

Etiquette Tips for Members of Boards of Directors

These tips will serve as general guidelines for proper etiquette for all members of a Board of Directors. Different organizations may have slightly different expectations and/or protocols, so it's important to familiarize yourself with those as well.

General Etiquette:

1. Prepare thoroughly. Prior to board meetings or committee discussions, take the time to review all relevant materials, reports and updates. Being well-prepared demonstrates your commitment and professionalism, as well as increases your ability to serve the organization.
2. Respect confidentiality. Maintain the confidentiality of sensitive board discussions, decisions and any other non-public information you come across. This fosters an environment of trust, and ensures the integrity of the board's work.
3. Act in the organization's best interest. Always prioritize the interests of the organization and its stakeholders over personal interests. Make decisions that align with the organization's mission, values and long-term goals.
4. Exercise independent judgment. While it is important to work collaboratively with fellow board members, remember to bring your unique perspective and expertise to the table. Independently evaluate proposals, ask critical questions, and contribute to robust discussions.
5. Contribute. Share your ideas and involve yourself in discussions in and outside of meetings. Attend organizational events and functions to demonstrate your commitment and support.
6. Respect all members. Embrace diversity in perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences around the board table. Encourage an environment that values and respects the contributions of all board members.
7. Foster a positive board culture. Promote a culture of trust, mutual respect, and constructive feedback among board members. Encourage open dialogue, avoid personal conflicts, and focus on collaborative problem-solving for the benefit of the organization.
8. Educate yourself. Stay informed about the sector, and monitor emerging trends that may impact the organization. Read books or attend workshops to enhance your knowledge and skills as a board member.
9. Prepare your successor. Even if you aren't planning on leaving the board soon, have someone shadow you so that someone can take over while you're away or ill, and so that there will be a smooth transition when you do decide to leave.

Meeting Etiquette:

1. Arrive on time and prepared. If you are going to be late, or miss a meeting, let the Chair / President know ahead of time so you don't delay the meeting. Be ready to discuss / vote on whatever topics are on the agenda.
2. Stick to the topic at hand. Too many board meetings run overtime because members get sidetracked into other topics or get bogged down in irrelevant details.
3. Demonstrate respect to all members. Don't interrupt others, carry on side conversations or use electronic devices except to reference meeting materials. Keep comments objective and fact-based. Show others the respect that you would wish for yourself, even if you disagree with their ideas or opinions.
4. Declare any conflicts of interest, or potential conflicts, as soon as they come up. Participating in such discussions, even if you recuse yourself from voting, can leave all the board members open to legal action.
5. Always publicly support any decisions made by the board, even if you voted against them. Not doing so weakens the board and causes stakeholders to question the board's integrity and capability.
6. Take responsibility. No matter what your role on the board is, you are a leader. Don't wait for others to rein in an irrelevant discussion or shut down a disagreement that's getting personal. Everyone is responsible for the smooth functioning of the board.