HOW CAN WE KEEP OUR BOARD FOCUSED ON THE BIG PICTURE?

Most board members use their club frequently, so it shouldn’t surprise anyone if they approach their role on the board from the same perspective as their usage. The exception here is that they also view things from the perspective of someone with the authority to “fix” the things they see that are “broken”. It is this perspective that drives lengthy board room discussions on the color of tee markers, the price of draft beer, the type of pin flag material, the quality of toiletries, and the best meat purveyor. To be clear, the board has the right to spend as much time on these issues as they like. However, none of them are worthy of much, if any of the board’s attention, and none of them are likely to be considered an important part of the Big Picture.

The passion and good intentions of club board members is not in question. In most cases, they have stepped forward to contribute their time, knowledge, and expertise because they feel strongly about the club and want to give back to the organization that has meant so much to them and their families. If your club’s board is distracted by issues that are clearly not part of the Big Picture, don’t blame the individual board members. The fault most likely lies in the institutionalized processes and the solution is simple (although not to be confused with easy): define the Big Picture and establish processes that ensure the board will focus upon it.

The Big Picture is articulated within the club’s STRATEGIC PLAN. The processes are articulated in the club’s BOARD POLICY MANUAL.

An effective strategic plan will contain:

- Values (the guiding principles that form the foundation for all decisions)
- Mission Statement (what the club is, what it does, and for whom)
- Strategic Vision (a concise description of the club in the future)
- Goals that serve the strategic vision
- Action plans that drive the goals forward

An effective board policy manual (BPM) will include:

- The BPM’s purpose and function
- Procedures for amending the BPM
- The club’s values, mission, strategic vision, and goals (strategic plan)
- Descriptions of the board’s structure and procedures (committees are covered here too)
- Description of the relationship between the board and the general manager
- Parameters within which the general manager may operate the club

Developing and implementing these documents are the most important tasks for the board of any club. Simply put, they ARE the club’s governance system. What task could be more important than to define where their club is going and to train their team to help them get it there?

The club’s board is in sole possession of the responsibility and authority to create these documents, but because it is rare for them to possess the expertise to do so, it is best to seek expert advice to facilitate and expedite the process. If there has not been a thorough review of the club’s governance system in the last 5 years, it is strongly recommended that the board have on performed sooner rather than later. This is a key to keeping your board focused on the Big Picture.