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Who Invited Micromanagement?

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Do we unwittingly invite the board to micromanage the association? The orientation describes governance roles. But some directors slip into micromanagement.

The board sets vision and direction in a strategic plan. Committees advance initiatives from the plan. Staff implement the vision with a program of work.

What triggers directors to drop from governance to micromanagement?

1. **Policies and Procedures** – We orient the board to their leadership roles. Then we give them a manual titled, “Policies and Procedures.” Policies are the domain of the board. The operating procedures are staff responsibilities. Providing a book of procedures to directors may lead them to believe they are responsible for management. The board should receive a “Leadership Manual.”
2. **Office Keys** – Beware the officer or director who feels they should have the key to the office and passwords. Shun the elected chair who says, “I would feel better if we installed a remote camera in the executive director’s office.”
3. **Drop-Ins** – Inviting directors to drop in the office anytime they are nearby can be problematic. “Hi, I was in the area, so I thought I’d stop by, what are you working on?” Directors questioning staff about their jobs is inappropriate. The board is not the supervisor of staff. “Respecting one another’s time is the key to a successful team. Dropping in does not allow the CEO to prepare for meetings, interrupts schedules and diminishes authority in the eyes of staff,” offered DaVina Lara, CEO at Bridge Association of REALTORS® in California.
4. **Report, Report, Report** – Reports and updates occupying most of a meeting agenda dampens innovation. The board offers time, talent, and treasure to address the association’s goals --- reports should be distributed and read BEFORE the meeting. Move reports to a consent agenda to keep board meetings focused.
5. **Fraternization** – Fraternization is frowned upon. A director who offers to help a staff member, let’s say co-sign a loan or rent them a place to live, establishes an inappropriate relationship. Directors maintain a collegial, professional relationship.

6. **Second Guess the Staff** – The staff have knowledge about how to get things done efficiently and effectively. Having a board member go around the staff, inviting speakers, visiting hotels, belittles the role of staff. There will be times when a volunteer leader may be asked to doff their governance hat for a specific task, but their primary role is leadership. Lara adds, “The sole staff person under the guidance and control of the board is the CEO. All other staff answer only to the CEO.”
7. **Parking Lot** – Governance is conducted from gavel to gavel, between convening and adjourning the meeting. Debating outcomes after the meeting in the parking lot on through a series of intra-board emails is second-guessing decisions already made.
8. **Performance** – It is anticipated that staff have performance reviews conducted by their supervisors or the CEO. Directors should not ask to see evaluations, nor comment on how they feel about a member of the staff. Encourage continuous board improvement by providing a board self-assessment. “Sometimes the board members need to be reminded that the CEO works for them, and the staff works for the CEO,” said Suzanne M. Gebel, CAE, Executive Director of the Iowa Funeral Directors Association.
9. **CEO Contract** – Most executives have an agreement outlining responsibilities, compensation, and duration of service. Boards who say, “It’s not important, I don’t think we need one,” are disrespecting professional standards. A contract protects all parties.
10. **Palatial Office** – It is rare for the chief ELECTED officer to be assigned an office the association headquarters. If this occurs, looking over the shoulder of the executive director is a concern. The association wants to make best use of all assets, including physical office space and equipment.
11. **Roadmap** – When board members are focused on advancing a strategic plan, they have less interest in micromanaging. The plan keeps the board within their lanes, allowing committees and staff to take care of details. The opposite of strategy is tactics --- not the role of board members.
12. **Committees** – The board should be discouraged from doing committee work at the board table. By assigning tasks from the strategic plan, with clear expectations and performance measures, the board will not need to micromanage committees and task forces.

13. **Free Time** – The pandemic, economic slowdown and other factors may change the work patterns of board members, leaving them with time on their hands. Ray Aduato, executive vice president at the El Paso Association of Builders, says he would discourage the association office from being the place to congregate. Similarly, directors who have rolled off the board should avoid the urge to use the association office as their place to “hang out.”

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.