

Board Member Skills/Characteristics

High Quality Leadership = (Vision + Partners) * Heart

$$(V + P) * H = HQL$$

(Adopted from Board Works – Ray Ledgerwood)



10 Steps to Effective Leadership

Reprinted from *Executive Monthly*, CCI/USA.

- 1. Leading isn't managing:**
Managers manage things, leaders lead people
- 2. Leaders have a sense of purpose:**
They focus on achieving goals.
- 3. Leaders have courage:**
Their decisions aren't always popular.
- 4. Leaders are forceful:**
They clearly express their viewpoint
- 5. Leaders are consistent:**
Their consistency inspires trust and confidence
- 6. Leaders are truthful**
They tell the truth even when it hurts.
- 7. Leaders don't try to "do it all":**
They concentrate on a few "big themes."
- 8. Leaders accept others' ideas:**
Ideas don't have to be original with them.
- 9. Leaders are made, not born:**
Leadership stems from experience.
- 10. Leaders are surrounded by achievers:**
They are energized by quality people

What expertise, talents, and backgrounds are needed within the conservation district board?

The makeup of the conservation district board is critical to its success. The term diversity is often used and it means a variety of things to different people. But it is important regarding the makeup of the conservation district board. Without a diverse board, a district may find itself lacking in critical knowledge areas from farming practices to administration procedures. The board must have a good representation of the population and production within the district boundaries as well as business skills. Consider diversity in areas below.

- Different types of agricultural producers – (Note: 66% of the board must be agriculture producers who are landowners CRS 35-70-107(1)(a)(II))
 - Irrigated, dry land, rangeland
 - Wheat, corn, hay, orchard, vegetables, various livestock, etc.
- Non producers – (Note: 34% of the board are not required to be agriculture producers CRS 35-70-107(1)(b))
 - This is a great opportunity to find expertise to provide guidance for the district operations, outreach, fundraising, financial management, legalities, etc.
 - Small acreage owners with occupations/expertise needed for a successful district
 - Landowners with environmental concerns outside of agriculture
- Representation from various areas
 - As representatives of your constituents, it is important that the district board members reside within the various portions of the district. This allows for easy access to the board members for constituents as well as representation of different geographic and production areas.
- Gender, age, and race
 - As an organization representative of the people within the district boundaries, it is valuable for the board makeup to reflect the gender, age, and race makeup of the people within the district.
- Variety of expertise
 - A successful board is involved in many aspects of the “business”. They not only need expertise in farming, ranching, and natural resources but also the operations of the district including:
 - Strategic Planning
 - Administration
 - Financial Management
 - Fundraising
 - Marketing/Public Relations
 - Information Technology
 - Human Resources
 - Legal Issues



Board Member Job Description

The question is often asked; “As a board member (supervisor), what is my role and what should I be doing”? As a conservation district board member (supervisor), you are not “just a volunteer”. **YOU ARE AN ELECTED OFFICIAL WITH RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR CONSTITUENTS.** It is a job. Just like your district employee(s), all board members deserve to have a job description so you know your responsibilities.



[Click here for a sample Conservation District Supervisor Job Description.](#) It is recommended that each board review it carefully to make any needed amendments. Each board is strongly encouraged to include the job description in your district’s policies so it is on file for next month, next year, and five years from now. Each current, potential, and future board member should have a copy.

Board Member Toolkit

From *Association Management* Jan. 2002

- Always show up
 - What's your leadership legacy?
- Get an early start on board materials
 - Look forward, not back
- Continually review mission, vision, and plan
- Strategic thinking is a special responsibility
 - Talk to new members
- Bring in a member - it sets the needed example
 - Have your calendar with you
 - Understand the plan for crises
 - Figure out a filing system
 - Board work doesn't take a holiday
- Disagree at the board meeting, but present a united front
 - Ask for staff research help early
- Rapid turnover of executives costs time and money
 - Deal with the name game now
 - Tune in to leading indicators
 - Grow room for members
 - Agree on what constitutes success
- Achievement flows from the team to the top
 - Resist the temptation to micromanage
 - Bottom line: Money really matters
- Be mindful of other people's time as well as your own
 - Ask for great volunteers
 - Effect a wonderful transition

What are the characteristics of an effective conservation district board?



