

THE ELEVATOR

Volume 1 Issue 3: April 2019

A newsletter buzzing about board governance and management of condo and not-for-profit boards.

Is it Spring?

Bill and Heike are still looking for any sign of spring. They've spotted a canoe rising out of the melting snowdrifts and are determined to usher in better weather and good times! They thought they'd be chewing on some chocolate bunnies this month but looks like they've built what is likely to be the last snowman of the season instead. All is not lost though; the birds are singing in the background - they seem convinced that better weather is on the way!

So far, the yard is still full of leftovers from the long winter: dirt, debris, and the last of the ice that just refuses to go. Is your board office looking a bit like the yard? Messy, disorganized, and with a lot of things left hanging around that don't really need to be there? Marie Kondo - the organizing superstar - is everywhere these days advising people to merge, purge, stash, trash and then tidy up what's left. We propose that this month everyone 'Marie Kondo' their board records. Don't let your board routines languish like the tired snow of winter.... but renew, reorganize, and rebuild for a fresh outlook on the year ahead.



Read on for tips on how to get your records in order, suggestions for ways to implement something new in your operation, a strategy for evaluating your board's performance, and some thoughts on how to make better decisions. We'll end this month's newsletter with a super-tip on where to find like-minded people.

Remember, our newsletter theme for 2019 continues. Since we've had no suggestions so far, here is hint # 1; boards and elevators start at G. Maybe spring will offer some clarity. Heike and Bill are not clues; don't be distracted by them.

Pat Crosscombe & Bonnie Oakes Charron, Co-Editors

1st Floor: Marie Kondo your Board

Since most of us can't hire Marie Kondo to come in and perfect our space, we'll look to some basic principles from the world of professional

records management to help get your board organized whether you have an office or not.

Organizing board records information is a never-ending task - streamlining what you need to manage on a day-to-day basis is critical to successfully managing records - so they don't end up managing you. Information arrives via phone, email, in-person visits from directors, clients, external professionals, stakeholders - a dizzying array of 'stuff' that needs a place and will need to be found again.

Even though directors may not actually do the work of organizing their board's information, the board remains responsible. The task can be delegated to others such as a board secretary, staff or a property manager but the responsibility always remains with the board. If the task is done badly and records disappear, the board is still responsible.

Tip One:

Deal with any piece of information on contact - use, file, or delete - decide right away. Do not set aside for later. Later usually means never and leads to items piling up.

Tip Two:

Remove clutter regardless of whether it is on your desk or computer. Develop a system for daily activities and keep three board meetings prioritised - the last one, the upcoming one, and the one on the horizon.

Tip Three:

Make sure anything transferred to a storage area such as a file cabinet, share drive, memory stick or in a board portal is organized, labelled, and accessible - the easier these files are to access, the more you will be

willing to transfer. Once you have confidence that you can always find what you need, you will be less tempted to keep everything in your immediate work area.

Tip Four:

Periodically assess your records for 'the final step' - delete or archive. Keep what needs to be kept and keep it for as long as it must be kept (check your provincial, state, or federal legislation for holding requirements).

If it is no longer needed, delete. Out with the old, in with the new.

Tip Five:

Consult outside professionals if you need some guidance - it will likely be a one-off consultation that could lead to lasting results. Talk to a governance advisor, professional records manager, or subject matter specialist (legal/financial etc.) for an assessment and recommendations.

Other great places to learn include networking with peers and attending workshops and conferences.

Tip Six

Keep records secure. Documents stored in basements are at risk of fire or flood. It is great if they are archived in a fire-proof safe or secure facility, but this is unlikely the case for many organizations. Consider digitizing records and storing on CDs or in a board portal. Make several copies of the CDs and store in multiple locations.



2nd Floor: Try Something New

It's spring; a time to renew your board. Why not try something new! At your next board meeting add an agenda item where a discussion could take place about a new project.

Maybe your board is considering a retreat or about to embark on a recruitment campaign. New could include starting a newsletter, starting and finishing a business plan, embarking on a new project or reviewing your purpose or mission.

Start small and be successful. We recommend doing one thing better this year. It's a bit like making New Year's Resolutions when it is not the new year.

3rd Floor: Break out of old patterns

Spring is a great time to strategize about the future. What can you do new this year to break out of old patterns and test some new ideas? This time next year, will you be able to 'assess' your board's performance? Will the value-added be clear? Undertaking an assessment, whether formal or informal, factual or anecdotal, requires setting up something to evaluate against - a plan, a benchmark, or a specific objective. If your board lacked this type of structure in the past, choose something to focus on this year - and commit to evaluating the results this time next year. Creating an annual work plan for the board is a great way to provide structure.

Next year you can use the work plan to check off what was done, and what wasn't. This is a great way to create the content for the Annual

Report/President's Address that must be done each year for the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Take the results from the checklist and write as a speech – or prepare a PowerPoint – starting with accomplishments, then what will be carried over, or discarded. If a new board or new directors are coming in at the AGM, they'll appreciate knowing the status of last year's work plan.

Rooftop: Create a wider framework for discussion

What have you noticed so far with spring on the way? The snow drifts are giving way to new growth, and just the tips of flowers can be seen in our outdoor gardens. Is there anything new to notice in the boardroom? If not, take a regular practice, and renew or transform it with a new approach.



How about approving recommendations in the board package? When substantive files come forward to the board, see if you can expand the context and create a wider framework for discussion. Rather than simply approving what is presented, why not ask in advance that anything

presented have at least one option beyond the recommendation? It is easy to not ask questions and just accept what is presented but encouraging some extra discussion could lead to new insights that would be lost when in 'rubber stamp' mode.

Remember - questioning a decision, a process, or an input isn't questioning a person - no one should feel threatened about taking time for careful thought. If asking for options, engaging in discussion, and evaluating alternatives becomes part of your regular board practices, it will simply become the norm.

Resources

Did you know about the Society of NonProfit Board Directors? It is an association specifically for nonprofit board directors, connecting people passionate about board service, sharing stories, networking, and even recruiting competent people to your board. It is a place where you can learn about governance, get tips on dealing with challenges your board faces, and even more practical concepts like growing or staffing your organization. Use this link for more information.

<https://nonprofitboarddirectors.org/home>

Yours in good governance. Pat & Bonnie
