

WHAT A GREAT BOARD MEMBER LOOKS LIKE

If you want a stronger board, you have to start by defining what “great” looks like — and *you*, the board, are the ones who must define it. Not the executive director. Not the staff. **You.**

The responsibility for setting standards for board service is a governance duty. And once those standards are set, it’s the board’s job to recruit, select, and orient members who meet them — and to hold them accountable once they join. Anything less is negligence.

Here’s the truth: great board members share a common set of qualities that go far beyond good intentions. They show up as leaders — and their actions demonstrate the seriousness of the responsibility they’ve accepted.

They are mission-driven and curious.

Great board members don’t just “like” the mission — they *understand* it and are committed to it. They invest time learning about the organization’s work, the community it serves, and the larger context in which it operates. They ask questions, seek clarity, and push for deeper understanding.

They show up — fully.

Attendance is the bare minimum. Great board members come prepared, participate actively, and follow through. They treat board service as a leadership responsibility, not a volunteer hobby. They know their decisions shape the organization’s future — and they take that responsibility seriously.

They think strategically.

Board members are not there to manage programs or approve staff decisions. Their role is to think beyond the day-to-day — to anticipate challenges, explore opportunities, and help chart the path forward. They bring perspective, not micromanagement.

They leverage their influence.

Board service isn’t just about showing up to meetings — it’s about using your position to advance the mission. Great board members open doors, connect networks, and advocate publicly. They use their credibility, relationships, and expertise as tools to strengthen the organization.

They embrace accountability.

True leadership means holding yourself — and your peers — to a high standard. Great board members welcome evaluation, seek feedback, and measure their contributions against the organization’s needs. They know that governance is not ceremonial — it’s consequential.

They invest time, talent, and treasure.

Every great board member brings all three to the table. They dedicate time to meetings, committees, and events. They share their skills generously. And they give financially at a level that’s meaningful to them *and* significant to the organization.

They are ambassadors for the mission.

A great board member is never “off the clock.” They talk about the organization in their networks, advocate for the mission, and represent it with pride. They understand that their leadership extends beyond the boardroom — and they embrace that responsibility.

The takeaway: It’s not staff’s job to define “great.” It’s yours. And once you do, it’s your job to recruit for it, expect it, and uphold it. Anything less sells your mission short.



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