

1-2-3-NOT IT!!

By Eileen Setti

Here is a scenario that is all too common with nonprofits: it's the last month of the fiscal year and somewhere in the bylaws (we think), it's time to nominate our Board Officers. We're not sure exactly who is the Chair of the Nominating Committee (if only we could find a copy of our bylaws to find out!), so the full Board will proceed with good intentions. The conversation ensues with, "I just don't have the time to be President" and "So-and-So has been such a good President for the last six years, why can't she just do it again?" So two plans emerge: "one...two...three not it!!" or "let's nominate who ever is not at this meeting to be the president".

Both plans may work. But are these plans really good strategies for your nonprofit?

There is a very good reason why the Foundation Fathers included term limits and periodic elections in our Constitution. Likewise, there are very good reasons why every nonprofit should have term limits and periodic elections of leadership.

Periodic elections is just the beginning. What really counts is leadership development. If you expect your agency to thrive and not just survive, leaders must be intentionally selected, prepared, supported and periodically rotated. The life of a nonprofit is not stagnate. It is constantly adjusting to the external and internal environment. There is no possible way that any one leader will have the skills, the energy or the available time to lead an organization through every peak and valley of a nonprofit corporation every year.

A Board President succession plan should be developed and more importantly followed. Many organizations use the Vice-President as a president-elect position. That gives your president-elect a period of time (usually a year) to serve closely with the President and the Executive Director and really learn about the organization and how to lead the Board. Some organizations reverse this theory—the out going President serves as the Vice-President and functions in a support capacity to the new President. Another option is to have the president-elect serve as an at-large member of the Executive Committee prior to serving as the Board President to gain experience.

Intentional and strategic leadership development may sound scary—but actually, it makes the entire process of electing officers easy. That's right, easy. You never even have to count "one...two...three" or locate your board roster to figure out who is not present at the meeting, because the work is already done. You can spend valuable board time on something more important—like fulfilling your mission.

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