- A board is only as effective as the members who make up the board. Therefore, it is important to examine the characteristics of an effective individual board member.
- To do this, let's first look at **“The Ten Stupid Things That Board Members Do To Mess Up Their Organizations”** while considering what is needed to have the opposite effect (Improve the organization).
 1. Members join boards of organizations they don't really care about. We fail to commit and fail to be engaged. The idea still exists that service on a board of directors is an “honorary” position, and it is not – it IS a lot of work and a serious challenge to lead through effective governance.
 2. Members think that showing up for board meetings is the extent of their obligation. Membership entails more! The rule of thumb for a well-running organization is that a minimum of six hours per month should be spent in board activity (credit Jeff Pryor at Anschutz Family foundation: 2 hours at board meetings, 2 hours in committee work, and 2 hours in outreach (marketing, PR, fundraising)). In reaching this level of commitment, understand when you're “wearing your board member hat” and when you're “wearing your volunteer hat.” Additionally, members need to keep in mind that efforts made by committees involve lots of hard work and should not be changed. Let the committees do their jobs!
 3. Board Members don't prepare to do the job correctly. There is a general tendency to NOT prepare for board meetings (reading materials, etc.) and a lack of understanding the role of governance, which is to establish the proper controls to allow the organization's work to be done in a cost effective, reasonable manner. Board members don't always see “the big picture”, which is their role – to protect and promote the mission of the organization.
 4. Board members don't understand budgets and other financial presentations, leaving it to others to make sure funds are in place and are being wisely spent. These same members are shocked when the organization is “in the red” or, worse yet, the victim of on-going misuse or theft of funds. Boards have a strong fiduciary responsibility within nonprofit organizations, and each member needs to have a clear understanding of how monies are being brought in, managed, and spent.
 5. Members think that “the bottom line” in an organization is its financial status. In any nonprofit organization, there are two bottom lines: the finances and the mission. All programs and initiatives should be weighed in financial terms, as well as by how they serve the mission.
 6. Board members fail to speak up, when every indicator says that they should. Members fail to ask questions. Members fail to “rock the boat” as it sinks deep into the ocean. It is the responsibility of each member to ask questions and speak his or her mind, leading to knowledgeable and informed decisions.
 7. Board members don't do their duty to give, get, AND get off! This means giving personally – financially, expertise, time – getting others to contribute the same, and getting off the board when it's time. Yes, fund raising and term limits are minimal expectations of the job.
 8. Board members hire, retain and put up with the wrong executive director. We expect too little of this person. We know we're micro-managing, and it's because the director isn't getting the job done. The board needs to set roles that are clearly defined and regularly “check in” to make sure that the board is doing board work, the staff doing staff work.

9. Board members fail to be involved in long-range planning, sometimes not looking to the future at all. Board meetings are spent talking about past progress and what already has happened. The board needs to take its responsibility of long-range planning very seriously, setting a course for the future, and then spend significant time looking ever-forward at board meetings.
 10. Board members engage in “parking lot conversations”. It is frustrating for both staff and other board members when conversations occur and “unofficial” decisions are made after or between meetings. Board members’ opinions need to be heard at meetings, not in closed door or under-the-table discussions.
- **If you avoid the above behaviors and adopt the behaviors below, you are or will be an effective board member.**

1. Become an elected official (board member) of the conservation district because you care about the mission and activities of the organization.
2. Commit to a minimum of 6 hours per month of board activity – 2 hours for board meeting, 2 hours for committee work, and 2 hours for outreach.
3. Prepare for meetings and your role as a board member – read minutes, financial reports, and other materials before the meetings and understand the role of governance. Protect and promote the mission of the organization. (know the mission statement)
4. Review and understand all the financial reports and financial position of the district
5. Weigh all programs and initiatives in financial terms as well as how they serve the mission of the district.
6. Speak up, ask questions, don’t allow yourself to get caught up in “group think”
7. “Give, Get, and Get Off” – give of your time, energy, and even financially, receive the rewards of volunteerism, and get off the board when it is time to allow new and fresh ideas.
8. Don’t micro-manage the district if you have a district manager – provide good strong direction for the district manager and let him/her manage.
9. Plan, plan, plan, plan – take time to develop and utilize an effective long range plan and annual plan of work.
10. Take care of business at meetings – stay on topic and make decisions during the meeting.



How can we recruit effective board members?

[Click here for District Board Member Recruitment PowerPoint](#)

Effective Board Members are Strong Leaders and Have:



- ***Vision***
- ***Imagination***
- ***Long-Term Focus***
- ***A Sense of Purpose***
- ***Focus on achieving goals***
- ***Dedication***

- After reviewing the Board Member Recruitment PowerPoint, begin your recruitment process today! It is never too soon to begin identifying the Board's needs and searching for future conservation leaders.
- Associates (advisory) Members
 - When potential board members are identified, they can serve as an associate member.
 - Associate members can be a great asset to the District by attending meetings to provide input on issues, activities, and concerns. They can also serve on committees and volunteer for District activities.
 - Associate members will be better prepared to accept Board Member positions any time there is an opening and carry on the Board's mission with great success.

How do we mentor our new board members to keep them interested and excited about their position?

It is critical to capitalize on the interest and energy that a new member brings to the Board. However, it is a challenge to do this without burning them out and/or losing their momentum.

- First, the new member must read and understand his/her role and responsibilities as a Board Member and of the District as a whole. The most critical documents for a new member to review are:
 - District mission and vision statements (The Purpose of the District)
 - District bylaws
 - Colorado State Soil Conservation Act
 - District and Board policies
 - Board member job description
 - Local Operating Agreement
- It is beneficial to assign a current effective board member to mentor the new person. They could meet before/after each monthly board meeting to discuss any questions that may come up as well as discuss the above documents. It is more interesting and exciting for two people to be reviewing and discussing the possibilities based on the above documents. When questions come up that need additional information or clarification, your CSCB conservation specialist is always willing to assist. The mentor should be willing to check in and visit with the new member any time questions arise.
- Within the first three months after a new member joins, it is valuable to set up an appointment to meet with the CSCB conservation specialist. They will provide additional information and encouragement for the individual as well as review the statutory and fiduciary responsibilities.
- A new member will benefit from attending watershed meetings/activities and the CACD Annual Meeting where s/he can meet and network with others to gain insight and confidence as a board member.
- The new member will be more effective if they understand the structure of the various partnerships such as NRCS and the District.
- The CSCB and CACD offer a Conservation Leadership Class that has proven to be very beneficial to board members. They gain tremendous knowledge of the conservation district movement and how they can "make a difference" at the local, watershed, state, and/or national levels.

