

# The Australian Strategic Planning Institute

## *Executive Leadership Checklist - Topic: **Guiding Your Board***

### Overview

Many successful CEOs report that a key element of their success has been due to the quality of input and support of their board. The question that emerges then is how to develop the types of relationships that add significant value to the organisation's senior leadership team

It is expected that people who join an organisation's Board are doing so because they have a desire to positively contribute to the success of the organisation. It is also anticipated (though perhaps cannot always be expected) that Board members will bring with them a specific attribute or set of skills that improves the quality of strategic thinking for the organisation.

To assume however, that Board members have the time or skills to be fully prepared might pose challenges over time. In this Executive Leadership Checklist we consider the types of approaches that can assist CEOs and senior managers to get the best out of their Boards and that allow the Board to contribute fully to the organisation.

### **The Induction Program**

Just like employees, a Board Induction program can be invaluable to new Board members to enable them to quickly get up to speed. Regardless of how the Board member came to be on your Board, as part of your Induction process consider:

- Providing new Board members with a check list entitled something like '*How to be a Good Board Member*' that lists: the key criteria you have established for how they can best contribute to the business; the culture of the Board; and the key questions expected to ask; can be an invaluable way to establish a guiding framework.
- Having them 'pair-up' with an existing Board member as part of the initial engagement period so that the experienced Board member can help them settle in, is often well received
- Ensuring that all existing Board members are aware of the core capabilities of the new Board member and vice versa
- Ensuring that as quickly as possible, they are given an opportunity to utilise the skills they bring to the table in an area important for your business

Sometimes we forget that Board members are people too! Allow them the same opportunity to settle in and also provide them with a succinct download of needed information so they can begin using the skills they offer you. In the end, Boards are about effective business relationships that enable the application of effective skills and knowledge – communication is the key.

### **Building a Board's Strategic Capacity**

Truly effective Board's tend to target their thinking at the strategy making areas of the business, rather than at the operational areas of the business. They use their insights, experience and understanding to test, stretch and extend the CEO and senior management team's thinking about how the business might run and what could be considered in achieving the organisation's goals.

Building the Board's strategic capacity means a focus on:

- Critical areas of organisational achievement
- Tracking of progress to achievement of those critical areas
- Keeping the Board informed of newly emerging issues and potential changes in the industry
- Providing ongoing learning opportunities to develop the way the Board both works together with each other, and provides guidance to the CEO

When it comes to encouraging strategic thinking within your Board, the Board agenda is one key place to start – ensure that the agenda focuses the majority of the Board's attention to discussion of strategy rather than operational issues. This is the difference between tapping into a Board member's ability to think and their ability to direct.

Consider providing the Board with an Environmental Scanning (ES) update on a regular basis, in particular targeting those areas of interest to the organisation. If there is a cross over between the Board member's personal area of interest, that of the business and the information in the ES, all the better (See '*Executive Leadership Checklist – Environmental Scanning*' for more information)

### **Improving Attendance at Board Meetings**

CEOs sometimes experience times when one or more Board members seem reluctant to attend the Board meetings. Setting aside the issue of work related absence, the following article may provide a few additional insights into what you can do to foster an engaged Board.

In particular the article looks at the difference between an *Involved* Board member and those who just aren't attending meetings. Sometimes you can have Board members who turn up to all meetings but who contribute little by way of being involved in strategy making for the organisation

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### **'Exiting' un productive Board members**

What could you do to have unproductive or disengaged Board members move on? This article provides some insights as to some of the steps you can take including Board evaluations, use of sub committees and more. Once again, it all comes down to effective communication

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