

Right People - Right Places

By Dan Bolin

BOARDS OF NONPROFIT MINISTRIES MAKE CORPORATE DECISIONS. These decisions include: establishing the direction for the ministry; setting policies; hiring and directing the CEO; and setting internal operating procedures for the board itself. The board speaks with a unified voice, acting as the corporate owner of the ministry. To do this well, a board needs insights from an array of perspectives.

As a board is constituted, several factors should be considered, but one key question is: "Do we have the right vantage points included at the table to make good decisions?" How does a ministry bring the right mix to the boardroom to make the decisions that will honor God, strengthen the ministry and move it in the right direction?

First, the board of a Christian ministry must consist of people who are committed to Christ and who demonstrate that commitment in their lives. Their family life, church life and business life should match their words. The Father's work should be done by his children.

Second, the board should be populated by those who are aligned with the mission and values of the organization. An easy way to assess this commitment is through their giving patterns. Potential board members who give generously and sacrificially to the ministry have not purchased a seat at the board table. Rather, they've demonstrated the commitment of their heart through their gifts.

Third is the question, "Do they fit?" This fit is not limited to their personality but, "do they bring a needed perspective to the corporate mix?" Because the board is charged with making the best corporate decisions possible, wise and godly perspectives from several vantage points are important. A practical and helpful method of evaluating the board mix is a simple grid. A list of important perspectives can be easily established, which might include things like: age, gender,

church affiliation, professional background, geography, or any other vantage point a ministry considers significant.

This list is placed along one axis of the grid and the names of existing board members are listed along the other axis. Voids in the mix of perspectives quickly become apparent.

Age, gender, church affiliation and location are relatively simple to assess. The issue of professional background is somewhat more complicated. Perspectives from the clergy, professionals and entrepreneurs are all needed to reach the best possible decisions. Ministries need a pastoral perspective to keep the ministry on track, fulfilling the mission and core values. But generally, pastors have little experience making corporate decisions.

Professionals, such as doctors, attorneys and accountants, bring much needed insight to corporate decisions. Their perspective is invaluable. However, they're trained to find problems, and that tendency can bog down or paralyze the decision-making process.

Entrepreneurs sense opportunities and know how to forge ahead. They bring energy, enthusiasm and vision to the process. The drawback that often accompanies their contribution is risk. They tend to throw caution to the wind and take risks that might be acceptable in their personal lives but inappropriate in the setting of a donor-supported ministry.

A good balance on the board is needed, not to ensure representation from various interest groups, but to guarantee that the key perspectives are expressed and the best possible decisions are implemented. The stakes are too high to make corporate decisions that are less than the best.

Ministries need board members with a deep commitment to the Lord and a passion for the ministry, but they also need a good balance of perspectives to lead effectively and impact the world for Christ.



ONLINE
HELP

CMA Management
Resource Center
CMAonline.org/mrc



Dan Bolin

Board Governance Section Resource Commission. For more resources on board governance, go to CMA's Management Resource Center at CMAonline.org/mrc. Email or call the volunteer members of this Section Resource Commission, or contact:

Dan Bolin, Section Leader (2004-2006)
Board Governance

Email: dbolin@tyler.net, Phone: (903) 593-5863, Fax: (903) 509-9942

Dan Bolin is president of Encouragement FM, Tyler, Texas, and a member of CMA's board of directors.