

# **Stronger Together:** ***Making the Board/Executive Relationship Work***

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- BA, Tufts University
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# Start With Why

A strong executive–board chair partnership boosts trust, reduces burnout, and drives mission.

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

-African Proverb

# Warm Up - In the Chat

1. What's one trait that makes your, or a partnership in general, thrive?
2. What has created tension in the past?

# Agenda

1. Welcome & Context
2. Relationship Building
3. Role Clarity
4. Shared Goal Setting
5. Communication
6. How to Disagree
7. Burnout & Retention
8. Scenarios for Discussion
9. Relationship Assessment
10. Takeaways

# Relationship Building

- Getting to know each other
- Connection to camp
- Understanding what success looks like
- Leadership style
- Decision-making style
- Areas of sensitivity

# Role Clarity

- Clarity is power
- Written job descriptions
- Review and agree upon roles
- Recalibration as needed
- Good fences make good neighbors

# Who Does What?

<b>Responsibility Area</b>	<b>Board Chair</b>	<b>Camp Director</b>	<b>Shared</b>
<b>Mission &amp; Vision</b>	Upholds and protects mission, ensures alignment	Executes mission through programs and leadership	Collaborate on strategic direction
<b>Governance</b>	Leads board meetings, sets agendas, ensures board performance	Supports board function, provides information	Work together on board development
<b>Strategy</b>	Approves long-term plans, evaluates strategic priorities	Leads operational strategy and planning	Co-create strategic plans and milestones
<b>Fundraising</b>	Leads board's role in giving and getting	Supports and implements development strategy	Joint donor cultivation and stewardship

# Who Does What?

<b>Responsibility Area</b>	<b>Board Chair</b>	<b>Camp Director</b>	<b>Shared</b>
<b>Operations</b>	Oversees only at policy level	Leads daily camp operations, manages staff	Align on budget, staffing, and goals
<b>Staffing</b>	Hires, evaluates, and supports director	Hires and manages camp staff	N/A
<b>External Relations</b>	Public representative of the board	Public representative of the organization	Coordinate messaging, attend events
<b>Crisis Management</b>	Supports executive, represents board response	Leads execution of crisis plan	Share timely information and decisions

# Goal Setting

- What are our goals?
  - Strategic
  - Operational
  - Governance
  - Fundraising
  - For our Partnership

# Communication & Expectations

- Regular meetings - determine how often and how you want to meet
- Communication in-between meetings - determine modality and level of detail
- Invite feedback
- Be curious

# Quarterly Check-In

- Wins since last check-in
- Challenges or blockers
- How are we doing?
- Any upcoming heavy lift?
- One thing I need from you this quarter. . .

# What Happens When You Don't Agree

- **Pause** - Take a breath. Don't rush to respond. Pausing helps you respond—not react. A moment of silence can de-escalate tension and demonstrate thoughtfulness.
- **Clarify Intentions** - Assume good faith. Express that your goal is shared understanding, not winning an argument.
- **Surface assumptions** - Name what might be going unsaid—either your own assumptions or ones you sense from others.
- **Reset expectations** - If needed, reframe the conversation. Realign on goals, process, or tone.
- Useful phrases
  - “Help me understand...”
  - “I hear what you’re saying—can I offer another perspective?”
  - “What would it look like if we tried it this way instead?”
  - “Let’s take a step back—what are we each solving for?”

# Burnout & Retention

- Trust and autonomy
- Time off that's protected
- Strategic—not tactical—engagement
- Career growth
- Responsive board support

# Signs of Burnout

- Avoiding communication
- Changes in mood, energy, and visibility - withdrawal or irritability
- Increased reactivity or conflict
- Emotional exhaustion
- Loss of creativity
- Missing deadlines or pulling back

# What Boards Can Do

- Ask: What do you need to thrive?
- Protect boundaries
- Ensure adequate resources for proper staffing and professional development opportunities
- Appreciate year-round
- Make sure taking vacation and days off
- Support sabbaticals

# Burnout Discussion Questions

- How do we check in beyond just updates?
- What signs of burnout have we seen/felt?
- What might we say or do?

# Scenario Discussion Questions

**Scenario 1:** A parent reaches out to the Board Chair with a complaint about a staff member. Instead of forwarding it to the Camp Director, the Chair contacts the staff member directly to “get their side of the story.”

- What boundaries were crossed?
- How should this have been handled?
- What systems need to be clarified to avoid this in the future?

# Scenario Discussion Questions

**Scenario 2:** The Camp Director signs a new food services contract without discussing it with the Board Chair. It's within their budget authority, but it shifts a long-standing vendor relationship valued by alumni and donors.

- Was this a misstep or appropriate autonomy?
- How should the Director and Chair discuss scope of decision-making?
- What does this tell us about shared goal-setting and trust?

# Board-Director Self-Assessment

- Do we have role clarity?
- Are we clear on shared goals?
- Do we know each other's communication preferences?
- Do we meet 1:1 regularly?
- Do we have a feedback loop?
- How might we improve our partnership?

A photograph of a diverse crowd of people at a Q&A session, with many hands raised. The image is overlaid with a teal color and decorative wavy lines at the top and bottom. The text 'Q & A' is centered in white.

# Q & A

# Takeaways

- Great organizations run on strong partnerships
- Relationship maintenance is strategic, not optional
- Set partnership goals
- Meet monthly
- Use the check-in template
- Talk about areas of tension or disagreement
- Address burnout
- Realign roles annually
- Prioritize your partnership—it fuels the camp's future!

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