**Four Simple Steps to Strong Board Engagement**

***Improving board engagement through Clarity, Connections, and Commitment***

Highly engaged nonprofit board members have a number of things in common:

* Passion for their cause
* Clarity on their organization’s mission and vision
* Commitment to their cause
* Commitment to their fellow board members, staff members, and clients / beneficiaries

***These four steps, with associated exercises, will help your board members share their passion, find their clarity, and improve their commitment to your cause.***

1. ***Debate Your Mission***

**Reasons: To encourage board members to make all organizational decisions through the lens of your mission, and to improve board members’ clarity about why they are volunteering.**

* 1. □ Peter Drucker’s *Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*[[1]](#endnote-1)
     1. □ What is our mission?
     2. □ Who is our customer?
     3. □ What does our customer value?
     4. □ What are our results?
     5. □ What is our plan?
  2. □ What if we disappeared tonight? What will the world, the community, or individuals regret having lost?[[2]](#endnote-2)
  3. □ What would this organization be doing, that it is not doing already, if money were no object?[[3]](#endnote-3)
  4. □ Marcus Buckingham’s Points of Clarity[[4]](#endnote-4)
     1. □ Who do we serve?
     2. □ What is our Core Strength?
     3. □ What is our Core Score?
     4. □ What actions can we take today?
  5. □ Review your programs based on *contribution to mission* versus *use of resources*.

1. ***Define Your Organizational Values***

**Reasons: People build connections based on shared values, and values guide decisions.**

* 1. □ Does your organization have a single “umbrella” value that provides guidance and direction?
  2. □ Do you have a set of core values?
  3. □ Have your organizational values shifted over time?
  4. □ Have your operational values over the past few years been different from your “true” values?

1. ***Share Your Organizational Stories, and Board Members’ Personal Stories***

**Reasons: Stories have an amazing power to carry information, to communicate values, to convey emotion, to help us remember, to inspire us, help us make decisions, and to show us how to behave. Emotional sharing is like social glue, maintaining and strengthening relationships.**

* 1. Essential stories for board members:
     1. □ Why am I on this board?
     2. □ Why am I optimistic for the future of this organization?
  2. Organizational stories for board members:
     1. □ Who are we? What makes us unique?
     2. □ Why were we founded?
     3. □ What is our vision?
     4. □ What are our accomplishments?
     5. □ Stories that could follow, “I can guess what you’re thinking…”
  3. Places and times for board members to share their stories:
     1. □ The process for recruiting new board members
     2. □ New board member orientations
     3. □ Board meetings
     4. □ Committee meetings
     5. □ Staff meetings
     6. □ Fundraisers
     7. □ *Story banking*: creating a written record or your organizational stories…

1. **Build Connections**

**Reason: Strong personal connections between and among board members, staff, and clients are a hallmark of highly engaged boards.**

* 1. Between Board Members and Staff Members
     1. □ Recruiting
        1. □ Everyone on the board is on the Recruiting Committee
        2. □ Create complete clarity on expectations
        3. □ Embrace diversity
     2. □ Orientations for new board members
        1. □ Experienced current board members should attend orientations to establish relationships with new members
        2. □ Assign mentors for new members
        3. □ Create job descriptions and committee charters
        4. □ Consider inviting significant others / spouses / family to meet the staff, perhaps following the orientation meeting
     3. □ Make sure that board members have *meaningful work* to do
     4. □ Encourage networking at board meetings
     5. □ Plan networking activities, including small group meals among board and staff
     6. □ Create leadership tracks for board members
     7. □ Honor past board members with “Board Member Emeritus” designations
     8. □ Consider “open” board meetings, during which non-board members are invited
* Encourage board members to invite friends to learn more
  + 1. □ Encourage committees to function as “farm teams” for future board members
    2. □ Involve board members’ significant others / spouses / family at some level
  1. Between Board Members and Clients
     1. □ Plan opportunities for hands-on volunteering by board members
     2. □ Plan opportunities for small group interaction with board, staff, and clients

*Clarity + Personal Connections Lead to Commitment*

*Commitment Leads to Engagement*

1. Peter F. Drucker with Jim Collins, Philip Kotler, James Kouses, Judith Rodin, V. Kasturi Rangan, and Frances Hesselbein. *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Tom Ahern, Ahern Communications <http://aherncomm.com> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Pamela Jones Davidson, Davidson Gift Design <http://www.giftplanners.com/davidson_gift_design/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Marcus Buckingham. *The One Thing You Need to Know: … About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success*. (New York: Free Press, 2005) <http://www.tmbc.com/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)