Leadership Community Newsletter

The National Center for Nutrition Leadership

The quarterly Leadership Community Newsletter provides news and information you can use to help your Senior Nutrition Program reach its fullest potential.

Welcome to the first issue of the Leadership _Community_ Newsletter. The new name for our newsletter – a slight change from the quarterly "Leadership Section Newsletter" that you may have been familiar with – reflects a deepened recognition of the desire of our Members to build a true professional community, based on mutual support and sharing.

At the 2010 Annual MOWAA Conference in Atlanta, a facilitated discussion among nearly 100 leaders of MOW programs laid the groundwork for building this new, vibrant community. The first article in this newsletter will give you an overview of the Leadership events held at the Annual Conference, and in the coming months we will continue to update you on the Leadership Community as we explore ways to nurture its growth.

Undoubtedly, groups of people working toward a common goal have remarkable transformative powers. This is true of far-reaching groups like the emerging Leadership Community, but it is equally true of small tightly focused groups – like your organization's board of directors.

To help you take advantage of this group-engagement energy within your own program, the articles in this newsletter focus on practical tips to revitalize your organization's board of directors, engaging them as individuals – and importantly, engaging them as a dynamic team.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Note: The following articles are reprinted verbatim and with the permission of the sources cited unless otherwise noted.

Leadership Wrap-up: The 2010 Annual Conference

There were over 600 people at our 2010 Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia – including 150 members of MOWAA's Leadership Community – who participated in over 30 breakout sessions and workshops. Enrollees in the Leadership Certificate program collectively earned over 460 Leadership-track credits from the National Center for Nutrition Leadership.

Kicking off the Conference was the Launch of the Professional Community for Leaders of MOW Programs – where executive directors and others came together to discuss challenges and share ideas. At the forefront of everyone's thoughts: finding new and improved ways to communicate, collaborate and network throughout the year.
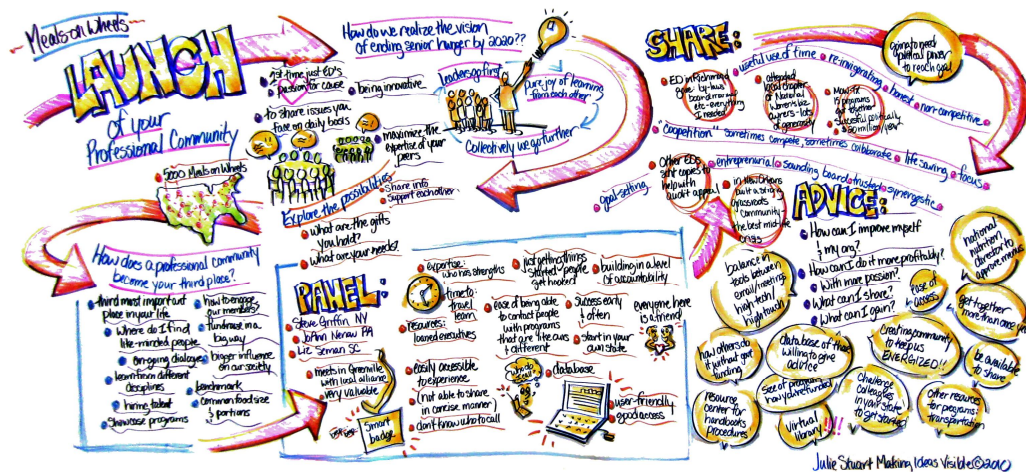
(Notes from the Community Launch. Full image available at: www.mowaa.org/_____.jpg)

Key Takeaways from the Leadership Sessions

From Jennifer Moore's presentation on "Decision Making and Problem Solving."

Key Takeaways:

Steps in the problem-solving process:

1. Identify and understand the situation.
2. Determine the root causes.
3. Explore infinite possibilities.
4. Prioritize possible solutions.
5. Implement.
6. Evaluate and monitor.
7. Remain unattached.

Steps to engage your team in this process:

1. Take personal responsibility as the leader.
2. Be open to infinite possibilities.
3. Recognize others' strengths as helpful tools to seek solutions.
4. LISTEN.

