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# Trustee focus

ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOL TRUSTEES AND PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR A SECURE FUTURE.

Few Christian schools budget for, or have a plan for growing the board. This article will explore a key to effective board development—the establishment of a Board Governance Committee.

## Board Development: A Perpetual Need

By John Schimmer, Ed.D.



Few Christian schools budget for, or have a plan for growing the board. Even more detrimental to the success of the board, and consequently the school, is

that boards tend to wait until the last minute to fill openings on the board. So much board time is spent on problem-solving that little time is left for planning the future. Far too much board time is spent looking **backward and inward** rather than looking **outward and forward**. It is simply easier and more within our realm of experience and expertise to be a problem solver than a visionary leader.

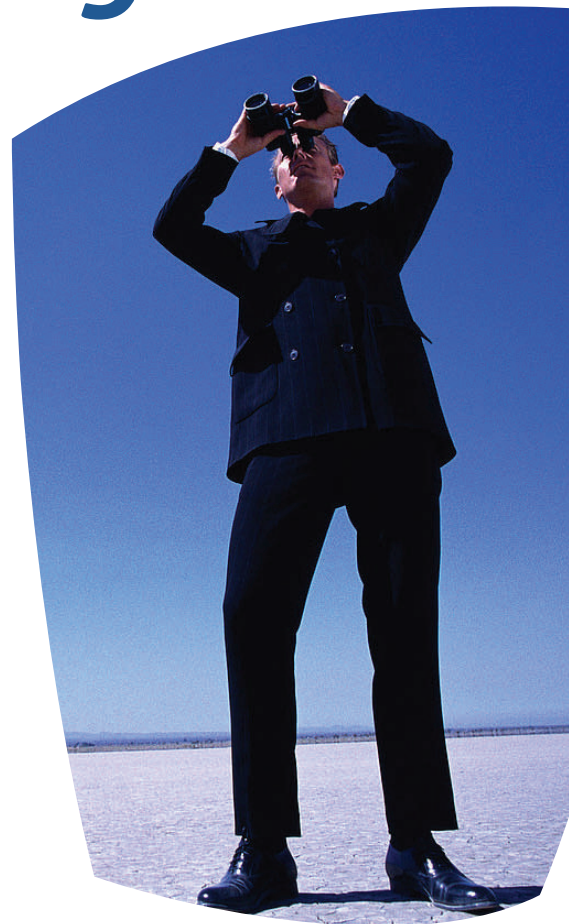
John Carver wrote, "...people speak of a 'working board' when they simply mean a board that stays busy," (p. 3) and, "The problem is that we are giving boards the wrong job." (p. 10). Board committees, especially those with titles similar to administrative responsibilities, tend to

become involved in *administrivia* rather than assisting the board in its governing role.

### The Most Important Board Committee

The one committee most Christian schools do not have is the **Board Governance Committee**, also referred to as the **Committee on Trustees**. What can be more important to the future of the school than the board perpetually studying and improving its governance and fiduciary responsibilities, and recruiting the right people to serve as Trustees for the owners?

The governance committee is usually comprised of the most experienced, senior board members; but the most important prerequisite is that each member is passionately committed to determining the best governance model and providing optimum leadership for the school. The board chair and school head should serve



as ex-officio members and be active participants of the committee.

Unlike the traditional nominating committee which has a single focus and usually only meets two or three months to prepare a slate of board candidates for the annual board meeting, the governance committee has a much larger responsibility and meets all year.



This committee determines the skill-sets needed by the board. It ensures that appropriate funds are annually budgeted for board improvement. It facilitates the board's self-assessment process and makes sure the board always operates legally—according to its bylaws.

Generally the committee's duties include the following:

1. Recommends policy on how the board functions and establishes, monitors, and refines a Governance Model.
2. Develops/maintains a Board Profile
  - a. Skills present board members bring to the board
  - b. Skills which will be lost when members rotate off the board (if board policy requires term limits)
  - c. Skills the board may need in the next cycle of school growth. This enables the committee to search for candidates with requisite skills
  - d. Oversees board diversity of professional (occupational) skills, ethnicity, gender, and age, as well as possible by-law requirements of a specific number of board members from designated stakeholder groups.
3. Develops/maintains a Board Member Profile—specific requirements of eligibility to serve on the board.
  - a. Spiritual qualifications
  - b. Character qualities
  - c. Other qualifications determined by the board

4. Monitors board member terms, and plans well ahead of the need for new board members, including when the board decides to increase the size of the board.
5. Serves as the Nominating Committee for board member elections.
  - a. Prepares, reviews, and updates the board member recruitment process and materials.
  - b. Enlists the assistance of trustees and others in identifying potential board members. (Recruitment is a continuous process.)
  - c. Assures that each candidate meets the profile (qualifications) to serve on the board.
  - d. Recommends candidates that fit the profile, and when elected, will maintain the desired diverse make-up of the board.
  - e. Evaluates the contributions of sitting board members whose term will expire and are eligible to serve another term. Confirms these board members and former board members who are eligible to return to the board.
  - f. Begins the education process of preparing nominees to serve on the board, including the distinctives of a Christian school, the school's Statement of Faith (doctrine statement), Mission and Vision statements, and the core values of the board and school.
6. If board policy requires board members, and board candidates to be annual financial contributors to the school, this committee researches and confirms the same.
7. Plans the Orientation Program for new board members.
8. Plans board retreats and periodic in-service programs designed for board growth and improvement.
9. Prepares for and conducts the annual evaluation of the board as a whole, the board chair, and individual board members, and reports results to the full board.

10. Plans for the succession of board leadership. Recommends a slate of officers for board approval.
11. In some schools, this committee serves as an advisor to the Chair. It may evaluate the board's use of committees, whether more or fewer committees are needed, monitors committee job descriptions, committee membership, and rotation of committee members and chairpersons.
12. This committee might also be responsible for monitoring the school's authenticity and ethics—making sure the school is what it claims (advertises) to be, in philosophy and practice.

The seriousness with which the board accepts its responsibility of selecting and training board members, the more serious each board

member will accept his/her responsibility. Serving God on a Christian school board is a holy calling, a ministry unto the Lord that deserves our best-informed effort. It behooves us to study board literature and to receive training so we can carry out our responsibilities

with knowledge and wisdom. We must serve in a way that honors our Lord.

**No Christian school board should be without this very important, hard-working committee.**

References:

*Boards that Make a Difference*, John Carver, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.  
*Trustee Handbook* (multiple editions), Washington D.C.: National Association of Independent Schools.

**A must read for Christian school trustees:**

*Serving God on the Christian School Board* by Roy W. Lowrie, Jr.

For more about this indispensable resource, [click here](#).

**“What can be more important to the future of the school than the board . . . recruiting the right people to serve as Trustees for the owners?”**

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