

## CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

### I. Introduction

- A. Show Church Cartoons
- B. An essential key to a smoothly operating church is the monthly meeting of the board of deacons/elders/directors/etc.
- C. The key to conducting profitable meetings is planning - which includes, pre-meeting planning, and post-meeting followup.

### II. Preparing for the Meeting

- A. Ask: What are some things that need to be included in planning for an effective board meeting?

Possible replies: Date, time, agenda, data, resources, research, contacts

#### B. **Date and Time**

1. The schedule for regular board meetings should be established as far in advance as possible so the members can include them on their personal calendars.
2. Usually the same day of the month works best (e.g. 2nd Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday). Saturday morning may work for some who have swing shift workers.
3. If a financial report is a normal part of the agenda (and it should be), adequate time should be allowed for the treasurer/bookkeeper to compile the report.
4. Once the schedule has been set, every effort should be made to adhere to it,
  - a. Busy board members, especially those who's schedules vary from week to week, need as much lead time as possible to adjust to changes.
  - b. If a change of date and/or time is unavoidable, such persons should not be expected to be there if their personal schedule conflicts.
5. Once a schedule has been established, members must make the meetings a priority and not allow trivial conflicts to interfere with their involvement.
6. Not only the starting time but also an approximate adjournment time for the meeting should be set.

- a. Most board meetings tend to go too long. Lengthy meetings produce diminishing returns on the effort put forth.
  - b. Setting the time of adjournment helps everyone to keep the pace of the meeting moving forward.
  - c. If an unforeseen issue surfaces, it is usually best to table it until the next meeting or if the matter is urgent, to call a special meeting to address it.
7. Ask: What do you think is the ideal length of time for a board meeting?
  8. Usually 1 ½ to 2 hours is the maximum effective time for a board meeting

### C. The Agenda

1. The most important pre-meeting planning task to set the agenda.
  - a. As chairperson of the board, the pastor is responsible for setting the agenda. Your control of the meeting is primarily done through the agenda.
  - b. One of most effective tools available to the chairperson is the order in which the agenda is arranged.
  - c. Don't put an item you know may engender some dissent put before an item you are desirous to see approved.
2. A written copy of the agenda, along with other pertinent material such financial reports, committee updates, etc., should be emailed or sent to each board, preferably 1 week before the meeting.
3. This practice gives members an opportunity to study, digest and pray about pending decisions.
4. As the meeting begins the chairperson can inquire as to whether there are other items to add to agenda. The decision to add those items to the present agenda or to refer to a later meeting can be made by mutual consent of the pastor and board members.
5. It is not a good practice to continually be adding items to the agenda at the last minute. A better idea would be for the pastor to solicit items for inclusion on the agenda beforehand.
6. I recommend a standard agenda outline for board meetings:
  - a. Ask: Do any of you have such a standard agenda that you use?
  - b. My Agenda was: Prayer - Reports - Discussions - Decisions - Dates

### D. What about "meetings before the meeting?"

1. You are familiar with John Maxwell and his relationship with "Claude" in his first church.

2. What do you think of the practice of meeting with influential board members beforehand to discuss upcoming agenda items? Is it wise or unwise? What is the upside and downside of doing so?
  - a. Upside - You can deal with strong personalities outside the boardroom  
 You can solicit support from those who influence others  
 You can launch a “test balloon” of new ideas  
 You can take the “temperature” of the group and determine the most optimum time to introduce a new concept
  - b. Downside - You may be giving away your authority  
 You may turn off those not included in the meeting  
 You can win the “battle” and “lose” the war
3. Your action in this regard will be determined by your situation. But I have personally made limited use of these kinds of meetings to advance.

#### E. Research and Resources

1. All necessary resourcing and research for a meeting should be done beforehand so the information is available at the meeting.
2. This should include: reports, prices, budgets, resource persons, etc.
3. It is important that you keep your key leaders apprised of actions that are of vital interest to them.
  - a. Get input from staff and other leaders regarding the impact of pending decisions
  - b. That way it was not be necessary for them to “go over your head” in taking issues to the board, which should never be allowed regardless of how strongly they may feel about an issue.
  - c. Make it a rule of thumb: “Never surprise the pastor!!”

