

# **DESTINATION LEADERSHIP**

**BILL GEIST**

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Published by:  
Neverland Publishing  
Madison, WI 53704

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design: Clay Altman / **Admanic**  
Interior layout: TheBookProducer.com

ISBN-10: 0-9755484-1-7  
ISBN-13: 978-0-9755484-1-7



CHAPTER

7

# DESIGNING BOARD STRUCTURE & COMPOSITION

*“A team is something you belong to,  
something you feel,  
something you have to earn.”*

– Gordon Bombay in *The Mighty Ducks*

First up, we must tackle the thorny issue of whether the Board is appointed, elected...or a mixture of the two. As we touched upon earlier, DMOs that are Governmental in nature or Divisions of other Agencies will generally operate with an “advisory board” (so called because the ultimate authority rarely resides with the Board but, rather, with the parent entity).

Assuming that your DMO is an independent body, however, the Board must do everything in its power to avoid the pitfall of appointed members controlling the majority of the seats and, thus, the conversation.

Governments, industry associations (such as the local innkeepers, restaurateurs and attractions) and other special interest groups will lobby for seats on the Board. In many instances, DMO Boards have agreed that such representation would be (in theory) a good thing... and then have punted away the future by allowing too many of these groups to select *their* representatives for the newly-created seats.

A DMO Board should never allow more than 50% of its seats to be chosen or appointed by those outside the Board.

This gets to a fundamental philosophy of Board governance: A Board made up of appointees cannot represent the best interests of the organization. They represent the interests of the appointers.

Think about it. The Mayor appoints 6. The County appoints 6. The Chamber appoints 3. And there are 3 at-large seats. Then, let's say the City is contemplating a significant reduction in its investment in the DMO.

When push comes to shove, the Mayor will call in their chits from their 6 appointments. Assuming the County is also in a budget crunch and wants to maintain harmony with the City, those votes will block an objection from the DMO Board to the Mayor's proposed cuts. And, the Chamber, also wanting to stay on the Mayor's good side, will vote their way as well.

Now, let's look at a scenario where the City, County and Chamber each have an appointment. The other 12 seats are Board-selected. The Mayor announces plans to cut the DMO budget.

The decision on whether to oppose the budget reduction will be made on the merits of the proposal. How will it affect the long term viability of the DMO and the destination? Does the Board believe it has a leg upon which to stand to fight back?

In other words, the Board will make the decision that is best for the organization and the destination at that point in time. Chances are, the Board may well agree to the reduction rather than go head to head with a strong Mayor. Or maybe they won't. But, either way, it is the *organization* talking...not someone that controls seats from the outside.

But (I hear you cry), what about the City's argument that it must have seats to oversee the tax revenues being invested in the DMO? Easy. They'll get all the oversight they need with a well written contract for services between the City and the DMO. In fact, the level of control will be greater with a contract because the Mayor won't have to worry about their appointees wiggling on a close, emotionally charged vote.

Of course, the Board can reinforce its trustworthiness by engaging a reputable outside accounting firm to do annual financial audits. Additionally, performing organizational and performance reviews signals to stakeholders that the DMO is serious about the very real business of Tourism development and helps the organization improve its own effectiveness.

Despite the logic of this argument, there will be situations where the majority of the Board will continue to be appointed. Indeed, in some States, it's the prevailing law. In these cases, the Board must take a proactive role in the appointment process. You cannot assume the person responsible for appointing the Board knows what kind of individuals are most needed at a particular moment in time.

In these instances, Board leadership must go through the same process that we are about to outline for an effective nominating process (short of the selection phase) and make its case for the best and brightest individuals you can find. The Mayor or County Executive may not agree with all of your recommendations but, if you've developed a strong relationship, chances are they'll appreciate your suggestions and confirm many (if not all) of them.

### **Industry Affiliation**

When you strip the DMO Mission down to its most basic role, it's about the creation of economic wealth and impact, with a side order of sensitive sustainability. All social, governmental and Quality of Life advantages flow from the creation of wealth. Thus, the first consideration should be the development of a Board that represents the business community.

