

# 5 steps for effective HOA leadership

Some volunteers who have served on a homeowner's association (HOA) board have realized that much of what works for them in their day job doesn't work as well in the context of board governance. That's because, in an association, no single person is in charge. Decisions are made by the consensus of board members, so the chain of command is horizontal and less hierarchical.

The best board members understand this very different paradigm. They also prepare for the role and follow the steps below.

## **Embrace group decision-making:**

The individual director typically has no power. Once directors embrace the framework of the board as decision-maker, they understand that they cannot make individual promises. This restraint can be very freeing since no individual is responsible for the association and its actions.

**Know limitations:** A director's role is in the title; he or she is a person who gives direction. Directors are not normally required or expected to act. The board directs its manager, employees, and service providers to act through association policy and individual decisions.

A director has got to know his or her limitations. The best accept that they do not know everything; they rely upon managers, consultants, and committees. Such directors handle board disagreements much better by accepting the possibility that another sees or knows something that they do not.

**Prepare for meetings:** The dynamic between group decision-making and



relying on experts should be on full display during association meetings.

The most productive and efficient meetings are the result of committed and prepared volunteers, normally assisted by a great manager. To help bring about the best board meetings as a director:

- Read the agenda packet.
- Stay on topic.
- Talk to the board, not the audience.
- Ask the manager for input on most motions.
- Encourage board discussion and pay attention.
- Don't comment on every motion.
- Respect your board colleagues

**Handle disputes without hostility:** During your board service, there will occasionally be violations of the governing documents or other un-neighborly conduct. Try to work things out. Gentle escalation is

almost always preferable to "going legal" right out of the gate.

Don't assume the violating homeowners are disrespecting the board. They might not understand their rights and responsibilities. Give them a chance to do the right thing.

In addition, don't be too quick to take sides in a dispute between residents, unless there is independent corroboration of the problem. Encourage residents to work things out as neighbors.

**Recruit replacements:** Finally, begin identifying and preparing your replacement on the board. Volunteer service should not be a life sentence. Committees are a great place to identify people who not only have the interest but will demonstrate commitment to the association and proper attitudes of service and governance.