From Walter Coffey's two-part session on "'Emotional Intelligence: The Key to Succession Management"

Key Takeaways:

- In a supervisory situation, when listening to a worker talk about a problem, the traditional supervisor often focuses on the worker as the problem. Coaching Supervisors shift their focus from the worker to their own internal reactions because that is something the supervisor can change. If a supervisor changes his or her internal response in a difficult situation, that supervisor can affect what happens in the interaction.

- A supervisor's ability to handle a situation well will be determined by his or her ability to stay calm and think clearly. Good communication and problem solving can only come from clear and objective thinking.

From Jon Neiditz and Bob Herbolsheimer's presentation on "Risk Management"

Key Takeaways:

A High-level risk assessment includes the following areas:

- Employment Issues
    - Employee honesty/fidelity; Employee hiring/firing; Policy violations; Harm to employees
- Volunteer Management
    - Illegal activity; Harm to volunteers (auto accidents, slips/falls); Harm to others; Failure to follow procedures; Misclassification
- Food Safety/Food borne Illness
    - Food preparation; Food storage/handling; Food delivery
- Transportation
    - Food safety/Food delivery; Automobile accidents
- Facility Issues
    - Injuries to employees/volunteers and third parties; Physical security; Special events
- Board of Directors
    - Fiduciary responsibility; Governance; Communication
- Service Disruption
    - Backup food suppliers and storage; Alternative transportation arrangements; System disaster recovery/business continuity; Communication protocols
- Confidentiality, Privacy & Information Security
    - Older Americans Act; HIPAA; State security breach laws; Contractual/other expectations
- Records Management
    - Regulatory requirements; Contracts; Injury records; Corporate governance documents

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"One of the true tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency."
~ Arnold H.Glasgow, American Humorist

From Janet Greenlee's presentation on "Financial Vulnerability and Fraud in Nonprofit Organizations"

Key Takeaways:

- There are some things we know that we know, and some things we know that we don't know. However . . . . it's what we don't know that we don't know that can really mess us up.

- Two Major Types of Fraud:
    - Fraud against an organization
    - Fraud on behalf of or for an organization

- Increased opportunity for fraud occurs when there is:
    - An ability to get around internal controls; Inability to judge performance; Failure to discipline prior frauds; Lack of access to information; Ignorance, Apathy, Incapacity; Lack of an audit trail

- Decreased opportunity for fraud occurs when there is:
    - Modeling; Management communication; Appropriate Hiring; Clear Organizational Structure; Effective Prevention Programs; A good accounting system

- Symptoms of fraud include:
    - Document Irregularities; Accounting Irregularities; Internal Control Weaknesses; Extravagant Lifestyles; Unusual Behavior; Tips & Complaints

What's Next?

At the National Office, we are already gearing up for the 2011 Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois. If you have any feedback on this year's Conference, or suggestions for next year's, please contact Suzanne Grubb, Deputy Director of the National Center for Nutrition Leadership at Suzanne@mowaa.org or 703-548-5558.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."
~ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President of the United States

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For more Conference Highlights…

Visit http://www.mowaa.org/2010conferencehighlights

10 Simple Things You Can Do Now to Motivate Your Nonprofit Board
Liz Vibber

Are your board meetings the same old, same old each month? How about throwing a Devil's Advocate into the mix, or challenging participants to a Member Minute? Here are ten strategies you can implement at your next board meeting to shake things up!

1. Have your Mission and Vision statement on every agenda.

2. Start each meeting with a Member Minute where each board member spends a minute explaining what they have done since the last meeting to serve the organization: secured a donation, made an important contact, shared an article, etc.

3. Introduce a bylaw amendment that limits the number of other boards your members can serve on.

4. Create a "Face page" for each of your members in your board manual—this is a personal profile that includes hobbies and connections.

5. Use a "DA" or Devil's Advocate card at each board meeting. Each meeting someone different is given the card, and their job is to play the devil's advocate on issues before the board.

6. Create a FAQ for new board members created by current and past members.

7. Make sure all of your board members have business cards with the organization's mission statement on the back.

8. Decrease the number of your committees and increase the number of your task groups.

9. Create a strategic plan dashboard tracking 3-5 critical indicators to the health of the organization and update monthly showing a 12 month trend for each.