Note that I didn't say "Tourism industry" or "hospitality industry." That's far too limiting if the Board is going to make an impression and leave a mark on the destination.

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***All social, governmental and Quality of Life advantages flow from the creation of wealth.***

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Many DMO Boards today are top-heavy with hospitality industry representation, most often in the form of hoteliers. On the surface, one could certainly attempt to make the point that they deserve to be a dominant force on the Board because, after all, it's "their money."

**WRONG.** Room Tax is *not* their money. Room Tax is a pass-through tax that hotels collect on behalf of the Municipality or County.

Of course, without hotels, visitors couldn't stay (and spend) in our destinations as long as we'd like them to. And, it's a fact that the longer a

visitor stays in a destination, the more money they leave behind for the community.

In addition, hotels depend far more on the visitor dollar than their peers in the rest of the hospitality industry. And, our business community depends on their success for its success. But, should this entitle them to a majority of the seats on a DMO Board?

No. While they clearly benefit from the work of a DMO, hotels do not automatically deserve the lion's share of the seats for two basic reasons:

- 1) Hotels are generally not the reason for the visit, thus, how they view marketing their individual properties is not how a destination is marketed.
- 2) Hoteliers, by the very nature of their business, tend to have a very short-term bias in their view of the world.

This is by no means a shot at hoteliers. Hotels are *vital* to our mission of drawing more visitors to the community in that they are where most visitors will sleep. And, sleep they must if the destination is to reap the highest impact possible from its visitors.

Someone once said that hoteliers tend to focus on the next Quarter while DMO Boards should focus on the next Quarter Century. Since

### **CATHEDRAL THINKING**

When we work with DMO Boards, we encourage them to, as author, raconteur and former CEO of Tourism Vancouver Rick Antonson said from the stage at the 2017 Annual Conference of Destinations International, "think beyond your mandate and act beyond your term."

Rick espouses this concept internationally through his evangelism of a theory called "Cathedral Thinking." You can hear Rick's eloquent explanation at [CathedralThinking.com](http://CathedralThinking.com).

a growing number of hotel executives in our communities represent out-of-market ownership, their very livelihood is, understandably, based upon short-term results.

When Madison WI began its final push to build the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Monona Terrace Convention Center, a number of hoteliers were vociferous opponents. They feared the Center would pull meeting business away from them and attract a developer of new, competitive Headquarters Hotel. Never mind that the Center would be generating tens of thousands of new room nights for them (room nights they would never be able to attract without the Center). They just feared a potential loss in food and beverage business and the chance that a new competitor might elect to build a hotel downtown.

Because of these fears, the local Hotel/Motel Association was split on whether to support the referendum. To their credit, the majority saw the big picture. However, had hoteliers made up a majority of the DMO Board, the Convention Center might never have been built because the Organization could never have taken the lead on the project.

Today, virtually every hotel in the city benefits from the Convention Center (even with the addition of *several* new hotels within walking distance). The downtown has ignited into the place to be and be seen. Where half of the storefronts surrounding the Capitol Square were boarded up before the referendum to build the Center passed, today, there isn't a square foot available to rent. In the first ten years after the referendum win, over \$500 million of *private money* was invested in the downtown.

A DMO Board should be focused on long-term results. A DMO Board controlled by hoteliers will have a short-term bias. Even in this current economic climate in which the here and now tends to consume the discussions of many DMO Boards, the smart ones will be looking for future opportunities...not trying to plug the dike.

Thus, despite their intimate connection to a DMO's funding, hoteliers should make up no more than 25% of any DMO Board.

Why have any hoteliers on the Board, I hear some of you muse? They aren't generally "destination-focused," they're often not embedded in the community and many may try to force the organization into programs that are short-term fixes to their immediate needs.

Aye, but they bring a certain competitive intelligence to the table. They're in the front lines, talking to the customer. They are, in many cases, working with the same clients we are for meetings, conventions and sporting events. They're often connected to lodging properties in other parts of the country and they are, after all, the business that will fail first if the Tourism economy goes sour. They are the proverbial "Canary in the Coal Mine."

