



ONTARIO EDUCATION SERVICES CORPORATION

## Professional Development Program for School Board Trustees

Modules

# 15

## What makes a great Board Chair?

### CHAIRING BOARD MEETINGS - HELPFUL TIPS

Chairing an effective meeting is a skill. One that is learnable. Outlined below are some simple principles; which if followed can result in focused efficient meetings where everyone feels their opinion is valued and the job gets done.

**In the role of chair, there is no place for ego.** You are the facilitator, and the most effective chairs are those who listen, who use open ended questions to tease out reasoning and to involve others. Try to involve all trustees in discussions by asking questions to specific people if they are not taking an active part in the proceedings, “What do you think about....., Fred?” If others are dominating, value their contribution but involve others, e.g., “Thank you Bertha, that’s very helpful, what do the rest of you think about what Bertha has offered?”

**Keep the meeting on track,** identify how things will be recorded, summarize the discussion if there is confusion, identify points for action, who will do what, the time scale for action, how things will be monitored and by whom and when.

**Model good meeting behaviour** and accept nothing less from colleagues. Take a positive part in the activity, be generous with ideas, listen to others, avoid aggression and bullying. Promote healthy professional discussions where diversity of ideas and approaches are constructively used to create the best solution is the ideal.

**As the chair it is you who will set the tone and manage the process.** If colleagues are going to give of their best they need to know that all contributions are valued, that they will get credit for their ideas and that the whole organization is strengthened by the collective success rather than scoring points off one another.

## SECRETS OF SCHOOL BOARD SUCCESS

- The chair sets the tone for the entire board both in and out of meetings. In this role, it is critical that you be impartial, fair, respectful and conciliatory.
- Be sure to equally include and recognize all members during board discussions. Be as neutral as possible when an issue is being debated so no member perceives any favouritism on your part.
- Go slowly when first taking office as chair. Later, you can move faster after you've gained the members' trust. Trying to do too much too soon creates the impression of a hyperactive ego, or a lack of interest in genuine consultation.
- Talk very little in meetings. As chair, it's tempting to speak often because you can claim the floor whenever you like. A board chair who submits to this temptation may be perceived as domineering. An effective chair actually uses few words to facilitate the equal participation of all members.
- Refer problems to the board. Some board chairs mistakenly assume they should provide answers to all procedural questions. A better course is to ask the other members, "Board, how would you like to proceed?" Deferring to the board helps create an atmosphere of cooperation and sets an example for the other members to follow.
- Invite differences of opinion. If as the chair you sense that a board member holds a minority opinion yet for some reason is reluctant to talk, you tactfully should encourage him or her to speak out. Also, in a spirited board debate, it's a good idea to alternate your recognition of members so that all sides are evenly presented.

THE SECRETS OF SCHOOL BOARD SUCCESS, LYNN HAMILTON, 2008) (LANGUAGE AMENDED FOR ONTARIO CONTEXT)