



Smart Strategies to Create a Cohesive Board and Staff

Eggshells... We all hate walking on them. When interacting with different personalities it can be difficult to be diplomatic in our communication with executive staff and the board of directors.

Early in my career I worked with "Bill" (not his real name). Bill was introverted and preferred structure. I tended to be more outgoing and creative. Initially I thought Bill was rude because he didn't seem to want to talk to me. Bill later confessed to me that he thought I was rude because I always tried to change the way things were done. Bill's introversion meant he didn't enjoy a lot of chit chat and my creativity meant I enjoyed less structure. It was a clear case of personality difference.

The cohesion of the executive staff and board of directors is based on the culture, style and personality they adopt. The fact that board members tend to have diverse backgrounds means that there will be a variety of personalities represented.

"Different personalities help us be more effective and efficient," says Family 1st of Texas FCU president Sandra Szymanski.

"Even with our diverse backgrounds we are all focused on the same goal," adds American Airlines FCU board member Milton Whitehurst.

Good relationships and a common goal are the glue that holds the board together and will encourage board and staff members to challenge one another in a productive way without feelings of threat or fear.


There are some common threads throughout the different personality types that will help maintain cohesion within your staff and board. Here are Smart Strategies for how to maintain a cohesive executive staff and board of directors:

- **Hug the Tree.** This is the concept of sticking to the main point in a conversation. Think of the tree representing the topic and the tree branches other tangents. When having group discussions don't allow the conversation to go off point by discussing an old issue or something unrelated. Avoid "war stories" from the past that can get a discussion off track.
- **Recognize high emotions.** Regardless of personality type, as long as a person is communicating with high emotion, he or she does not feel understood. And before someone can trust others he/she must first feel understood. Without trust among staff and board members there will be suspicion within the group and less cohesion.
- **Know the two parts of trust.** According to the Deming Center of Quality Management 50 percent of time is business is wasted because of lack of trust. Trust is a function of character and competence. Character is your motive and integrity with people. Competence includes your skills, capabilities and your track record.
- **Focus on what is right rather than who is wrong when dealing with confrontational issues.** Address issues, not personalities. Ask "What" and "How" questions instead of "Why" questions. Ideally the





conversation style should be open with quick and honest communication that engenders constructive feedback.

- **Recognize that people will behave differently in a group setting than they behave one-on-one.** Peer pressure and intimidation affect how people interact in a group. New board members may be afraid to ask questions that could benefit everyone. New executive staff members may be afraid to challenge a seasoned board of directors.
- **Generational differences can be misinterpreted as personality differences.** It's not uncommon for a board of director to be more senior in age than the executive staff. The younger generation (Generation Y/Millennials born after 1980) will embrace new technology, emailing and communicating online whereas an older generation (Baby Boomers born 1944-1960) may resist technology and prefer more face-to-face interaction. These are the same generational differences you see within your credit union with members and their needs. Recognize motivators for the different generational groups to improve board and staff cohesion. 



Susan Fletcher, Ph.D. is a psychologist, author and speaker who specializes in helping individuals, professionals and organizations apply strategies for fast improvement. Her Smart Zone™ strategies provide ways to be a top performer at work and home. To learn more about how to be in the Smart Zone please visit www.FletcherPhD.com.



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