And, government taxes them. If there is going to be a change in the rate of tax or, more importantly, the distribution of the revenues generated, the voice of the hotelier is crucial to the discussions of a DMO Board.

Hoteliers most definitely belong on the DMO Board...but not in numbers so as to be able to command a majority voice. That's asking for trouble.

### **So...What's the Best Structure?**

While every destination is different, we like to see a diverse mix of community leaders, thinkers, influencers and, yes, contrarians on the DMO Board. And, while there are some thought leaders in the non-profit governance space whom we respect that believe industry-specific seats are not in the best interest of moving an association forward, we believe that DMOs are an exception to the rule.

Here's what I think would be a perfect Board:

- 2 Hoteliers – One Full Service. One Limited Service. *Any more than two and you risk them trying to command the conversation.*
- 1 Restaurateur – *The good ones tend to be adept at political advocacy and can be a wonderful asset...and, they are often long-term residents.*
- 1 Retailer – *We need them to learn the importance of Tourism.*



- 1 Attraction – *They are, after all, the reason people visit your destination.*
- 1 Media Owner or GM – *a crucial support opportunity...with a powerful voice.*
- 1 Arts/Cultural Leader – *whether they know it or not, they can be a significant attraction.*
- 1 Financial Industry – *preferably a Banker.*
- 1 “Big Business” or Developer – *more than one and you’ll risk being called a pawn by the progressive left.*
- 1 Education – *College or Junior College level preferred. High School is OK if they are in a position of curriculum leadership or venue availability. Otherwise, drop the seat.*
- 1 Appointment from the City
- 1 Appointment from the County
- 3 At-Large to satisfy geographic, gender, ethnic, age, labor, handicapped and other critical diversity criteria that cannot be accomplished through the industry seat criteria.

That’s 15...and only 2 are appointed.

Still missing somebody crucial in your community? That’s what ex-officio (representative but non-voting) seats are designed to provide.

There will be those who will see this list and ask why there are large and small hotel seats, but not large and small retail seats...or chain and non-chain restaurant seats. The answer is fairly simple...the Board will get too big.

According to Harrison Coerver and Mary Byers, authors of the breakthrough book, *Race for Relevance*, the larger the Board, the greater the chance for members to become disengaged. “When the Board is small,” they write, “Directors know that their presence and attendance are important.” The larger the Board gets, the easier it for Directors to duck out occasionally, believing no one will notice. Over time, missing meetings becomes easier...and then a habit. Then, attaining quorum becomes an issue.

What ultimately happens next is an Executive Committee is created to grapple with the important decisions when a big Board can no longer function efficiently. The rest of the Board becomes further disengaged when they are relegated to Quarterly meetings (because they can rarely make quorum) and realize their opinions no longer matter. And, instead of the 25-member, highly representative “United Nations-style” Board...you’re back to having a 5-member Executive Committee make all the decisions.

I know we advocated for an 18-member Board in our first book, attempting to build as much inclusion into a DMO’s governance as possible. We still believe strongly in inclusion...but today, we believe more in effectiveness. And, research has shown that smaller Boards are more decisive and effective.

To recap, your job as a Destination Leader is to envision the future, advocate for appropriate destination enhancement and development and build a stronger organization.

One of the ways you can insure the latter is to focus some of your attention on building a better Board, which we’ll cover in the next Chapter.



CHAPTER

8

# BUILDING THE BOARD

*“So, build me up, buttercup.”*

– The Foundations

Max, the CEO of a mid-sized DMO, was blessed with a diverse and dedicated Board. However, a comment made by one of his officers during a routine Board meeting rocked the organization.

The owner of the largest and most successful independent chain of restaurants in the region looked around the Board table at his peers and said, “we gotta get a better Board.” As the rest of the Board glared at him, some in anger at his suggestion that they were somehow unworthy of their seats, he continued by saying, “and I’ll be the first one to resign my seat to make way for a stronger set of leaders.”

As I said, Max had a diverse and dedicated Board. But “dedicated” and “influential” aren’t the same thing.

It’s like the concept of “Six Degrees of Separation,” in which a Harvard researcher once suggested that the average number of personal contacts it takes to reach anyone else in the world is six (with the advent of Social Media, that number has declined to four). Selecting the proper four people, of course, is the trick. But, in theory at least, we are now only four people away from knowing anyone on the planet.

