

SITE SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP, INC.

You've Been Elected! Now What? How To Survive The Yearly Board Transition

"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power." -- Tao Te Ching

New directors are elected by the membership yearly and new officers are elected by the new board, usually at the same time. This process is a good thing because members will introduce new perspectives and approaches to old problems. However, this process comes with the challenge of adjusting to transition: which frequently involves heightened emotions, power plays, personality clashes, a learning curve and adapting to a shift in balance of power and new team members. This transition requires a new approach to understanding how a functioning body has suddenly transformed and is experiencing temporary chaos. The ability to adapt to change quickly becomes a critical skill to come by.

Every year, the switchover of directors and officers is brief, and appears seamless, yet, complaints about the new board's experience or questions about their tactics can persist much longer and even mushroom into overhyped gossip that may potentially devastate a community. At the same time, the new board may be interpreting the complaints as ingratitude for their volunteerism and efforts. As you can see, this transition process can quickly spiral into a negative vortex. But, wait! There is hope! Understanding the nature of human transitions and with a display of sensitivity and respect for each other – we can make the best of it. Here's how:



Understanding the people side of change:

Endings

People experience a loss of the old ways
People need to vent
Leaders need to listen
Productivity is at an unsteady level



Turmoil

A period of uneasiness and stress follows letting go of the past
Often, lower productivity results
People want the best of both worlds, old and new



New Beginnings

People come to accept and even value the new way
Leaders achieve the benefit of change
Productivity is increased



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Tips for new and seasoned board directors:

- Announce the change to yourself. This is an ending and a beginning.
- Let go of past judgment and invite people to express themselves while you actively listen.
- Know that some turmoil is inevitable. Human beings don't like change. It's uncomfortable.
- Give the new board a few months to seek its bearings. Focus on beginning a new relationship with new board members and continue to cultivate established relationships.
- Establish, if not already in place, an orientation workshop for the new board to align itself to agreed-upon mission/vision.

Turmoil is a natural phase and it's okay for a board to experience confusion, stress, even blame others or resist suggestions and second-guess themselves. However, there should be a time limit to this process. A successful leader will be tough on the problems but supportive of people; harness the power of the group and help the group through the change; formulate expectations, state them clearly and follow up. Most importantly, the new board is now ready to celebrate, and in some manner mark the New Beginnings.



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