Five Fast Ways to Recruit New Board Members

We tend to recruit board members from among our friends and acquaintances . . . no wonder we often run out of people in familiar circles to ask. At the same time, we often want to bring people onto the board who are more prestigious, wealthier, better connected, and who can add an important diversity component. We might, for example, want to recruit more people of color, more women, younger members, gay/lesbian individuals, residents in another part of the county. In short: recruiting is as much about knowing WHAT you want to recruit, as HOW to recruit.

Previous Board Cafe issues have taken on the diversity issue - see www.boardcafe.org for archived issues or purchase Best of the Board Café at www.compasspoint.org. Here are Five Fast Ways to Recruit:

1. **Post your "Great Board Member Wanted" ad on free websites that match people seeking boards to join with nonprofits seeking board members.** We like:

   - [www.boardnetusa.org](http://www.boardnetusa.org) for its national (if uneven) reach, the info it collects, and the other resources there
   - [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org) for its very wide distribution, although it's much better known for referring program volunteers than for board volunteers
   - [www.bridgestar.org](http://www.bridgestar.org) uses the boardnetusa.org database, but adds individuals from its (mostly corporate) members, and has good additional resources for board members less familiar with the nonprofit sector

2. **Place a "Help Wanted--Volunteer Board Member" ad on your lobby bulletin board, in your newsletter, in the neighborhood newspaper, or in the alumni newsletter of a local college.** Example: "HELP SOUTH PARK... We're looking for a few talented and conscientious volunteer board members to lead and strengthen our programs for people with Alzheimer's and their families. If you can contribute your time, thoughtfulness, and leadership one evening a month, and are interested in exploring this opportunity, call Sister Mary Margaret at xxx-xxxx to find out whether this volunteer opportunity is right for you. We're especially looking for folks with accounting experience, with gerontology backgrounds, from the Asian communities, or who are on the younger side of the community.

3. **Our best idea: Form a "One Hour Recruiting Task Force."** Draw up a list of twenty well-connected people of the sort you would want on the board but who you suspect wouldn't join. (but who might know someone who would be a good board member.) Call those twenty people and ask them to come to one meeting of the Task Force committee over lunch (confess it will actually take an hour-and-a- half). Tell them that at the lunch they'll be told more about the organization and what it's looking for in board members. At the end of lunch they'll be
asked simply for the name of one person they think would be a good board member. The Task Force is disbanded. The day after the lunch call up each of the nominees and begin by explaining who nominated them.

4. Promote from the ranks: Ask the executive director or the volunteer coordinator if there are two or three hands-on volunteers who would make good board members. Hands-on volunteers, such as support group facilitators, practical life support volunteers, volunteer ushers, weekend tree-planters, classroom aides and others bring both demonstrated commitment AND an intimate knowledge of the organization's strengths and weaknesses. Volunteers, donors and clients should be the first place you look. You don't have to "sell" the agency - they know it already!

5. Board Member Swap: Pick four local organizations where you don't know anyone, but you'd like to (examples: NAACP, Japanese American Citizens League, Accountants for the Public Interest, community hospital). (Tip: Your local Yahoo site (http://www.yahoo.com/) is a good place to look for lists under "Community.") Ask each officer to call one of the four local organizations and ask to have coffee with one of their leaders. Over coffee suggest that your two organizations recommend "retiring" board members to each other as a way of establishing organizational links and strengthening ties among communities.

Q: Our board is kind of crummy, and I'm embarrassed to ask anyone I respect onto the board I'm on. But we desperately need new members! What should I do?

A: Use one of the above strategies, but with this kicker: "I even feel guilty asking someone like you to join a board that's as weak and confused as this one. But this organization has a unique role to play in solving the problem of _______. What's really needed is a total overhaul of the board. I'd like you to work with me and two others of the same mind to work with the new director to recruit six new members and really make this board work. We meet every month for two hours on Tuesday morning (specifics). Would you work with me on that committee?

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