

How To Get Board Members To Take Ownership For The Overall Success Of The Chapter, Instead of Just Their Position



Sadly, many associations chapter board members spend a lot of time worrying about stepping on each other's toes. Whether they do it on purpose or it rolls off their tongue unintentionally, you may hear "I'm the treasurer (events VP, marketing VP, or INSERT ANY ROLE), I don't make these sorts of decisions" more than a few times a week.



Are issues like these problems for your chapter? If so, who is responsible for fixing them? Your webmaster? Your President? Your membership VP? Your marketing VP?

- Members register for your events online. They fill out a form, the form is accepted, but they're not done. They have to complete a second step and go somewhere else to pay. Do those two processes happen as they should, or are you always sending emails, making phone calls or collecting money at the registration table?
- Your membership is on a decline. Members are leaving in larger numbers than normal and you're not bringing in enough new members to replace them. On top of that, you don't have a clear idea of why they're leaving. If something doesn't change, your entire chapter will suffer.

Here's the black and white truth, which can be hard to communicate. Board members, committee heads and committee members are part of a larger community. That entire community is responsible for the long-term success of your chapter. These people shouldn't believe they operate in a silo or a vacuum.

Rather, every one of them plays a role in ensuring the organization continues to operate as smoothly as it can, regardless of their position. If there are challenges, everyone needs to come together to address them.

It must be exhausting to hear "crickets" when everyone on your board is afraid to speak up or out of turn when you want talk about how to overcome some of the challenges the chapter is facing. "Talk to the treasurer. Talk to the president. I don't want to misspeak." But you don't need to feel like you're stuck. You can put a stop to those responses. There are ways to better engage those who help run your chapter, to get them to be more loyal to the chapter and better connect to the purpose of the organization.

3 ways to get your board members to speak up when they have ideas to improve your organization

1. **Include it as a requirement in the board job descriptions.** Being a team player should be in every one of your board member job descriptions. Of course, boards want people who are team players, but you can be a lot more specific. Being specific gives you something to reference when someone says it isn't their job to help. The description should include something like "working together on projects that X role may feel is outside their responsibility." Seeing that will help you find the better person for the role, the one who is prepared to work with other members to improve the chapter.
2. **Work together to understand the organization's pain points.** Give people reasons to connect by working together on illuminating chapter problems and bottlenecks. Since everyone will have participated in understanding where the problems area, it'll be easier for them to agree to work together on the solutions. They'll have more "skin in the game" and feel that they need to be part of the solution.
3. **Eliminate your single point of failure.** To avoid the "what to do" when one person is unable



to do their part, ensure that everyone on the board has a backup who is also on the board. That way, the VP of membership for example, can take on the role of treasurer, the treasurer can back up the VP of events, etc., because they will understand what they do. And with that understanding, they will be more likely to jump in and help, even when they're not needed as a backup.

Often, board members are afraid to rock the boat and call out a problem so they stay with the status quo don't speak up about finding a solution. But in reality, finding that solution is everyone's problem. Everyone is responsible for making the chapter run better. It's everyone's challenge – not just whomever you're pointing to. If you're on the board and elected, it's your job to help get it done.