10. Ask each board member to think of the single most important issue that they feel the organization should focus on in the next year and have them write it on an index card. Shuffle the cards and read them out loud to begin a strategic discussion.

By implementing any or all of these strategies, your organization can strengthen its position.

Liz Vibber is a Strategic Consultant with the Bucks County Center for Nonprofit Management. With more than twenty years of marketing and consulting experience with nonprofit organizations, her knowledge and insight have assisted numerous nonprofit organizations in achieving their missions.
http://www.buckscountynonprofit.com

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"Leadership is action, not position."
~ Donald H. McGannon, Broadcasting Industry Executive

Transforming Groupthink into Engagement: Participation and Board Dynamics

Michael O'Malley, Ph.D, and Ed Archer

Groups have a transformative power to evoke collective thoughts and behaviors that individual members would not contemplate on their own. The effect may be very positive: when conditions are right, groups can inspire people to push their physical and mental capabilities to the fullest.

But it is the dark side of groups that fascinates: when the dynamic leads members to adopt extreme positions, to overlook or condone untoward activities, or to otherwise fail in their collective duties. It is tempting to blame such communal shortcomings on members' self-interest or ignorance. This underestimates the truly insidious influence of groups, namely, the belief of individual members that they are immune from the group's reach and power.

This article examines how common group dynamics can lead members in wrong-headed and hazardous directions—phenomena with which all board members should be familiar. We conclude by reviewing what boards can do to improve their collective actions.

How Group Dynamics Works

Group Think. One would expect that prudence would prevail in a group—that dissenting individuals would quickly put a wrong-headed discussion back on a more constructive course. Yet the hallmark of many groups is uniformity of opinion, not dissent. It is instructive to understand why.

First, research shows that when information is pooled for discussion, decisions tend to be based on evidence that surfaces early in the debate and is already known and accepted by the group's members. The group is then inclined to look for facts that will confirm its initial predilections, particularly if the group's leaders do not actively seek out contradictory information.

Second, highly cohesive groups with strong identities that are, in part, formed by having similar, non-diverse members and perspectives, tend toward homogeneity of opinion. This "groupthink" has three biases: it overestimates the viability and correctness of the group's decisions, it believes that those decisions are based on varied input from its members, and it tends to dismiss information from outside the group. In essence, cohesive groups think they are right and everyone else is wrong—a kind of collective superiority.

Insular, close-knit groups of like-minded people, such as members of a particular social circle, are particularly susceptible to groupthink. They may fancy themselves special because they are engaged in a distinctive business activity. The chairs of these groups are permitted to control discourse and to guide decisions that endorse majority opinion. This tendency is exacerbated in a stressful environment. Under severe competitive or financial pressures, a group may "dig in," seeing and speaking with one mind, moving quickly and decisively to quiet non-conformity—and end up hopelessly stuck on a course of action from which it cannot extricate itself.

Diffusion of Responsibility. The most productive groups are small ones; in this context, "less is more." Most people view themselves as forceful, energetic actors who are quite capable of expressing and acting unencumbered by the watchful eyes of the group. But studies show that larger groups tend to inhibit honest and open discussion. The more eyes watching, the harder it is for a member to break free of the group's influence and assert a divergent point of view.

One explanation for this size-of-group phenomenon is "diffusion of responsibility," that responsibility is so thinly spread that no one person feels liable. This is similar to situations where bystanders fail to help someone in harm's way, because there is a collective assumption that someone else will or already has offered assistance.

There are other psychological factors that can dampen group members' sense of initiative in addition to diffusion. These are: perceptions about the truth and validity of events, concerns about self-presentation, and the threat of punishment for non-conformity. People make sense of the world, in part, by observing what similarly situated people are doing and how they are interpreting events—the "validity factor." If

someone perceives an emergency, transgression, or miscue that no one else seems to recognize, it creates doubt about the original perception. Similarly, the collective actions of the group can validate a particular outlook and create extreme discomfort in members who might view affairs differently. In such a scenario, some members of the group might initially doubt a particular decision, but with silence and time will reinterpret the course of events as acceptable.

The desire to be perceived favorably by others—the "self-presentation factor"—is another powerful disincentive to being a lone voice. No one wants to be thought of by others as divisive, foolish, alarmist, or weak; and speaking up creates these evaluation risks.

