

How board members can advocate successfully for their non-profit

When you became a Board Member for a nonprofit what was your motivation? Did you dream of a better future for a specific group of people? Did you dream of creating awareness for an important cause? Did you think you could make a difference by becoming an advocate to increase awareness, educate and raise more funds? If the answer is yes, the question is "How's it going for you?"

Are you putting in a great deal of time, energy, effort and commitment into a nonprofit you truly believe in only to find your efforts aren't returning the results you want? Sometimes the law of diminishing returns can impede your potential success.

I've seen clients who care so much about their cause, that the extra effort they put into the process is the very thing that holds back their ultimate success.

Here are several things to think about as a Board Member and some tips on how to be more effective when advocating for the nonprofit you care so deeply for.

1) Are you memorizing the speech to the point it becomes more about getting the words right than being in the moment and truly connecting?

If public speaking makes you uneasy, you might find it tempting to memorize each word. While it's good to be prepared by knowing the goal of your speech and organizing it in a way that makes sense to follow, you also want to be spontaneous and flow in the moment.

If you've memorized your speech, it's hard to take advantage of the opportunities that pop up in the moment. Spend more time visualizing the end result you want and the main points you want to relay, then speak naturally to one person at a time. Your audience will feel the difference and be more engaged.

2) Are you talking so much about the cause that you forget to relax and invite others into the conversation?

Have you ever heard someone who cares so deeply about their cause, they get caught up in their own dialogue? They ramble on and on about its importance and the needs of people who are affected. It's hard to listen to. It's like trying to play catch with someone who never tosses you the ball. It takes a lot of effort to do all the talking and the ironic thing is that it's less effective. Take the pressure off yourself by asking more open-ended questions and then listen with all you've got to what they say. You'll hear clues about what's important to them.

3) Are you worrying about saying the right thing (or not saying the wrong thing) while holding back what you really feel in the moment?

It takes a lot of effort to hold yourself back. We've been conditioned to strategize what to say in order to fit in. It really puts a damper on your authentic voice. Learning to trust your impulse and say what you want in the moment can be re-learned. Knowing when to remain silent is just as important. It's a skill that, once you learn it, will reduce stress and simultaneously build credibility. Understanding your motivation and intention for speaking or remaining silent is a good place to start.

4) Are you pressuring others for a certain outcome and not being open to unexpected opportunities? When you put a lot of thought into your ideas it's easy to become invested in a specific outcome. Board members will be able to more successfully advocate for their non-profit when they learn to go with the flow and trust that the universe is backing them. Opportunities will come up if you keep your eye on the goal while letting go of your pre-conceived ideas of the outcome. Have you ever noticed that once you let go of how you think it should be, a jaw-dropping opportunity falls in your lap? You can learn to do this deliberately instead of it being a rare-occurrence. Stay focused on your goal and at the same time, flexible how you achieve it.

The most important thing to remember as a Board Member for a nonprofit you truly believe in is that you are an advocate for the organization. That means knowing the history of the organization, about the services they provide and understanding their mission statement in a way you can easily communicate to others. It's also about knowing yourself and how to

best forward your efforts in a way that is meaningful and rewarding for both you and the organization. The thing that made you successful at one level is usually the very thing you must drop to move to the next level. The ego will resist, holding on with all it's might. But, the more you let go, the less effort you'll waste. Spend your energy in a way that draws in new donors and creates more success for your non-profit.