

Improving Relationships With Board Members **By: Hardy Smith**

Organizations can benefit from the very valuable advice that was shared by participants in my nationwide survey of business and community leaders who serve on boards of nonprofits.

The purpose of the survey was to find answers to the question: “Why Don’t Those Board Members Do What They Are Supposed To Do?”

One of the survey questions asked, As a board member, what is your biggest criticism related to organizations and relations with their boards?

Responses to the question offer some good insight to board member thinking. Here are suggestions from five survey participants that can help improve board member relationships.

“Lack of communications about expected performance is my biggest criticism,” says Mayor Rusty Jessup of Riverside, Alabama. “I also believe openness about differences is essential. Don’t pretend there is not a problem. Never ignore the 1000 pound gorilla in the corner. Don’t sugar coat anything for PR purposes. Close your meeting if necessary, but talk about the gorilla.”

Florida State University President, Dr. T.K. Wetherell, feels problems can develop with board relations because, “nonprofit boards often expect more and more of board members who have lives and businesses to run.” Dr. Wetherell suggests, “ask only when you need their help and limit the asks to something that can make a difference.”

Penske Corporation executive Walt Czarnecki is an advocate of, management and boards working more closely on all issues-not just financial,” as a way to improve board relations.

Lori Tolland of Ormond Beach, Florida and Nebraska Chamber of Commerce President Barry Kennedy both relate their biggest criticism of board member and organization relations to a “lack of communication.”

“Not communicating expectations,” Tolland says while Kennedy adds, “not asking for input on key issues,” are specific communication problems they recognize.

Some very good advice from five very engaged board members. Acting on their suggestions will certainly help your organization strengthen its board member relations.

(Hardy Smith is a speaker and trainer who helps nonprofit organizations reach higher levels of success. Contact him at hardy@hardysmith.com)