Most DMO Boards, if well designed, should aspire to be no more than a “Two Degrees of Separation” away. In other words, each member should be able to touch a key opinion leader or decision maker in the destination in two phone calls or less. If the target is a large retail developer, Kevin should be able to connect with that developer by calling Ann, who is tight with the target. Two Steps. Two Degrees.

The fewer the steps, the stronger the Board. If the majority of the Board is “One Degree,” it’s stronger than a “Two Degrees” Board. If a Board is

“Three Degrees” or more, it needs to recruit a more well-connected member base during the next Nominating Committee process. After all, if you are three or more phone calls away from the people who can get things done in town, what good are you to the organization?

I don’t say this to offend...but to make you think. If a Board member cannot influence those who have influence, one must ask what purpose that individual serves on the DMO Board.

We’ve seen Nominating Committees select PR professionals, hotel managers or marketing mavens because they know about advertising and promotion. That’s wonderful...but if they can’t influence governmental leaders and the power elite of the business community, they shouldn’t be on the Board. They should be on an Advisory Committee. The Board exists to get things done. Committees exist to assist and advise staff. If you can’t get things done through your professional and personal networks, you shouldn’t be on the Board.

Coerver and Byers would add “competence” to my requirement, and I can’t argue that. Not everyone with influence is competent to govern. But, in the highly politicized world of Destination Marketing people who are neither have no place on a DMO Board.

As we’ve discussed, DMO Boards exist to enhance the destination, strengthen the organization and engage a professional CEO. Depending on which of these roles emerges as most important at a particular point in time, the organization should focus its attention on Board candidates who can most effectively advance that mission.

Boards are not unlike professional sports teams...and a sports analogy comes to mind. The high-flying Green Bay Packers, sporting one of the best records in the NFL, sailed into the playoffs leading up to Super Bowl 37 (and, when will they stop with the roman numerals thing?). They had never, in over 75 years, lost a post-season playoff game at home. They had one of the best quarterbacks in the history of the game. They were favored by more than a touchdown to win.

Instead, they got pounded in the first round by a team with a young, fast, run-and-gun quarterback.

## SIDEBAR

### ..... **If you're three degrees (or more) away...**

Just because you're not two degrees (or less) away from "the juice" in your community, doesn't mean that you have to stay that way! If you believe that you're NOT in a position to influence the influencers in your town, take these steps to change the way you view yourself and the way others view you:

**Get to know your local political leaders.** Find out who your City Council and/or County Board representative is...and find a way to meet them. While it sounds simplistic, you'd be surprised at how few residents have actually shaken the hand of their representatives...which means you'll stand out in their mind as someone they've actually met.

Several of these positions are up for election every-other year, which means you'll have a perfect opportunity to catch them at a campaign appearance or coffee klatch at a local supporter's home. If you're between elections, look for their name in the media and call or e-mail them to voice your support on a position they've taken on which you agree. It doesn't have to be Tourism related. In fact, it's better if it isn't, as they'll see you as a community supporter who has more than a single issue agenda.

Of course, calling to say that you think their recent vote on garbage pick-up was beyond ignorant won't produce the long range results that you desire. Wait until they support some-

thing you support so that you can find common ground. Then you can move on (in a few months) to the issues that are really important to you. Once you've laid the initial groundwork, they'll be more open to hearing your message.

**Join a Service Club.** At the entryway to most communities, you'll find a sign bearing the logos of Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists, Junior League, JayCees, Sertoma, Young Professionals and a myriad of other Service Club Chapters. Ask around. In which do the power elite of the community congregate? Join one...and then dive into the volunteer opportunities provided. You'll soon find that you are shoulder to shoulder with the people who are making a difference in your community.

And...so are you! This provides a common bond that gives you the access to the movers and shakers in your community. And, if you don't end up shoulder to shoulder at the hot dog stand or the beer tent...chances are you will at the weekly meetings. Use these meetings to meet the influencers in your community and, as with your politicians, begin this new relationship on a note of commonality. Bring your interest in the Tourism industry's impact on the community to the table in the months ahead.

