

get it right on... **Difficult Board Members!**

What happens when a Board member doesn't pull their weight? Or if someone is constantly dominating discussions or intimidating other directors? What do you do if a director means well but just doesn't seem to grasp his or her responsibilities?

Hopefully, you will never meet any of these people in your volunteering life, but human nature means that you probably will.

Here are some strategies for dealing with the most common character traits of difficult Board members. But remember, just because you personally do not get along with a particular person does not mean they are "difficult". Personality clashes happen – please do not use that as an excuse to sideline another director.

The Dominator

Look out for: Someone who dominates debates and discussions, often talking or shouting over other members to be heard above all others. Other Board members may submit to the view of the Dominator to keep the peace.

Remedies:

- The Chair should arrange to meet them informally to talk about the problem.
- Agree to place time limits on individual contributions to debates or discussions during meetings.

The Bludger

Look out for: Someone who turns up at meetings but does little work in between meetings. They are unlikely to read the agenda or other papers before meetings, do not carry out tasks assigned to them, or completes their tasks late.

Remedies:

- Regularly remind members of their roles and responsibilities.
- Ask all members to sign a statement confirming they understand what is expected of them
- Try to find out why the Board member is not pulling their weight, especially if it is a new problem. Maybe personal issues or work commitments are eating up their time more than usual, or maybe they have lost interest.
- Ask them to offer solutions to fix the problem.

The Absentee

Look out for: Someone who doesn't often attend meetings. Others have recognised the apparent lack of commitment and are beginning to question their participation.

Remedies:

- Remind all Board members of their responsibility to attend most, if not all, meetings.
- Find out what is preventing the member from attending regularly and consider what strategies may need to be put in place to fix the problem
- Consider "naming and shaming".
- Check the constitution on attendance. Require and enforce the rules.

The Non-Contributor

Look out for: Someone who is silent through most meetings. They rarely contribute to discussions or debates and never volunteer for tasks.

Remedies:

- The Chair should encourage contributions by asking individual members for their opinion during meetings and discussions.
- Ensure all members are aware of their legal duty to contribute to Board decisions – not just to turn up at meetings

The Empire Builder

Look out for: Someone who appears less interested in the organisation they are governing than how they can use their position to further their own ends. They lobby for their friends and supporters to join them on the Board.

Remedies:

- Ensure all members are aware of their primary duty to the group they are governing, that they are familiar with the Board's conflict of interest policies and that all personal or business interests are lodged on the Board's Register of Interests
- Ensure you put in place an open selection and recruitment process ensuring all potential Board members are given equal treatment and selected on their merits.

The Martyr

Look out for: Someone who turns every debate into a "me against them" style contest and generally refuses to support majority decisions of the Board they have not voted for. They may disrupt meetings with tantrums and walk-outs.

Remedies:

- Ensure that all Board members are getting a fair hearing during debates and that all decision-making procedures are followed to the letter. Don't give the

White-Anter an opportunity to accuse the Board of unfair or improper decision-making.

- Make sure all Board members are aware of their duty to operate as a team. If necessary, undertake some "Team-Building" exercises, such as informal functions or retreats.
- While dissenting views are normal and healthy, working against majority decisions is not. The Board may need to consider some long-term strategies that could include having this Board member removed.

The Bore

Look out for: Someone who drones constantly during meetings, often speaking about irrelevant issues and going over and over old ground. The Bore may be a nice person so other members may be unwilling to directly confront the problem.

Remedies:

- Consider placing time limits on individual contributions to debates or discussions during meetings.
- Make all members subject to the same rule, this offers a tactful way of reducing the bore's effect

The Dinosaur

Look out for: Someone who seems to have been with the organisation forever and has started to appear a little stale.

Remedies:

- Mix of youth and experience whenever you can
- Place time-limits on Board involvement

West Dunbartonshire CVS produces a range of resources covering different issues of interest to community and voluntary organisations. Please contact our team directly if you would like one-to-one support or advice on any issue.