

EXPERTS' CORNER

Q How does a club find the best board candidates? Are there best practices for board succession planning?

A Most public companies and many large nonprofit organizations have an almost unlimited pool of potential candidates to fill open board positions. However, private clubs by their very nature are limited by their relatively small memberships. It is not uncommon, for example, for a golf and country club to have 500 to 600 total members, of which usually no more than 250 or 275 are regular members who can vote and are eligible to serve on the board. Thus, a club's process for identifying and vetting prospective board candidates is more challenging. The Nominating Committee (the "committee") is charged with this responsibility, and its role of recruiting the "right" members for the board is critical.

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The committee typically consists of three to five members who, in many cases, have previously served in leadership positions as either officers or board members. Once constituted, the committee should meet regularly to identify prospective candidates.

Board Candidate Qualifications

In order to ensure that the best possible candidates for board service are identified and ultimately selected, the committee should follow a consistent, thorough and structured process. Depending on the club, and its particular circumstances, some qualifications or attributes may be more important than others. The following list, although not all inclusive, provides a solid blueprint for identifying, vetting and selecting the best candidates. Prospective board members should:

- **Be willing to commit the time** – Being a board member is not only an honor, it is also a commitment. Potential board members must be willing to commit the necessary time to attend board meetings, committee meetings and other important club functions. The committee should clearly communicate, and the candidates should understand the amount of

time that board service will entail as well as the club's policy, if any, on attendance/absences.

- **Be members in good standing** – Since the board must address, and possibly discipline, delinquent members, it makes sense that potential board members should be current in their financial obligations to the club. It would, at a minimum, be awkward and embarrassing for the board to have to suspend or possibly even expel one of its own members for not paying their financial obligations on a timely basis.

- **Have a track record of committee service** – Having a track record of committee service will be a pretty good indicator of what type of board member an individual will be.

- **Possess the skills and expertise the club needs** – Due to the wide range of issues that arise in the normal course of business at clubs today, it may be beneficial, depending on the circumstances, to look for board members with specific expertise (i.e., lawyer, accountant, architect, etc.)

- **Be supportive (financially) of the club and its programs** – A board member should be an active user of the club, not someone who visits once or twice a year.

- **Be compatible with other board members** – Although board members may not always agree with one another's views or opinions, they must respect the opinions of fellow board members.

- **Be an independent/critical thinker** – The ability to objectively assess issues is a valuable asset that should not be dismissed or underestimated.

- **Be willing to act in the best interest of the club** – As the board represents all members, it is important that board members approach their duties with an open mind and not arrive with preconceived agendas.

- **Be respectful of club staff** – Because leaders set the tone in any organization, board members should be individuals that treat all staff with respect.

Once candidates have met the aforementioned qualifications, the next step is for the committee to interview and screen individuals and ultimately select and recommend the slate of candidates to the board and membership for approval, in accordance with the timing required in the club's bylaws. The committee should also maintain a list of board prospects for future consideration.



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