Group members also are well aware of the "contingency factor"—the potential negative consequences of bucking the crowd. Most groups tolerate dissent for only so long before taking action, often moving to socially isolate people who are not considered "team players" while marking them for removal at the first convenient opportunity.

Social Loafing. Studies also have shown that members size up the group situation before deciding how much mental and physical effort they want to invest in its general welfare. If it is difficult to measure individuals' unique contributions, a member can work relatively less—called "social loafing"—without detection. Why would someone choose not to give his or her all for the benefit of the group? One reason is that people may minimize the extent to which their own contributions will affect the quality of the entire group's work—especially if they assume others are more competent. For example, onlookers are less likely to lend a hand in bystander situations if they believe that someone else who is present is better equipped to help.

In a similar vein, our experience with boards has shown that "junior" directors frequently defer to more experienced members. Yet many of these perceived differences in ability are neither real nor relevant. Director competency really consists primarily of bringing one's unique knowledge and experiences to bear—in other words, being a thoughtful voice.

What Boards Can Do

We offer a four-point prescription for positive group processes among board members that promotes smooth, highly engaged and effective discussions.

1. Educate members on group process. Every board should have a basic understanding of how groups can influence individual behavior. Formal instruction can include exercises and self-evaluations that highlight the group's strengths and weaknesses as a unit.

2. Implement sound information-gathering procedures and encourage strong group leaders to actively solicit divergent points of view. It is critical that board and committee chairs foster a frank and open dialog among members. Chairs should encourage members to submit ideas to them confidentially prior to open discussion.

Along those same lines, background materials and instructions should be provided in advance of meetings, with the chair following up by seeking out individuals' candid reactions and suggestions. The chairperson, in turn, would raise those issues when the group convenes.

3. Hold board members personally accountable for their participation. At a minimum, this means enforcing attendance at meetings, ensuring members understand the distinct roles of the board and its committees, and educating new members. Excessive absences and phone-in participation at meetings are clear signals that a member lacks the time and attention required for board service. Members should clearly understand the distinct responsibilities of the board and its committees to ensure both accountability and full participation. We have found confusion even among seasoned directors as to who is ultimately responsible for a particular decision or action.

4. Question and establish the operating norms of the group. Boards should be vigilant of group attitudes and behaviors that dissuade dissent or lead in directions to which no member on his/her own would consent. Further, we recommend that boards create a formal statement of values that spells out a range of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

Directors ideally should serve on more than a single board. When a board is comprised of long-standing members of similar character and backgrounds, with little perspective on how other boards operate, conditions are ripe for an inwardly-focused, conformist culture.

A Better Board

In summary, board meetings should be an environment in which diverse, independent-minded people feel comfortable and are motivated to provide their frank opinions on matters. An understanding of how group dynamics can affect that dialog will help ensure that members reach the informed and thoughtful choices needed in these challenging times.

Michael O'Malley, Ph.D, is a psychologist and consultant at Clark Consulting, New York.

Ed Archer is managing director at Pearl Meyer & Partners in New York, a Clark Consulting practice.

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> **"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."**
> **~ John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the United States**

Critical Path for the Board

Jan Masaoka

Many boards and their executive directors complain about a "lack of engagement" and bring in speakers or even undertake strategic planning as ways to "get the board engaged." But even if there is discussion at meetings, shouldn't the goal be something more than just lively talking? Instead of "How can we get the board engaged?" perhaps the question should be: "WHAT should the board engage with?"

The term "critical path" originated in the field of project management to mean the sequence of milestones that a project must follow to finish in the shortest amount of time. The term has come broadly to mean the path or sequence of decisions and actions that will lead to success.

One way to get to this Critical Path for the board is to clarify what the critical path is for the organization this year. At least annually, ask this question of the executive director and the board officers: What does the organization NEED to accomplish this year? What are the most important two or three things that have to get done?

The answer might be, "to be named one of the six city lead health centers," "to move to a new office," "to get our enrollment up," "to either fire or see great improvement in the CEO," "to get our finances under control," "to explore and maybe merge," "to find a way to raise salaries," or "to get the board's act together in preparation for hiring a new executive director."

