

## Recruiting Volunteer Board Members from within the Organization

**Volunteer Boards (VBs) face unique challenges.** They include:

1. They receive no stipend, nor compensation for their time or travel
2. They are asked to make (sometimes significant) financial contributions to the organization as a condition of membership
3. They may not have the right skills or experience, but are passionate about the mission and want to help
4. The quality of their contributions (except for their financial giving) is typically not assessed. There are no consequences for exceptionally good or bad performance
5. They are hard to fire!

“Promote from within.” This approach to recruiting new VB members makes intuitive sense. After all, they already know the organization as volunteers, have already proven their commitment to the mission, have some lived history and stories, and already have established relationships with others in the organization. As a result, their learning curves should be shorter and they should be able to contribute to the Board sooner.

All of these things are true -- AND ...

There are concerns with this approach as well. Each of the apparent strengths has a corresponding risk:



*They already know the organization as volunteers.* This is true -- and the work of the Board is very different than the work of the organization. Do your potential VB members have the management, strategic thinking, fiduciary financial responsibility, and other skills needed for success as a Board member?

*Have already proven their commitment to the mission.* There is no doubt that this commitment is important. A question to consider is the motivation of the member for joining the Board. Is it to

further the mission or to advance a personal agenda? This is not necessarily bad -- is the prospective Board member transparent in sharing their motivation?

*Have some lived history and stories.* Board members should be powerful advocates for the organizations they support. What kinds of stories do they tell? Are they of successes, progress, and possibilities? Or are they of mistakes, gossip, and missed opportunities?

*Already have established relationships with others in the organization.* This can be a double-edged sword. How is the potential Board member perceived by others in the organization? Who do they associate with? How are those colleagues perceived? Is the potential candidate thought to be a member of a particular faction/subset/special interest? Will they be perceived to be able to put aside those parochial preferences to act in the best interest of the entire organization?

Finally, we strongly urge Boards and organizational leadership to consider these issues **before** even approaching a candidate for potential Board membership. The act of exploring interest in a potential appointment will create expectations, no matter how many caveats are shared at the time. Should the person not be selected, it can do significant damage to their continued support as a valued organizational member.

We hope this post is the catalyst for a larger conversation about this topic as well as other challenges facing Volunteer Boards. Please "comment" with your thoughts. Other articles in the series can be found on LinkedIn **#VolunteerBoards** or at [www.larrysolow.com](http://www.larrysolow.com).

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