

TEN WAYS TO SET A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ON A PATH FOR SUCCESS

When a new executive is hired, the board has usually been working extra-hard for weeks or months. In addition to meetings about candidates, board members have often taken on additional tasks, such as managing a fundraising event or overseeing the audit. (The board, acting as a body, has been working hard on its governance responsibility of hiring, while board members, acting as individuals, have also stepped forward to support and help.)

Here are some ideas for the board and for board members:

1. Don't drop the ball now! It's understandable that board members may want to relax once the new executive director is in place. In a tough situation—where new income streams need to be found, for example—board members may want to step back and hope the new executive will pull the organization forward. At the same time, a new executive may be reluctant to ask board members to do more, or may be new to the community or field and thus be unsure of the kind of board help to seek. Stay in there at continued intensity for awhile longer, and make sure the executive gets off to a great start. Tip: Have a committee or an officer take on the job of monitoring and supporting the transition for the first six months.
2. Write and send out a press release—either by email or in hard-copy. Send it to local and neighbourhood newspapers, local ethnic press, newsletters for the field (such as disabilities or theatre), national office and affiliates (if you're a chapter organization such as Planned Parenthood), and local television and radio stations.
3. Don't forget that the most important recipients of the press release may not be the press: be sure the press release is sent to funders, donors, significant volunteers, former staff and board members, city officials, and organizations with which yours is in contact. They'll appreciate the news, and it gives you a chance to tell them more about the new executive and spark their positive interest in working with her.
4. Have the Board President or Chair introduce the new executive to the staff. Doing so sends a message that the board has hired this executive who manages the staff and reports to the board.
5. At a board meeting, make a list of the influential people your new executive should meet, and see which board members can set up coffees or lunches with them. A board member can invite the new executive to lunch along with other Chinatown leaders, for example, or coffee with the school superintendent.
6. Make a personal donation to the organization *now* to demonstrate your confidence in the new executive and the organization's future. Bonus: she'll really appreciate it.
7. Set the new exec up for success by giving positive messages to the community about him, especially ones that point the way for working together. If you have some private reservations about the new executive, keep them to yourself. Example: "We are so thrilled we were able to hire him—he's just what our organization needs for the future. In particular, I think you'll appreciate his experience with innovative programs involving kids and sports."
8. If you're the board chair, take extra care working with the new executive on board meetings and board packets. She'll just be finding her way in a new environment, and you can help find a balance between what the board is familiar with and her style as it develops.
9. Take your new executive out to lunch, and listen. Don't forget that he's in the process of forming his big ideas, and you can help him by listening, asking questions, and encouraging him to be creative and bold. You can also help him think through which kinds of issues need

to come to the board, and which are appropriately up to him. While reminding him of what the board expects in terms of support and information from its executive, in turn, ask him how he'd like to be supported by the board. Any relationship in life has a better chance of thriving when the expectations of all parties are explicit.

10. Look for opportunities, especially at board meetings, to praise the new executive. "The directions you're talking about are just the ones we were looking for," or "The board packets were excellent—I especially appreciated the inclusion of the article about changes in funding for neighbourhood arts."
11. Even the best baseball players work with batting coaches and fielding coaches. Suggest to your exec that a good use of organizational funds may be to pay for a coach—perhaps in fundraising, or public speaking, or general leadership development.
12. Don't let all the positive support from board members distract you from the board's responsibility to establish and monitor benchmarks for performance. Clear performance goals for the first year will go a long way towards keeping the board and the executive focused on what's important. Some boards ask the new executive to use the first 45 days to learn, and then present a set of draft benchmarks to the board, while others establish the benchmarks together as part of the hiring process. Either way, be sure the board fulfills its collective responsibility as a board to oversee its chief executive. If things begin to go bad quickly, such benchmarks will allow early termination, and if things go well, such benchmarks will have been a reason for success.

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