

REPONSE TO BOARD RETENTION ISSUES

Acme Board

A series of interviews, common themes among them and a set of recommendations to address issues of retention and governance among Acme's Board of Directors.

**Acme's Recent Past Board Interviews
Summer 2014**

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Purpose

Recruitment has not been unusually difficult for Acme, however turnover at the Board level has been a consistent issue for approximately 3 years, emphasized most recently when 3 Board members left within 6 months of each other, each stating similar concerns with respect to governance, transparency and purpose of the Board. This set of interviews was intended to identify common themes among concerns stated by these Board members.

Methodology

All recent past Acme's Board members were contacted by email and requested to participate in an interview by phone with one or two current board members. They were provided with the questions at this time. The questions to all were the same:

1. When was your term on Acme's Board?
2. Why did you leave the Board?
3. How would you characterize your experience?
4. Were your skills well utilized and were you satisfied with what you were able to contribute?
5. What were the strengths of the Board? And weaknesses?
6. How would you characterize the Board's interaction/relationship with CEO? And with the rest of the executive?
7. How well do you think the Board functioned with the rest of the organization?
8. What recommendations would you like to make for the Board?
9. What kind of person (qualities or qualifications) do you think makes a good Acme's board member?
10. What recommendations would you like to make for the organization?

The interviewers explained the process in advance which was to scribe the conversations in real time as accurately as possible, although not exactly word for word. The transcript was then emailed to the participant for their approval with an opportunity to add or correct upon reflection. In all instances no material changes were made. These transcripts are included in the final report and are considered to be "raw data."

After the questions were asked, a more informal off the record conversation took place including an explanation for the purpose of the interviews.

No participants requested anonymity, although we expected they would and were prepared to provide it. Participants will be provided with the summary of findings and recommendations, but no transcript other than their own.

Present and future Board members will be provided with the entire report including the transcripts.

Common Themes

1. It was rewarding and challenging. It was stressful and difficult.
2. The Board failed to clearly identify its purpose and needs to define its role more clearly.
3. There was a common desire:
 - To help the executive in achieving the goals of the organization, although there was considerable difficulty communicating concerns with the executive.
 - For improved information sharing from the executive to the Board, with more thorough and more timely information sharing, especially financials.
 - Improved trust between executive and the Board. Questions and recommendations from the Board were often perceived as being harsh and personal. It was difficult to openly ask questions regarding operations.
4. Sometimes a lack of board experience has been a problem. Diversity is important – often this was achieved successfully.
5. Time at meetings was often not spent efficiently. There was a tendency toward reactivity instead of strategic planning. Sometime disorganization was a problem.
6. Acme does great work, the programming is second to none.
7. People were uniformly passionate and committed to the cause of Acme's.
8. There is enormous respect for the ED and the work of Acme; and relationships were largely considered positive at an individual level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Properly define Board purpose and role – high priority. A draft is below.
2. Begin ED recruitment by writing a position description and interviewing recruiting agencies.
3. To actively support COO in her development as an ED and in her current position as Acting ED.
 - a. Work with COO to do a thorough audit of programming to assess it for strengths and weaknesses, and to develop a vision for the organization and its programming in the future. Consider carefully the recommendations of the associate managers, specifically:
 - i. Adapt to meet the needs of more difficult youth
 - ii. Develop more partnerships in the community
 1. Counselors and other support services
 2. Job training, trades, industry
 - b. Additionally consider arts, sports and other recreational and therapeutic programming.
4. Assign staff the task of creating an online database available to all current Board members (probably Dropbox or similar, not google docs). This would contain all board documents including the contents of the Board Binder, meeting minutes and reports including this one.
5. The Executive should make its relationship with the Board a higher priority, and to take more seriously the commitment of Board members. E.g. to assume the Board is capable and willing to assist management, and that individual's time is as valuable as that of staff.
6. Executive to provide the Board with the past 24 months of Cash Flow Statements, in a timely manner and verified by the accountant.
7. A credentialed accountant with suitable experience be hired. While this might not be a full time position it should be in excess of 10 hours a week. This person might be entrusted with additional administrative duties. This person should develop appropriate controls for the organization.

Draft Purpose Statement:

The purpose of Acme's board is to provide oversight and governance to the organization to ensure its mandate and goals are being met. They help to preserve the integrity of Acme's reputation, and maintain management's accountability to its stakeholders and the community. The Board actively supports the ED by providing

oversight in matters of programming, administration and overall operations; this includes making recommendations and supporting fundraising initiatives. The Board also works closely with the ED to develop strategic planning and policy. While the Board is not necessarily involved in the day to day activities, it is to be consulted on all matters of importance including but not limited to significant expenditures, major initiatives, and hiring and firing of management and executive.
