



▶ **LEADERSHIP**
in a Home Builders' Association
2008

Canadian
Home Builders'
Association



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1

WELCOME TO HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP

Organizations like the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) exist because people in the industry are willing to devote their time and resources in pursuit of common goals. The Association must offer members real value – by correctly identifying and pursuing those goals.

Leadership is one of the most important aspects of this process. Although a good association can survive a poor leader, it cannot flourish. But with good leadership, everything important will follow – an efficient and effective program, a substantive agenda, a loyal and growing membership.

Association leadership is larger than any one person. It is contained in the vision and commitment shown by every member and committee at the local, provincial and national levels. It is written into strategic plans and policy papers; offered through staff advice and recommendations; donated in thousands of hours of volunteer labour, thought and creativity by men and women across the country.

Behind all this is vision – a shared vision of what members can accomplish by working together: how they can benefit the industry; how they can benefit those who buy or rent homes.

Volunteers can and do make a real difference. The leader is a facilitator in this process, 'coaching the team' so all members agree and focus on what they want to accomplish – and helping them work together during the actual 'play by play'.

While leadership is evident throughout the association, during their term of office the presidents are the ones who represent the industry to all of its 'publics': to association members, government, media and the general public. They set the tone for the association.

Presidents don't have to be perfect – they are all human, with strengths and weaknesses. One of their greatest strengths is the fact that they are active new home builders, renovators and developers.

People in government, media and the general public want to hear directly from someone who works in the industry. They will forgive a lot of nervousness in return for that direct contact.

But presidents do have to stretch. They are representing the common interests of a whole group of people.

2

WHAT GOOD IS A LEADER WITH NO FOLLOWERS?

It's easy to find lots of motherhood statements about leadership and what makes a good leader. But when you get right down to it, the fundamental defining characteristic of leadership is ... followers. If you don't have the membership behind you, you're not leading.

Leading in your own company is one thing. Leading in an association is quite different.



▶ **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

In your own company you have staff. You'll probably discuss things with them – you did hire them because they are smart and knowledgeable – but at the end of the day, if you need a decision, you go ahead and make the decision and then live with the consequences. In the association, you have to gather buy-in for whatever you propose. That can be quite confusing for a volunteer leader because it's backwards to everything we know. And it's worse because most of the people you ask to

sit on the board are successful entrepreneurs. They have leadership, they have charisma, they have power, and they are used to making things happen – but they're all team leaders, more than team.

▶ **BOB
FINNIGAN**

The internal politics are very different from your own company. On the association's board of directors and executive committee, you're surrounded by people from other companies who are your equals. Your role is to work with all of them and get the most out of them. You need to get out their ideas, which will not necessarily be the same as your ideas but they will be good ideas for sure. And you need people to work together in a spirit of cooperation.

That requires knowing the members really well – who they are, what they stand for, what they're capable of, how they define their common interests, and what they want to accomplish – and then helping them to reach their goals together.

It's important to remember that there are constant demands on people's time and attention. A leader must respect that reality and keep attention focused on outcomes ("What are we trying to accomplish?"), and how they relate to the individual ("Why is this worth the effort?").

CHAIRING FOR PERFORMANCE

- The chair's greatest enemy is the word "I".
- An effective chair does not impose decisions, but facilitates collective decision-making.
- The chair's overall duty is to manage people, issues and time, and to create the appropriate balance between these three entities. To do so effectively, the chair must do much more listening than speaking.

Eli Mina
*The Guide to Better Meetings for
Directors of Non-Profit Organizations*ⁱ

Leadership also requires a lot of patience and an understanding of how people who are equals reach consensus.

▶ **DIANE
BUSH**

It's very important to respect all of the people in the room. We are not sitting at the table for our own personal interests or our companies' interests. We are working to further the interests of the housing industry as a whole. Everybody is there on an equal front – CEOs, directors of sales, technical advisors and everyone else. They're all part of the industry and they all have useful viewpoints.

