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### 1 Honor Thy Mission

No commandment is more critical for association boards than this one. If your board isn't watching out for the mission, who is? Often, a board needs to consider whether the mission has shifted.

Dartmouth College's original mission focused in part on the "Education of the Youth of the Indian Tribes." At some point, they realized it was time to shift. Similarly, the March of Dimes was formed to stamp out polio. With the Salk vaccine in 1952, it was time for them to shift.

The primary job of a board is to ensure that the mission of the organization remains relevant, and the organization remains focused on achieving it. If you can only focus on one commandment, this is the one.

### 2 Thou Shalt Scan the Environment

Too many associations spend their time looking inside of the organization and miss significant changes in the environment. Whether it's economic trends, shifting demographics, or technology advances, it's critical that you spend some time looking outside to ensure that you're adapting to whatever challenges—and opportunities—the environment brings.

### 3 Thou Shalt Drop Dead Wood from the Board

Every board has them: the Board members who are members in name only. There's no reason to put up with it. Have a plan to transition "dead wood" from your board.

Sometimes that's easier said than done, but two strategies that work well are attendance requirements—consider a requirement to attend two out of every three meetings—and the creation of "secondary constructs." For example, some Boards have smaller advisory boards or corporators—entities that have less responsibility and allow someone to make a graceful exit from the board.

Regardless of your strategy, make this commandment a priority. Dead wood is infectious. If some board members aren't working, before long that can become the norm.

### 4 Thou Shalt Embrace Change

A few years ago, we started working with a newly-formed association client. In the second year of their board election process, we suggested changes. Their answer was, "we can't change—we've always done it this way."

That's how fast resistance to change can become ingrained in an organization. One of our favorite quotes is, "if you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less." Associations need to embrace change or get ready for irrelevance.

### 5 Thou Shalt Not Create Unneeded Bureaucracy

To approve this commandment, we need a three-fifths majority at the committee level. Then it goes to the executive committee for a majority vote, followed by approval by the full board. After the commandment has been approved, the marketing committee will work with the website committee to place it on the web site. Sound familiar? 'Nuff said.

## 6 Thou Shalt Create Roles and Responsibilities

Do your board members know explicitly what you expect from them? Do your officers? In many organizations, things as simple as attendance requirements and expectations for meetings are often left unsaid. Beyond the formality of bylaws, make sure there are operating procedures for how the board operates. Board orientation sessions provide an outstanding start for this process—and if your organization doesn't have a formal orientation process, ask yourself *why not?*

## 7 Thou Shalt Conduct Effective Meetings

Do your board meetings follow formal agendas? When are they distributed? How about action items—are they logged? If someone were to observe your board meeting, how many members would he see staring at their phones or laptops during dialogues? These are all the elements of establishing an effective meeting. Setting ground rules is critical for the success of the meeting—and meetings are central to the success of the board.

## 8 Thou Shalt Utilize Technology

One of our executives serves on a board that sends printed packages to his house every month. Ironically, he tucks the packet into his iPad case to bring to meeting. There are great board portals out there online, and iPad apps like Diligent Boardbooks. Ask yourself how you can expect your organization to have 21st century goals, if you're still conducting board meetings in a 20th century manner.

## 9 Thou Shalt Examine Thyself

It's funny how many organizations conduct evaluations for every seminar and conference, but never do self-evaluations for board meetings. Start examining your own process, ideally after every meeting. Here are a few questions to ask:

- Did we come to the meeting prepared?
- Did we avoid personalization of issues?
- Did we reach decisions?
- Did we stick to the timeframes on the agenda?

## 10 Thou Shalt Covet Thy Neighbor's Benchmarks

Insist on quality benchmarks for your organization. And be sure to benchmark against best-of-breed organizations. For example, for customer service, make it Nordstrom and L.L. Bean, not "associations of comparable budgets." It's your job as a board to hold the organization to a high standard and push for excellence. Benchmarks let you do that.

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If you need help addressing one or more of the above essentials, our Board Support services can help. We provide strategic consulting and management services to associations, standard setting organizations, and technology consortia at all life cycle stages—from start-up through growth phase and maturity. Over the years, we have worked with dozens of organizations on all aspects of association management and operations.

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