

The Food Bank Board Meeting

AS THEY REACHED THE boardroom, Joe said to Ivan, "I hope you don't mind sitting at the table with us. I took the liberty of calling the board chair, Nanci Oreo, earlier today and shared that I had invited you. She was thrilled and suggested that you consider yourself part of the group."

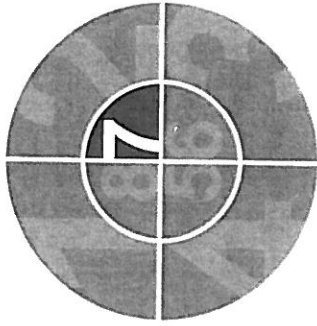
"Well, Joe, that is very kind of you," Ivan replied, "but I do want to stay objective here. After all, we wouldn't want anyone saying I took it too easy on you."

Joe laughed. "Oh, that's okay, Ivan. I think the food bank folks are just happy about the publicity they might receive. The more people who know about them, the better."

With that, Joe opened the door and ushered Ivan in.

As they took their seats at the round table, Ivan was struck with how organized everything was. Every board member had an agenda at their place. Each also had a notebook that appeared to contain background information on each of the items. It was obvious that all of the members had taken time to review the notebook, because each one was full of sticky notes and turned pages. There

was a table at the back with coffee, soft drinks, and snacks. Classical music wafted from the speakers set in the ceiling. Around the perimeter of the room were a series of easels with flip charts and markers.



PRACTICE DISCIPLINE

No sooner had they sat down than the music faded and the individual that Ivan presumed was Ms. Oreo called the meeting to order.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for being on time tonight. First, I want to thank Joe Victor for allowing us to use the Allied boardroom again this evening. And, Joe, thanks too for the music and refreshments. Now,” she continued, “I understand you have a guest this evening.”

“Yes, Madam Chair, I do,” Joe assented. “Everyone, I would like you to meet Ivan John. I am sure many of you recognize his name. Ivan writes for the *Sunday News*. He is doing a story on boards of directors here in greater Chamton and, as part of that, has been meeting with me and others. I invited him this evening so he can see how the best board in Chamton operates.”

At this, everyone at the table chuckled, and a few even

clapped and hooted.

“Of course,” Joe continued, “I have shared with Ivan many of our governance principles and told him that tonight we will be working on our target policies. Fair warning, though: what you say here tonight can and will be held against you in the *Sunday News*.”

Again there was a round of laughter.

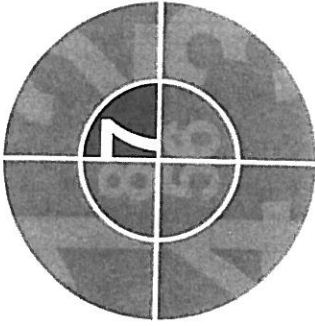
“Thanks for that introduction,” said the chair, reasserting her control over the meeting. “Everyone, please take a minute to go around the table and tell Mr. John just a bit about yourselves.”

As the board members introduced themselves, Ivan was struck with the caliber of the group. Each of the board members was successful in his or her own way, and yet here they were on a weeknight, taking time to talk about food for the less fortunate. It was clear that the group members liked each other, but, more than that, they clearly had a passion for the mission of the food bank.

After the introductions were complete, the chair again took on the captaincy of the meeting.

“As we begin this evening, I would like to ask for agreement that Jordan be our meeting monitor tonight and evaluate our performance during the meeting against the board authority policy titled ‘Governing Style’², specifically clause 1 regarding group responsibility and clause 3 regarding discipline. I spoke with Jordan earlier to ensure that she is familiar with the policy and prepared to monitor.”

² See Appendix 4



PRACTICE DISCIPLINE

All hands were raised.
“Thank you, Jordan.”

Nanci continued, “Are there any deletions or additions to the agenda?³ No? Good. I will remind you that we are scheduled until 8 this evening, and I promise to do my best to get you out of here on time.”

“Hear! Hear!” several of the members agreed.

Without missing a beat, the chair continued, “The first item is the Required Approval Agenda. A submission for a request for funding from the Chamton Community Foundation requires board approval. Clearly they are not using the OnTarget Way,” Nanci joked. “We have received a monitoring report from our CEO identifying how this funding is aligned with our targets and priorities and how it will not go outside our boundaries. Are there any questions? I will accept a motion that this be approved.”

Following the motion and the seconding, the chair called the question. Everyone voted in the affirmative.

Ivan looked at his watch. Barely fifteen minutes had

³ See Appendix 3

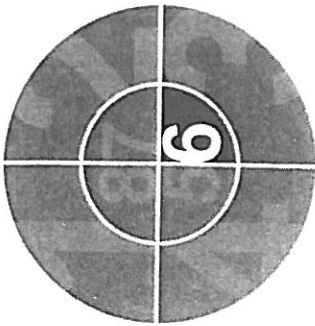
elapsed, and already the board had dealt very efficiently with a number of items. *Maybe I will get out of here by 8*, he thought while writing down “Use Required Approval Agenda.” His Friday deadline had been extended to Saturday mid-morning, but there was still a lot of work to do.