**Get on another Board.** While the time you have to volunteer is limited, look for other non-Tourism specific Boards on which you could serve. Again, search for the ones that include community leaders AND which you strongly support. Your presence on other Boards (or on the committees for these organizations) advances your ability to connect with "the juice" in the community and, again, signals you're not a one-issue community leader.

During the off-season, the Packers focused their efforts on acquiring faster defensive players so that what happened to them on that cold January afternoon at Lambeau Field would never happen again.

Were there better players available in the college draft? Of course. Could they have traded for more accomplished veteran players? Sure. But, preparing for the coming season, they needed defensive players with speed. And that's where they focused their attention.

My point is that the smart DMO Board needs to understand what its primary role is before it begins to build the team that will take them there. What are the opportunities and threats on the horizon for the next five to ten years? Just because an individual is well-liked, well-placed or well-connected doesn't mean that they are right for the Board at that particular moment in time.

The Board needs to know the type of influence and talent it needs in the next nominating cycle before it even begins the process.

As Coerver and Byers comment: "Once the challenges and opportunities have been accurately identified, it's easier to determine what competencies will be needed on the Board; not in terms of technical skills but in high-level knowledge and understanding." And, influence.

Here's how we suggest you start:

### **The Process of Building a Great Board:**

It all starts with a sea change in the way we view the Nomination Committee process. In fact, Doug Eadie (in *Boards that Work*) suggests that the Nominating Committee be renamed the "Board Development Committee."

Whatever it's called, here's how it (unfortunately) usually works: Let's assume that Board terms begin on January 1st. Most Boards fire up their Nominating Committee in late August or September (and I'm being kind here, as we've seen some scrambling to get them up in October and November). Usually headed by the Immediate Past Chair and a handful of less-than-motivated Board members, the Committee

starts calling friends and acquaintances looking for new blood that would be willing to join them on the Board.

“Oh it’s only one meeting a month,” they plead. “It’s a fun group,” they lie, trying to convince potential board members of how easy being a member of the Board is. But, as when a dentist says, “this won’t hurt,” the prospective Board member only hears “this is gonna get ugly.”

Is this any way to run one of the most important and vital organizations in the community? Of course not.

We propose a vastly different scenario. It won’t be easy...but nothing important ever is. As Coerver and Byers state: “The selection process has to be rigorous. It has to be disciplined. It has to be taken seriously. It can’t be impulsive, rushed or conducted cavalierly.”

For the purposes of our proposed timeline, we will use a January 1st start date. If your year differs, make the conversion in your head as we go.

### **FIRST QUARTER**

As your Board welcomes its new members at the January meeting, the Board Chair should appoint and direct the Board Development Committee to begin its work. That’s right...at the FIRST meeting of the year.

As we said earlier, what is more important than replenishing the organization’s fuel? Identifying and landing new Board members is one of the most important things a Board does. So, let’s take it seriously.

During the first quarter, the Board Development Committee should identify the organization’s upcoming needs. Ask questions like:

- Who will be stepping off the Board next year?
- What industries or constituencies do they represent?
- What skills do we need to replace or add to the mix?
- How can we increase the diversity of the Board?
- What areas do we need to augment, given the Board’s stated goals over the next five years (remember the Green Bay Packers?)



Their deadline to complete this initial phase of the process: March 31st.

### **SECOND QUARTER**

During the second quarter, the Committee moves from needs assessment to candidate identification. Each Committee member should arrive at the next meeting with a first and second choice candidate for each of the “needs” identified during the first quarter.

The goal for the Committee should be to develop a list of potential candidates that is at least double the number of available seats to be filled. In this way, the Committee will have flexibility should a candidate decline the invitation or emerge to be not as qualified as originally presumed.

The deadline for the Candidate Identification Stage should be no later than June 30th.

### **THIRD QUARTER**

Some veteran Board readers will say that they do these first two steps in the process already...and, to them, we say, “congratulations.” You are members of an elite group of destination leaders who have taken a thoughtful look at your organization and are positioning your Board for future success.

