

October 1, 2007: A Tale of Two Missions

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When discussing board recruitment, there are frequently discussions of mission but that's not the real issue. "Let's make sure that people get our mission." I hear this so much within our nonprofit community that I tend to tune it out and downplay it. I usually say, in these situations, "yes" OF COURSE you want people on your board who support your mission. Lately, I have come to a couple of realizations.

First, it is not sufficient to value the mission, it is more important to digest and manifest the guiding principles and values that guide the organization in pursuing/furthering its mission. Arguments tend to focus on how to interpret the mission or where the actual boundaries of a service niche, as defined by the mission statement, actually lay - arguments among people who agree on the mission.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, there needs to be a focus on the mission of a trustee, regardless of which board they serve on. The larger problem in recruitment, are boards composed of "yes people" picked by the chief executive or selected by current board members because they know these people and believe they get the mission. The mission of trusteeship, with its many well-defined responsibilities and the single focus of "increasing community value", this is the mission that is most frequently overlooked. Bringing a unique and desirable set of general and specific skills, components of diverse background and strategic perspective AND being able to ask the hard questions, making tough choices and taking responsibility for outcomes: THAT is the key mission that I want prospective board members to support.