Once again, the chair spoke. “Has everyone received and read the ‘Treatment of Clients’ compliance report?” All heads nodded.⁴

Then the chair asked two questions separately: “Has the CEO convincingly demonstrated her interpretations of the policy?” and “Is there sufficient evidence to convince you that this policy has been complied with?”

A healthy discussion ensued, with both questions being answered in the affirmative by all board members. It was then recorded in the minutes that the board had received the staff compliance report for the policy titled “Treatment of Clients” and accepted that the CEO had convincingly demonstrated her interpretations of the policy to be reasonable and the data as proving compliance. This was also recorded by the board’s secretary on a separate tracking sheet to be used, along with other similar decisions, at year-end for the performance appraisal of the executive director.

⁴ See Appendixes 5 and 6



ASSESS PERFORMANCE

“As you know,” the chair continued, “this evening’s meeting will focus on decision making about our target policies. We have been collecting data throughout the past six months, and tonight we will review all that we have read and heard. Based on these data, the board will decide whether to amend our target policies.

“I have prepared for you a set of documents, which was included in your board packet. I know that you all will have read it, as you always do. You have seen all the material already. I have simply gathered it together so that we are all working from the same documents. To set the stage for our discussion, let me give you an overview of the documents and take you through a bit of a chronology of our past six months of target work. You can follow along on the yellow cover sheet. Mr. John, I have an extra set of documents for you to follow along. I think you will find them interesting.

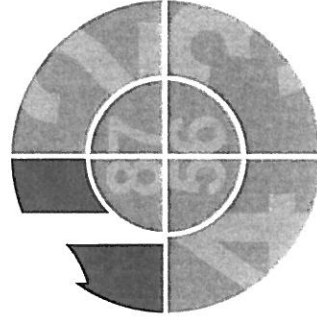
“Our current target policy, reviewed and adopted by us last June, is in tab 1 of your board binder.⁵ Behind that

⁵ See Appendix 7

policy is the latest report from the CEO on the achievement of our target.⁶ You will remember that when the board accepted that report, we asked ourselves, ‘Have we targeted the right groups? What are the contributing factors to hunger and food insufficiency?’

“The next document in your package is the notes from our leader’s meeting in September, as well as from our meeting with representatives from the City Council, the Interfaith Council of Chamton, and the Coalition of Social Service Agencies. The questions we asked in that meeting were as follows:

- Who is most at risk for going hungry?
- What is the impact of the current level of people going hungry?
- What are the long-term solutions your organization is using to address hunger?
- How important is the issue of hunger to your constituents?



ACT ON BEHALF

⁶ See Appendix 8

“In November, we held six neighborhood focus group meetings. The summary of those meetings is your next document. The focus for those meetings was this set of questions:

- What would you consider to be an adequate supply of food?
- What does a person need to ensure an adequate supply of food?
- What are the barriers to having an adequate supply of food?

“The last document in your package contains the results of our organization’s latest annual survey of food bank clients.

“There is a lot of material here, rich with information that we need. I know you all have read everything. I suggest that we take the next thirty minutes to meet in small groups to digest and analyze the information.

“Why don’t we have three groups? Mr. John, please feel welcome to join one of the groups as well. Each group will take one of the documents. Jordan, your group can discuss the neighborhood focus groups summary; Pat, your group can take the annual survey; and Kathy, you take the document from our September leader’s meeting.

“Here are the guiding questions for your group:

- What words, or data, caught your attention?
- What is in the document that is worrisome?
- What is surprising?

- What did you read that is validating?
- What are the specific points that would have an impact on our organization?
- What values do you see reflected in this document?
- Which ones are not there?
- What do you recommend to the board?

“Please take notes from your group discussion, and be prepared to make your points back to the larger group after the thirty minutes are up.”

Ivan was quickly asked to join one of the small groups and immediately found himself to be part of an interesting and lively discussion about hunger. He wisely didn’t enter the discussion, because he had not read the documents. By listening to the others, he became vastly more educated about the issues causing hunger and the different values about hunger in the community. He wondered how the board was going to make a decision.

After thirty minutes, the board chair called the groups back to order and asked for a presentation from each small group.

“You have fifteen minutes each to report back,” the chair said. “At the end of each group’s presentation, there will be questions for clarification. At the end of all the presentations, we will have a brief stretch break and then reconvene for board decision making.

“Now, who would like to go first? Kathy, is your group ready to go? Okay, let’s hear what your thoughts are from the September meeting.”

Kathy said, “Well, Charlie took the notes while we were talking, so I’ll defer to him, in case I might miss something.”

“Thanks Kathy,” said Charlie. “All the board members in our group were also in attendance at that meeting in September, so we used our own personal impressions of the meeting as well as the meeting summary notes. In summary, we heard the following:

- Children living in poverty, new immigrants, and people with disabilities are those most at risk for going hungry.
- Children living in poverty and going hungry are also eating less nutritious food. They are therefore at increased risk of obesity and other health problems in the future.
- Hunger has a negative impact on children’s ability to learn.
- Other organizations are focusing in two areas to end hunger in this city: lobbying state government to increase the minimum wage and basic welfare assistance rates and removing the barriers to the use of food stamps.
- Donations to food banks are down nationally due to increased giving to victims of international disasters.”