However, the next step is where some of even the best Boards falter: the Interview Stage. Instead of having a committee member who knows Monica call her to see if she might be encouraged to join the Board, a far more effective plan of attack is to have the committee member invite Monica to lunch. There, in a relaxed setting affording the two an hour or so of conversation time, the subject of the DMO and its role in the community can be discussed. Questions about the Board can be answered in a conversational environment. There’s no pressure. This is a “look-see” opportunity for both individuals.

But, up front, this first meeting should lay out the bare minimums for Board Member involvement:

- Attendance at all Board Meetings
- Active participation in assigned Board Committees or Task Forces
- A willingness and ability to publicly support and advocate for the organization and the destination
- An adherence to a Board Ethics Policy\*

If Monica agrees that she'd be interested in taking the process further *and* if the committee member still feels that Monica would be an appropriate and strategic addition to the Board, a formal interview should be scheduled. This time, the full Board Development Committee should meet Monica in a less casual setting, for this meeting is all business.

This gives both sides a chance to explain why they think the match is a good fit for the destination. It gives the Board a chance to stress the importance of the organization. It gives the candidates a chance to express the strengths they can bring to the table. In short, it establishes that we are all professionals, coming together for the advancement of our community.

When this format is employed, an intriguing thing happens: the candidate begins to fight for the position.

It's another interesting facet of human nature, best exemplified by the classic Groucho Marx line, "I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me as a member." When someone is pursuing you, your interest is often nominal. When there's a chance that someone else may be selected instead of you, you dig in and start competing. It's the competitive juices that flow through virtually every successful individual who is reading this book. We want to win...and if there's a chance that

*\*Destinations International's Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) has developed an Organizational Code of Ethics for DMOs. Whether your DMO is accredited or not (and we recommend that you are), you can adopt the Code as standard policy for your organization. Better yet, use it as a model and build your own Code to your more stringent specifications. Accredited or not, the Code is a service that DMAP has offered to the entire DMO industry as a way to encourage ethical behavior and standards for all in our profession. The DMAP Organizational Code of Ethics can be found in Appendix B.*

the DMO Board may select someone else, we'll become much more engaged in the process than if we were being pursued.

And isn't that exactly the kind of Board members we want to be sitting next to for the next three years? Engaged. Committed. Dedicated. By starting their relationship with the organization from a competitive platform, new Board members will be more energized than their peers who were merely pursued or dragged.

The Deadline for the Interview Phase: September 30. And start early... as summer is vacation time for most in the Northern Hemisphere.

And, as we discussed earlier, if your Board still falls into the "appointed" category, this is where the Board needs to approve a set of names to be recommended to the Mayor, County Executive or Chamber Board for their consideration and action.

#### **FOURTH QUARTER**

While the process in the third quarter is the most time consuming, the fourth quarter simply flies by. The Committee has the intelligence of the candidate interviews. Those members of the candidate pool who came to realize, during the process, the time commitment involved in being a Board member was too much or that there just wasn't an appropriate fit between their interests and the DMO will have removed themselves from consideration.

Now, the Board Development Committee makes its decision...voting on the candidates who best match the Board needs that were identified in the first quarter. Candidates who emerge from that vote are forwarded to the full Board as the Committee's recommended slate of new directors.

The final slate represents the best, the brightest and the most competent individuals for the growth of the destination and the organization *at that point in time*. And, the Board can be sure it is getting the best because of the thoughtful process used by the Board Development Committee instead of the harried chase that characterizes most selection processes.

As it spreads the workload out over 10 months, members of the Board Development Committee won't get as stressed out (a good thing for Board morale).

Sure beats the way you've been doing it, doesn't it?

But, what to do with the ones who don't make the cut? They've come a long way with you over the past three or four months and this process has turned them into individuals who have actually sought the nomination. The last thing you want for those you thought highly enough of to initiate the interview process is for them to turn away from the organization hurt or angry. After all, DMOs have enough detractors in a community. You really don't want another who is smart, connected and capable, *n'est-ce pas?*

Unless the individual wasn't selected because of a glaring flaw that was discovered in the interview process, look for ways to invite them to serve in another capacity in the organization such as a committee or a task force. The conversation might sound something like this:

"Lee, the Board met yesterday afternoon and, as you know, we had a number of extremely qualified and exciting candidates for a limited number of seats. With the Riverfront Redevelopment plan moving into the forefront of what we're going to be focusing on in the months ahead, the Board was compelled to elect Jackie to the seat we were looking at you to fill because of her close ties to the Mayor and several members of the Council.