The Big Job for the organization (or two or three jobs) will lead naturally to two other questions. First, what does the board need to do in order to get this Big Job done? And second, what do board members need to know in order to do that?

Let's look at an example of a Big Job and the board's critical path, and imagine an organization that matches adult mentors with young people. This organization has two big issues in front of it. First, although they have a waiting list, they don't have enough mentors, so their matches have declined by 18% over the last year-what is the problem and what can be done about it? Second, they have enjoyed a substantial 3-year grant from the county which will be ending in six months. Should the organization expect to get a renewal? Plan to cut back? Find another source of income?

Old agenda:

- Finance Committee report: last month's financial statements

- Fundraising Committee: ask members to contribute raffle prizes

- Executive Director's report: mentor recruiting

New agenda:

- County funding: Form task force to investigate likelihood of renewal; develop strategy for renewal (such as board member meetings with county officials)

- Matches: Report from board-staff task force on the ten interviews they've conducted with mentors to learn how they were recruited. Review plan from executive director on staff work to recruit more mentors. Generate and prioritize list of ways that board members can assist with recruiting.

- Finance Committee-Contingency budget if county funding is not renewed.

In short, by beginning with what the organization has to accomplish and then what the board has to accomplish—and what it thereby has to discuss -- the board is grounded in pressing and meaningful work. The critical path may have been outlined in a recent strategic plan, or there may be a major" event" such as executive director departure, a substantive funding cut, or other matter. A discussion of the critical path will lead naturally to which committees and task forces are needed, what kinds of board members need to be recruited, what individual and group tasks there are for the board, and to what key items the board must hold the executive director accountable.

What is the most important issue, challenge or problem facing your organization? And when did the board last discuss this?

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"Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall."
~ Stephen R. Covey, Author

Book Review: Boardroom Chemistry: Getting Your Board to Govern as a Team
**By: BoardSource, 2010** http://www.boardsource.org/Bookstore.asp?Type=ebook&Item=1163

Every board struggles with group dynamics – the ways in which individual board members interact with each other and function (or don't) as an effective team.

That's why BoardSource created Boardroom Chemistry: Getting Your Board to Govern as a Team.

The downloadable PDF contains 24 tools designed to help your board function more effectively by focusing on the following:
Board composition (and the role played by board size and diversity)
- Board structure (such as term limits and how structure can enhance or inhibit teambuilding)
- Cultural and behavioral barriers (and how to understand and overcome them)
- Ways to engage detached board members
- Decision-making and other meeting practices
- Listening skills (and how to develop them) and use them to resolve conflicts
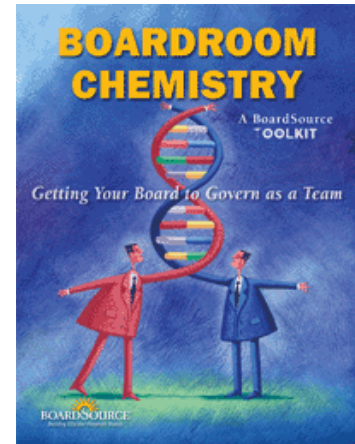
You'll find proven advice and practical tips and techniques for improving board interactions, along with questions to stimulate board discussion around important topics.

EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES
Visit www.mowaa.org/calendar for the most up-to-date listing of events.

Emergency Preparedness for MOW Program Professionals
When: 10/15/2010
Where: At the Unity in our Diversity Annual Conference in Syracuse, NY.
Details: The training is designed to instruct Meals On Wheels and other Senior Nutrition Program directors and managers in the use of the MOWAA Emergency Preparedness (EP) Standards and Implementation Guidelines, including the process for preparing an emergency plan that meets the MOWAA EP Standards. Visit **www.mowaa.org/emergencypreparedness**

Webinar Archive
When: Watch recorded webinars on-demand, on your schedule
Where: At a computer near you
Details: Register to view past webinars and earn Certificate credits at your convenience.
Visit **www.mowaa.org/webinararchive** to see a full catalog of available webinars.

> **"MOWAA webinars are invaluable in the senior nutrition field. We have a unique job and do not have frequent contact with other nutrition providers or training. Having a cost effective way to "meet" with our peers while learning about our distinctive field is invaluable to me. Thank you MOWAA!"**