

# Boardmanship

## Twenty Guidelines For Board Members

1. **Do not surprise the board or the superintendent at a board meeting.** Sudden surprises should be the exception, not the rule. First, talk with the board president or the superintendent. Ask to place an item on the agenda instead of bringing it up unexpectedly at the meeting.
2. **Remember that individual board members do not have authority.** Only the board as a whole had authority. An individual board member should not take unilateral action.
3. **How you conduct yourself at a meeting is very important.** Avoid words and actions that create a "bad show," especially when they could make the board look bad. Don't be afraid to make your point, but do it with a carefulness that won't escalate negative impressions or incidents.
4. **Follow your policies, procedures, rules and regulations.** Follow the chain of command and insist that others do so. Listen to your constituents and staff, but refer them to the person who can properly address their issue. The last stop, not the first, should be the board.
5. **Do not react to threats.** Neither "cave in" nor "dig in." Deal with the issue, not the threat.
6. **Do not be a "ball carrier" for others.** Let others present their own issues, problems, or proposals.
7. **Do not make assumptions.** Get the facts and information. Ask questions to obtain more knowledge.
8. **Do not play to the audiences.** Your audience should be your fellow board members. Address them. Speak to the issues on the table.
9. **Make motions so that the focus is on action.** Avoid situations in which everyone is talking about a subject without a clear focus on the motions or final action.

10. **"Move the question'** when the discussion is repetitive. The board meeting is a place for actions, decisions and votes, not for endless discussion.
11. **Police yourself.** The board should take care of its own problems by a yearly self-evaluation and by addressing itself to any individual problems, such as poor attendance or leaks of confidential information.
- 1 2. **Be sensitive to hidden agendas or motives.** Be deliberate and careful so that you do not do anything that creates an unwanted precedent or is the first step toward undesired policies.
- 1 3. **Keep it short and simple.** Make your point in as few words as possible. There should be very few speeches at a board meeting.
14. **Follow policy.** If the policy is old and outdated, then change it. Do not regularly take actions that violate your own policies.
- 1 5. **Avoid long meetings.** If lengthy meetings are the rule, ask that the board address this problem and take action to correct its practices.
- 1 6. **Do your homework.** Read and study your agenda and backup information. Call the superintendent or board president with any questions you have. If you don't have enough information, ask for more.
- 1 7. **Avoid overuse of "closed" or "executive" sessions.** While these sessions have a purpose, they should be held only when necessary.
- 1 8. **Support and help your board president** in his/her role as leader and presiding officer. She/he has a very tough job.
19. **Ask for the superintendent's recommendations before you act.** The superintendent is your chief executive officer and should recommend, propose and suggest on most matters.
20. **Keep cool.** 'Loose cannons" do not help a board function well. How you conduct yourself is as important as what you do and say.