"While I know the vote may be a disappointment, the Nominating Committee was very impressed with what you could bring to our organization, and we'd like to get you involved with our Public Affairs Committee to help keep the media focused on the importance of the Riverfront Project for all members of the community...not just tourists. And, while I can't promise anything, I'd certainly be surprised if the Board didn't turn to you for one of the open seats in the years ahead."

Of course, you should only offer that last line if you believe it to be true. Left at the altar once is bad enough...

## Other Considerations

Every incoming member of the Board should have the ability to become Board Chair...and I mean this in two distinctly different ways.

First, for *every* candidate, the Board Development Committee should ask itself, “can we see this individual as Board Chair in four years?” If the answer is no, you should ask yourself why you are considering this person in the first place? If they aren’t a strong enough candidate to one day lead the organization, we must question your interest in them. Don’t settle...shoot for the best of the best for your Board.

Secondly, on a more tactical basis, make sure that your Board terms and format don’t preclude members from leadership positions. I was once involved with a Board that offered its members the chance to serve two two-year terms. The Chairmanship of the organization was a two-year term. Thus, assuming that most Boards would not elect a Board Member who was just finishing their first year on the Board to the Chairmanship of the organization, it was virtually impossible for anyone coming onto the Board in the middle of a Chair’s term to ascend to a leadership position. Their first shot at the Chair would come too soon for them to be ready. The second shot would come too late, when they had only a year of eligibility left.

In addition, a two-year term format forces members who have barely gotten their feet wet to decide whether they want to re-up. And, losing good people after only four years to a short term limit rule seems a waste.

Look at your bylaws and term limit structure. Walk through the different scenarios to be sure that no one is being artificially blocked from leading the organization. Our favorite structure is two three-year terms.

Such a format provides for a first-year “learning-the-ropes” stage and two years of Board productivity. At the end of three years, some will feel they have contributed what they could and not seek another term. Most will be energized by their first three years and ask to stay on for three more. And, regardless of whether your organization prefers a one-year or two-year Chairmanship, the two three-year term format allows every member time to make a run at a leadership position, if they so desire.

**Bottom Line:** Are the terms long enough for board members to become skilled as destination and DMO leaders while being short enough to avoid “calcification” and the perception that the “power” in the organization is concentrated in an elite few? The two “3s” gets you there.

An exception to the rule: In some small-population destinations, the talent pool is somewhat limited. Depending upon the size of the destination and the Board, some DMOs might be better served with longer term limits. But, research indicates that anything over nine years results in Boards that are less productive, less innovative and increasingly fail to apply critical and objective thought to opportunities and challenges.

### **The Expertise Trap**

Finally, as the Board Development Committee begins its work in identifying potential candidates, beware the “Expertise Trap.” While it may be tempting to invite local “experts” into the mix, there are three downsides to having resident experts on a Board.

First, experts tend to dominate the conversation on their particular topic, causing others to withdraw from participating in the discussion for fear that their ideas on the subject may appear foolish. Second, experts are often driven by a narrow view of the world (“we’ve always done it like this” or “this is the only way it can work”). The most exciting projects are the ones that incorporate new and unique ideas. Unfortunately, those rarely come from experts.

Finally, experts often can’t help themselves from micromanaging projects. While it’s often with the best of intentions (hey, they’re the “expert” and they just want to help), their involvement beyond setting goals and lining up community support can often de-evolve into directing staff work, thus blurring the lines of accountability in the organization.

Experts are a fabulous resource for DMO Boards...but they are often more effective and less disruptive as consultants *to* the Board rather than consultants *within* the Board. If you need expertise and a particular topic or project...create an advisory committee to cherry-pick the best ideas from the experts in your midst.