### III. Conducting the Meeting

#### A. Getting started

1. Start the meeting on time. Don’t accommodate those who are habitually late at the expense of those who arrive on time.
2. Set a spiritual tone for the meeting
  - a. Church work is more than business and finances. Money is a spiritual issue
  - b. This is why I think it is unwise to separate financial responsibilities from spiritual oversight - i.e., deacons boards and elders boards.

- c. I think financial decisions should be made by the most spiritual people in the church.
- 3. What are some ways you begin your meetings on a spiritual note?
  - a. Possible replies: Bible reading, prayer, devotional reading, leadership development?
  - b. Our board meetings began with ½ hour of sharing prayer needs of the members themselves and their families regarding physical needs, finances, work associates, etc.
  - c. Some of my board saw the board as their prayer/accountability group.
- 4. Some pastors prefer to use their board meetings as a time to do leadership training with the members.
- 5. Ask: How do you do training as a board? What resources have you used?
- 6. Some ideas may include:
  - a. Working through a book together
  - b. Listening to audio-video training materials

#### B. Moving through the agenda

- 1. It may be helpful in keeping the meeting moving to establish a time-line at the margin of the agenda indicating the approximate time available to devote to each item.
- 2. It will take tact and skill to get members from going off on tangents on some issues. If that happens, suggest the side issue be made an agenda item for a future meeting.
- 3. Both the chairperson and members must avoid springing surprises on the rest of the group.
- 4. The standard agenda I used allowed for discussion of an issue in one meeting before a decision had to be made in the next meeting.

#### C. Striving for Consensus

- 1. A goal of a board meeting should be to reach consensus on all key issues.
  - a. The question: Is this possible or even necessary?
  - b. The answer: Yes it is - especially is maintaining good relationships is one of the values of the board.
  - c. At the same time one or two members should not be allowed to block action on vital issue by withholding their support.
- 2. In over 20 years of pastoring as a board we made less than 10 decisions on a split vote. All the rest were unanimous decisions.
  - a. Sometimes this meant postponing a final decision in order to give people time to think

and pray about it.

- b. Sometimes it meant modifying a proposal to get support.
  - c. Sometimes it meant not getting my way (which wasn't always the right way anyway). But the end result was continuing good relationships and mutual respect.
3. The pastor who has spent days and weeks thinking and praying about an idea should not expect his/her board to accept it on first hearing.
- a. It takes time for people to get used to a new idea
  - b. Board members are entitled to the same length of time their leader took in coming to a decision

#### D. No Surprises and No Garbage Dumping

1. Neither the pastor nor individual board members should ever surprise each other with bombshells dropped unexpectedly in a meeting.
2. If it's not on the pre-published agenda or placed there by mutual consent at the beginning of the meeting, it should not be discussed in the meeting.
3. Make it a rule among you to always talk to the pastor before bringing an issue before the full board.
4. It should go without saying that any secret meeting of the board without the pastor or other members knowledge is an illegal meeting. This kind of fragmentation always results in distrust and damaged relationships.
5. The board meeting is not the place for members to air their personal gripes. Nor is it the place to dump off church problems. In fact it should be the LAST place of appeal for settling church conflicts.
  - a. Matthew 18:15-17 sets forth the proper order for dealing with conflicts:
 

*“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”* (NIV)
  - b. Acts 13 and 15 also give guidelines for settling issues: *“They counseled together...and did what seemed good to them and to the Holy Spirit.”*
6. No member of the board should see him/herself as an advocate for any specific group or ministry.
  - a. Portfolio assignments are for representative and oversight purposes only.

- b.** When you meet as a board your concern for is the overall welfare of the entire church, not simply what might be good for one group or another.

E. Close the meeting on a positive note.

1. Review assignments made during the meeting.
2. Review items to be placed on the agenda for future meetings.
3. Refocus on the mission and vision of the church. Help each other see the “BIG PICTURE.”
4. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the good things God is doing.

#### IV. Following up on the Meeting

A. Don't let it be said of your board meetings that “After all was said and done, much more was said than done.”

B. Just because the meeting is over doesn't mean you can forget about it until next month. These are some of the things you have to do in follow-up:

1. Implement decisions that were made.
2. Complete assignments that were made
3. Make the contacts that were called for.
4. Begin preparing the agenda for next month. Include carry-over items from this month.
5. Express appreciation for work that was done well by others.
6. Report to pastoral staff, department leaders and others on decisions made that will affect their work.

#### V. Q & A