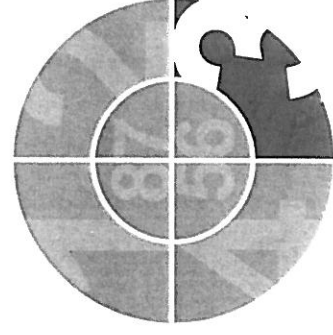
The reports from the small groups filled the next forty-five minutes. Ivan observed the board members listening

intently to each other and taking notes. Board members heard more about the barriers experienced by people applying to use food stamps, as well as more detail about immigrants and children experiencing food insecurity and hunger. A theme that emerged was that the board was almost completely “OnTarget” with the current list of outcomes that the organization should be achieving, although there were a few potential changes to the targets.

At the break, Ivan spotted Joe across the room and gave him an appreciative grin. Ivan realized he was getting considerably more access and exposure to his topic than most interviewees would allow.

After the break, the chair reconvened the board and asked for proposals from individual board members regarding amending the board target policies. Jordan proposed that the board specify “people with disabilities and new immigrants” in policy 1 by adding a policy 1 (a) to further clarify “those who are most vulnerable will include new immigrants and people with disabilities.”

“I second that motion,” added Kathy.



SET TARGETS

The board members entered into a hearty debate about this proposal. When it appeared the discussion was winding down, the chair asked, "All those in favor of amending our policy?" Seven hands were raised. "All those opposed to amending the policies?" Two hands went up. "We have a decision then to amend our target policy as proposed. Well done, everyone. I think that those we represent around this table would agree that we considered all the information, views, and values in making this decision.

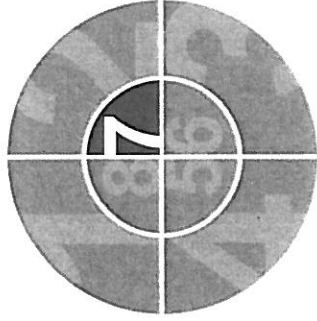
"Now let's hear from our meeting monitor. Jordan, how did we do?"

"I observed our behavior this evening and compared it with the Governing Style policy, clauses 1 and 3," Jordan said. "Based on my earlier conversation with Nanci, our chair, and understanding her interpretations of group responsibility and discipline, I report to you the following:

- The board demonstrated its own responsibility for excellence in governing through the chair's design and execution of the meeting agenda, which both accomplished our stated meeting outcomes and included everyone in the discussion.
- All board members were on time for the meeting and present for the full meeting. We had 100 percent attendance.
- As I listened in to the small-group discussions during the meeting, it was evident from both the quality of the comments and the state of

people's board packages, which were all highlighted and dog-eared, that everyone came to this meeting thoroughly prepared.

"So, on a scale of 1 to 10, I would assess our performance at very close to a 10 for tonight's meeting. Well done, everyone."

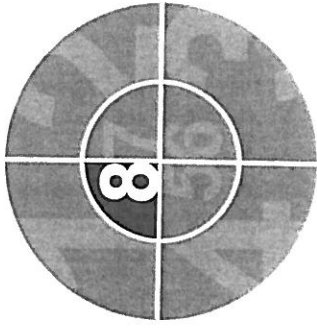


PRACTICE DISCIPLINE

Ivan leaned over and whispered to Joe, "May I get a copy of that board assessment report?"

"Sure," Joe whispered back. "I will have Jan e-mail it to you first thing tomorrow. We use almost the same one at Allied."

"Okay. Thanks, Jordan," the chair said. "I look forward to reporting on this meeting in our next community news-letter along with our new version of our target policies."



REPORT BACK

“By my watch, it is 7:58, and we are ready to adjourn a couple of minutes early. Joe, thanks again for the use of the room. I declare us adjourned. Drive safely everyone.”

As the meeting broke up, several of the members stopped by to say good-bye to Joe and to thank Ivan for being there.

When Nanci approached, Ivan said, “Ms. Oreo, that was one of the best meetings I have ever observed. Is there any way at all that I can get a few minutes of your time to talk about how you learned to do that?”

“Well,” said Nanci, “I really can’t stay tonight. I have kiddos at home that I have to put to bed on a school night. Tell you what, though—I will meet you at the Starbucks over on Main Street for a half hour in the morning at eight o’clock.”

Although he was groaning on the inside at the prospect of an eight o’clock meeting, Ivan put on his game face and nodded. “See you there, and thanks,” he said.

While he had a minute alone, Ivan wrote the following in his notebook:

- Seek owner input and use it
- Stay on track; be disciplined about the board’s work
- Get the board to discuss big picture issues in a meaningful way and process difficult information
- The board assesses organizational performance
- The board assesses its own performance