



WILLOW CREEK ASSOCIATION NZ

ARE YOU ON BOARD? – by Alan Vink

In my article in the December edition of 'Leader to Leader' I wrote about governance and the critically important role this has become in the NFP (Not For Profit) sector, including the 'church' sector.

Now I would like to develop a few thoughts specifically on governance for churches. Of necessity I can only address points of principle rather than try and expound in detail on any one particular model, as I am writing to a wide audience of churches with different traditions, structures and policy. It is accepted that a Baptist church executes its governance role differently to an Anglican church which will be different to an AOG church. I am keen to clarify however the role and responsibilities of a Church Board and let you determine how it should be worked out in your context.

Who should be at the Board table? I have chosen to start here rather than with the roles and responsibilities because of my conviction that as Jim Collins states "if you have the right people on the bus"¹, and those people are in the right seats, then you are already well on the way towards a good functional Board (of governance).

Here's what I mean. The conventional wisdom for assembling a Board is to recruit people who are completely independent i.e. they do not work for that organisation, nor are they involved in any of the day to day operations, but have a thorough knowledge of the nature of the church/organisation (Noses In, Hands Out) and have some significant Board experience. Independent Boards are easier to constitute for NGO's or Mission or Para-church organisation. Naturally it is more challenging for a local church to get an independent because Board members (read Leadership team, Eldership, Corp Council etc.) come from within the church and are usually engaged in ministry. In this sense they are unavoidably involved in the day to day ministry of the church.

How can a church navigate around this? Here are a few ideas:

1. Actively seek and appoint people who have had some Board experience if at all possible.
2. Have a good Board induction program that helps the Board members to be crystal clear about the delineation between governance and management (day to day operations) in your local church. Generally speaking, day to day ministry responsibilities such as leading worship and small groups are regarded as management and are the responsibility of the Pastor not the Board.
3. Set the agenda for Board meetings ensuring they focus on the governance issues of the church. There are good templates and guidelines for this in the public domain.
4. It is good practice for the Pastor to seek advice from the Board if there are persistent issues or problems. The Board however, should be ever so careful not to 'step in' unless invited by the Pastor (again Noses In, Hands Out)
5. Finally, work hard on role clarification. Here is a helpful outline:
 - The Board is responsible for Governance
 - The Pastor is responsible for Leadership and oversees the day to day operations of the church
 - The staff (including key volunteers) are responsible for running the ministries of the church

When all is said and done “congregations need Board members who, like good tribal elders, will point spears upward at pastors who abandon their perch in the tree and will point spears at the village critics otherwise”².

Alan Vink
CEO
WillowNZ
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Notes

1. *“Good to Great”* by Jim Collins
2. *“Winning on Purpose”* by John Kaiser, Abingdon Press 2006