



Board Members – It's All About Relationships

Why are some downtown managers excited to go to work every day, while others face each day with dread? It could be a million different reasons, but one of the most challenging parts of the job is relationship building and if you haven't perfected it you are doomed to a pretty unhappy existence. People are at the heart of everything that downtown directors do, but many people avoid that interaction (or more specifically avoid certain people) and that just won't work. It's an all or nothing proposition. If you are going to promote the fact that your organization is inclusive, then you have to practice what you preach and as the manager, you need to lead by example. And when it comes to your Board, you simply do not have a choice. So where do you start?

A volunteer is defined as “someone who donates their time without expecting anything in return”. Now, you all know that just isn't true – every volunteer wants something in return for their time. Not necessarily something covert or nefarious, but something. As a manager, it's your job to give it to them. Every year, you typically receive a few new board members. Then it's time to play everyone's favorite Main Street game show, "Tell Me What You Want". Of course, they will never actually tell you what it is - you have to guess, pry it out of them, hire a psychic, beg, etc. They usually fall into a three categories:

The Givers

These are the good ones. Very easy to work with, no hidden agendas. They are few and far between, but if you can find one, hold on to them with everything you've got. They are wonderful mediators for disagreements at the Board because they hold no allegiances and speak their minds. They have the potential to become your biggest cheerleaders if given the chance. Engage them immediately and figure out where they will best fit in your efforts.

The Takers

You've got something they want. It could be funding, power to make things happen (or not happen) or just the prestige of being able to put their service on the resume. They are pretty easy to identify, they come in like bats out of hell, blowing up virtually everything you've been working on and wanting to start over. Whatever it is that they want, you need to figure it out - and fast. Bite the bullet and take them for lunch to see what's on their mind. The sooner you find out, the sooner you can set them on the path to focusing their energy to something that they are passionate about rather than running rogue and hindering your organization's progress.

The Fixers

Well-intentioned, but dangerous nonetheless. No matter what you do, no matter what has been done by your organization, it's all wrong. But have no fear, they joined your Board to "fix

things". (What? You didn't know anything was broken?) While the Takers can run the gamut of personalities, Fixers need one thing - they need to be needed and to get attention and credit for what they do. Maybe they weren't hugged enough as a child? They didn't get that Boba Fett with Launching Rocket that they asked Santa for that fateful Christmas? Whatever the reason, it's now your job to fill that void.

Inevitably, they'll ask for a litany of reports and information that it will take endless hours to put together. Don't get defensive or take it personally, instead reach out to them and ask how they would do things. Instantly, you're flipping the script and putting the burden on them to step up and make things happen. You'll find out quickly if they really have the answers or if they are just crying out to be heard. I believe that being a Fixer is a temporary condition and with a little bit of time and effort, they can transform into Takers, or believe it or not, even Givers.

At the end of the day, downtown organizations are centered around people and you have to perfect your relationship building skills. Everyone has the capacity to be a positive contributor, but they don't always know it. Take the time to get to know your Board members and while you may not strike up lifelong friendships, you might just find champions for your organization that you never knew existed.