

Use a “Mission Moment”

Bob Harris, CAE

The meeting is called to order. After announcements directors get down to the business of advancing the organization’s mission. Or do they?

The board is responsible for advancing the mission --- even through the many distractions that include reports, updates and concerns about operations. Soon somebody asks about lunch. Then a few directors apologize for leaving early. None of this sounds like a meeting focused on outcomes.

IRS on Mission Statements

The IRS designates exempt status based on the submission of a statement of purpose. To emphasize the mission the Agency repositioned it to the front page of the annual information return (Form 990.)

In a white paper the IRS wrote that nonprofit organizations should regularly review the organization’s mission. A clearly articulated mission, adopted by the board of directors, serves to explain and popularize the purpose and guide its work. It addresses why the organization exists, what it hopes to accomplish, and what activities it will undertake, where, and for whom.

“Mission Moment”

Here’s a convincing way to draw attention to meeting purpose. At the start of the agenda provide a few minutes for the "Mission Moment."

The board chair reminds directors of the mission. Then he or she provides examples of how the organization’s work has resulted in positive outcomes. For instance, if the board supports “access to health care,” provide examples of how things have improved.

***A “mission moment”
highlights the
results of the
board’s work.***

A more powerful mission moment is to invite a testimonial from a benefactor or member who has been helped by the organization.

Mission Creep

Mission creep is a result of losing focus. The mission should frame nearly every discussion at board and committee meetings.

There are several ways to keep it in front of the board. Display the statement on the conference room wall and include it at the bottom of agendas. Some meetings are started by directors

reciting the mission. On name tent cards, one side should display the directors' names and the other side (facing directors) the mission.

Read the recent minutes to check if board meetings are mission centered. How many words from the mission appear in the minutes? (Too often minutes simply show the board convened, listened to reports and adjourned.)

Be resourceful in promoting the mission. The work of the board, committees and staff will be more powerful when framed by the statement.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides nonprofit governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

