

"What is a competent school board member?"

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We have been busy in our office this spring traveling around the province conducting school and teacher evaluations and working with school boards to determine staffing for the upcoming school year. I am convinced that one of our biggest challenges as a school system is selecting appropriate local leadership. When school boards are comprised of the right type of board members, the right things happen, and vice versa. It has been said that "the right time to fire a person is when you don't hire him." The same is true of board members. Do we have members on our boards that have been "forced" to serve because nobody else will? Do we accept any person who is willing? Has your church or school board given thought to the kind of people you need on the board?



In reading a document from the Society of Christian Schools (BC), I have come across two lists that may be helpful for selecting board members. The first is a profile of the "Ideal" board member.

- Meets scriptural qualifications (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1)
- Is God-oriented - life and sense of purpose focused more on God than on personal achievements, family or a mission or program
- Is motivated by faith in the supernatural work of God - a board sized faith
- Is a person of prayer
- Is able to be decisive
- Sees the 'big picture' - has a global perspective
- Is positive and focused on the future, yet is also realistic
- Thinks critically, without a critical attitude
- Is a natural encourager, a cheerleader for the whole group
- Believes strongly in the mission of the school
- Feels at ease in an advising relationship with the principal
- "Fits" in with current board members
- Is not a "rubber stamp" nor a "devil's advocate"
- Demonstrates ability to delegate effectively
- Enjoys a wide network of friends and professional contacts
- Can think independently, not insisting on "my way"
- Is humble and not judgmental
- Keeps priorities clear while able to sort out the many details in a confusing situation
- Shows a willingness to adapt a program to meet needs
- Has a spouse supportive of having one serve on the board
- Presents no conflicts of interest
- Has a servant-leader attitude: "How can I help the group win?"
- Is willing to work, to do homework, and to serve
- Is able to work with the team, not against it
- Brings a wide variety of successful experiences
- Has rebounded from failure with integrity

- Demonstrates a commitment to honesty, loyalty, and excellence
- Understands the importance of confidentiality on sensitive information
- Shows a desire to grow and learn

Recognizing that one person is unlikely to exhibit all the "ideal" traits, it is important to determine which traits are needed immediately to round out the board personality and which ones can be developed during a term of service on the board. Before asking someone to serve on the board it might be helpful to tell them exactly what is expected of them. Some of the danger signs in a board candidate profile include:

- Has personal (hidden) agendas
- Is consistently negative, always focusing on why something can't be done
- Is fearful of the future
- Is stingy
- Is extremely emotional, needy, or self-centered

Every board needs to schedule time for proper orientation and training. Superintendents are more than willing to work with boards in this regard. There are many good resources available and they need to be shared with board members. It is also recommended that a "training" component be build into every board meeting.

By taking the time and energy required to elect candidates who exhibit many "ideal" characteristics, the constituency can be assured of a board that will operate the school in the finest Christian tradition while meeting the varied needs of the school community.

Resources:

- Contant, Henry, "*The Link*", Vol.27, No.4, April 2004