

ATTRIBUTES OF QUALITY BOARD MEMBERS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR BOARD

Article # 5

As the owner of a private company you have formed and invested in a board of advisors or board of directors to bring value to the company. That value comes in part from the unique attributes that the outside directors bring with them to their board participation. Using and leveraging those unique talents of each of your board members multiplies the return to the company.

Years of participating on the boards of private and public companies have made it clear that certain attributes of outside board members are important to achieving the purpose of a productive and effective board of directors.

This series of articles will consider and describe some of those attributes. As you consider the composition of your board these articles are meant to provide you with thoughtful insight for enhancing the performance of the board.

The fifth article in this series will discuss the attribute of INTEREST IN MENTORING MANAGERS.

Think of mentoring as a vehicle for your key managers or next generation of family to advance the pace of learning, absorb the value of experience, and establish role models. Selecting board members with skill and interest in the art of mentoring exponentially increases the value of your board. Board member mentoring of identified succession candidates for key management positions provides new eyes to evaluate the performance and potential value of the human capital in your business.

A key objective to remember as you add or replace board members to your company is to fill gaps in experience and functional or process skill sets. If you can identify potential board members with the skill to teach and the interest in mentoring you essentially get two board members for the price of one.

When attempting to evaluate the potential mentoring skills of a board candidate you might consider the following yardstick. Clearly you will probe the background and experience of the candidate. You will likely find candidates more than willing to tell you what they have experienced and accomplished that might be applicable to their potential contribution to the company as a mentor and board member. There is another important

perspective to explore in the identification of board candidates with the skills and experience to mentor. Ted Levitt, respected professor, at The Harvard School of Business once told me that understanding what a manager learns from his mistakes is perhaps even more important and more valuable than the lessons learned from his successes. Board candidates who can describe the lessons learned from mistakes bring a perspective or maybe retrospective that is most valuable in the mentoring process. The perspective gained from the experience of mistakes brings a whole new value to the teaching and nurturing process of mentoring.

Therefore in considering board candidates with the skill to mentor explore both their success experiences and their “mistake” experiences.

While identifying qualified mentors among your board members it is important to also consider the intangible quality of the chemistry between the mentor and the manager protégé. For a mentor to deliver and a protégé to receive maximum value from the mentoring process there has to be a quid pro quo on the attributes of trust, respect and willingness to communicate. In addition there must to be a passion for the mentor to teach and for the protégé to learn. Think of the mentor and protégé as a mini-team working to accelerate the learning curve. When the chemistry in the relationship is right the speed and slope of the learning is accelerated.

Should you decide to add mentoring as an important skill for your board members you will find that your board members and your key managers become more productive and effective in bringing value to both the hard and soft metrics of the company.

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