

Building a Purpose-Driven Board

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Purpose provides a new operating system for your boards that establishes a solid platform on which to build everything else. [Part 1](#) of this series summarizes the importance of recruiting purpose-driven board members and how philanthropy leaders can be the connectors that align individual passion and purpose with organizational missions. Let’s dig a little deeper...

The provision of health care is a sacred trust. People put their bodies and their hopes in the hands of their health care organizations and caregivers for healing and comfort. Health care board members have the awesome role to safeguard and strengthen this noble work. Through philanthropy, board members have the opportunity to promote the organization’s vision and to invite others to join. This purpose-filled activity allows the health care organization to create a stronger bond with its community while letting donors be part of something that fulfills the good they have in mind.

Your organization has a clear purpose expressed in its mission. This collective purpose involves stakeholders from frontline workers to volunteers to executives. Philanthropy leaders must connect this collective organizational purpose to individual purpose that includes board members’ own values, their own visions of themselves at their best and their own routes to self-actualization. Organizations have to go beyond just fortifying board members in the fact that the organization’s collaborative purpose is virtuous and good; but instead, also meet with each

board member to uncover individual purpose, passion and goals. Asking key questions like these will help in the discovery phase:

- What first kindled your interest in our mission?
- What personal experiences have brought you here?
- What do you believe in and care about that connects you to the mission here?
- What are your core values that could be extended through this work?
- What impact do you want to have on this work, this community and this world?
- What about our mission gives you hope or joy?
- What legacy do you want to leave here?
- How do you see us best partnering?

These questions provide a different sensitivity to the selection of board members. It starts with what their beliefs are, what they want to do and how they want to be involved. Evaluating these responses through the lens of individual purpose, aligned with collective purpose, helps create and build a more successful and engaged board. If they can't answer these simple questions, they likely aren't well suited to be a board member. Therefore, it is important to continue your search to get the right board members around your table. This happens when you identify board members whose purpose aligns with organizational priorities to elevate the noble work of health care missions.



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Even with aligned purpose, there are challenges that board members often face. Few people agree to serve on hospital or foundation boards because they want the opportunity to ask others for money. Most people, including board advocates, do not feel comfortable in the role of “asking.” In fact, 59% of board members expressed being uncomfortable asking others to give—even to support a cause they care about greatly. The most frequently mentioned concerns are about damaging their relationships by asking and also feeling they don't “know how” to engage others.¹ Many don't want to take the risk.

Impactful board members also tend to be high-performing people who do not want to be set up for failure by participating in activities for which they do not feel they have the resources to be successful. Philanthropy leaders must create a culture that allows board members to succeed in making the ask and elevating the mission. Board members can bring incredible social capital and networks to advance the organization; however, providing the platform for them to best achieve good results is up to philanthropy teams. This means health care boards can no longer simply complete, follow up with or designate ongoing tasks to ensure all the boxes are checked. They must know, understand and want to further that which the health care organization deems most important, not only within the hospital walls but also for the greater good of the entire community.

When asking community volunteer leaders to go out and build partnerships with others to enhance and expand your mission, arm them with not only a mission statement but also with a true mission understanding. Does your organization provide care that allows people to return to movement and the overall well-being they desire? Does your organization provide mobile care to those who cannot make it to the facility, resulting in better overall community health? It is not so much about MRIs, surgery suites and programs as it is about the people whose lives are touched and changed by those things. At the end of the day, that's why health care organizations do what they do, and that's why board members would want to ask others to be part of your work. Teach them to talk from the heart to the heart. Most donors will make the decision to give to organizations based primarily upon emotion. Then they will justify it rationally. Give your board members the stories and the tools to go out and tell those stories themselves, basing all of their work in purpose.

If you can tap into that purpose and passion to save and change people's lives, you can move mountains. And so can your board.

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¹ Nonprofit Governance Index 2012, Boardsource, http://www.gnof.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/BoardSource-Governance-Index_2012.pdf