

*Mission Centered Board Leadership*  
“How to put to Death the Boring Board Meeting”  
Mark R. Fisher

Most charitable organizations are concerned with issues of financial growth and sustainability. At the board level it is often “What we do.” Without a focus on the above mentioned issues many would argue that the survival of an organization would be at great risk. If however over a period of time there is an overemphasis on issues related to income and expense, the attention of the board may unintentionally drift from mission fulfillment. The challenge for most boards is to find a way to balance between discussions focused on mission and money.

The most valuable two hours of mission development in the cycle of an organization can be found within the board meeting. It is within the board meeting that policy is established that will determine the direction and temperament of the organization for the next few months. Over the past year we have seen repeated evidence of organizations (mostly for profit) that have focused more on short term economic gains at the expense of long term mission development. The results have been no less than devastating.

If we are going to lead relevant organizations designed to meet real need, than the board meeting must focus on this basic fact that the fulfillment of mission is our most important responsibility. Anything less needs to be seen as unacceptable. Changing the corporate culture to focus more on mission within the context of the board meeting may have its challenges but once completed the results will reconfirm the decision.

The best way to build a bridge to the “Mission Centered” board meeting is to take time within a retreat setting that gives members an opportunity to reflect on their relationship with the organization, its mission and the people who are served. The retreat could be a setting that allows for group discussion on the following key questions;

- Why did you become involved in the work of the organization?
- How did you become initially involved?
- How have you been affected personally from the experience?
- How do you identify with the people the agency serves?
- What is your favorite story concerning one of the people the organization serves?
- How has your involvement with the organization influenced your life?

Answers to these questions become the board member’s personal story as to why he/she has become involved with the organization. These are the stories that will ultimately empower the board member to communicate mission with others. The CEO should serve as a facilitator to board members helping them find ways of articulating the answers to these questions.

As board members begin to internalize the needs of the people that are served, they will naturally cast a stronger sense of vision within their respective communities about mission. In doing so, the board member will stimulate a cultural/societal transformation that begins to focus more on issues of mission fulfillment setting the stage for a new agenda within the board meeting and putting an end once and for all, to those boring board meetings that leave many members silently wondering “why am I here?”

*The Agenda*

The following is a recommended agenda for the “Mission Centered” board meeting.

I. Welcome and time for inspirational message	10 minutes
II. Review and approval of minutes	5 minutes
III Review and approval of Committee Reports	10 minutes
III. CEOs’ Report	10 minutes
IV. Q&A	10 minutes
V. Client Testimonial	5 minutes
VI. Q&A	5 minutes
VII. Program Question	45 minutes
VIII. Budget/Income Report	10 minutes
X. Next Steps	10 minutes

### *Notes*

- Board members should receive the agenda plus all report and study documents one week prior to the board meeting.
- It is recommended that board members schedule a study period several days before the meeting to review materials and identify questions. Questions might be addressed at the board meeting or with the CEO in advance.
- It is recommended that for organizations with 10 or more employees that the Board is policy focused rather than operational and that it schedules four standard meetings each year plus a budget meeting and an annual board retreat.

### **About Mark R. Fisher**

Mark is dedicated to helping a variety of organizations answer the question, “How do we build a community of compassion?”

The focus of his practice has come from a lifelong experience of working with volunteers, donors and staff. He began to realize that the similarities between each of the participants of an organization were more significant than the differences. “By building unity between volunteers, donors, staff and care receivers our ability to achieve full potential increases.”

His counsel has helped raised nearly \$750,000,000 in private support and generated thousands of stories in the media. Mark earned his doctorate from the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, Michigan with a dissertation entitled, “Compassion in Board Decision Making.” He has been a guest speaker and presenter at numerous conferences and has served on a variety of non-profit boards. He is the author of *Mission Centered Board Leadership* which can be purchased on his web-site, [www.markrfisher.com](http://www.markrfisher.com).

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