▶ **GARY
FRIEND**

Sometimes you get members volunteering to go on the association board, but it's too early for them. I've told people: "I recommend everyone get involved at the committee, council and task force level for a year or two. It's even better if you work your way up to vice chair or chair. That way, you get a background in how things work in the association and what it's like to work with volunteers. You need time to get known and to build support for your programs. You need to talk to people and send an email note every once in a while saying: 'Here's my vision, and what I think should be done.' Otherwise you'll be wasting your time." Most people respect that. We don't want to take a great person and ruin them by letting them advance too quickly.

In essence, leadership requires knowing who the association is, what it does and what it wants to accomplish – and helping to make that happen as a collective, in a positive 'win-win' way.

3

WHERE ARE WE GOING AND HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE GET THERE?

An effective elected leader is one who helps everyone to 'see' a shared vision of where the association is heading – not one that comes straight from left field, but one that all members recognize as their own and buy into, because it matches their own aspirations.

Visualizing exactly what success will look like is very powerful. That is why coaches get their athletes to visualize themselves performing the perfect jump or scoring the perfect goal or throwing the perfect pitch.



▶ **STEVEN CROWELL**

When everyone shares in a common vision and makes it their own, they become self-motivated. That's a spontaneous occurrence rather than a forced exercise. Build support. Take all criticism and modify the vision as required. Compromise, and use diplomacy. Whatever time and effort is invested to reach the point of shared vision and self-motivation is a solid investment for the association.

Most home builders' associations (HBAs) have developed vision statements and strategic plans. At least once a year, the board of directors should review the strategic plan, making sure it still reflects the membership's real goals. From time to time, it is important to stop discussion on a specific issue and ask: "What is it that we are really trying to accomplish here?"

▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

We really need to look at who we are and what we want to do for the industry. It's not about holding a golf tournament. It's about government relations and technical issues and doing what's relevant for the membership. It's about being there to fight the things that need to be fought.

▶ **DIANE BUSH**

Beyond everything, it's really about our customers. The public doesn't care about our social events, or how some technical change affects builders or suppliers. They do care about their ability to purchase a home, the quality within it, and the service they receive.

Leaders help to define current priorities for action and tasks to move the strategic plan forward. That involves getting people to articulate their vision, and building a consensus so that everyone stays on track. Then, the president must communicate that shared vision to the general membership, to the public, to media and to government.

▶ **ALLAN KLASSEN**

One of the things to look out for is getting caught up in your own agenda. Maybe your priorities aren't the best priorities for the association. You need the ability to understand that, and adjust the program. That can be one of the hardest things to adapt to as the president of a provincial association. That's why you need lots of conversation and dialogue, and regular reality checks with your EO. I also used some of the older guys and gals, and bounced ideas off them.

▶ **BOB FINNIGAN**

Most leaders have their own priorities. But the association has two-, three- and five-year strategic plans, and you review those regularly when you're on the board. So as you become president, you don't pick your agenda items out of left field, you pick up on the issues and run with the ones you can run with best.

▶ **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

I think some of the best presidents may be the ones who actually want to accomplish the agenda of the previous years' leaders. They may not get as many kudos in the industry, but I think they're better for the association.

It's important to make regular reports to the membership at dinner meetings and through newsletters or other communications. The directors and executive committee members are, finally, accountable to the general membership. Don't hoard information. Keep people informed about the policy agenda, the rationale behind decisions, and finances. Take the extra time to explain what the work means, and how all categories of members benefit when the industry as a whole benefits.

4

WHO'S ON FIRST? (DON'T TRY TO DO IT ALL YOURSELF)

One of the things just about everybody who has come up through leadership mentions is just how much the association does. Even when you've been active for years, it can come as a surprise.

▶ | **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

I was fortunate. I had some provincial and national experience – I didn't have a strictly local perspective. Also, my father was a builder. It's easier if you have a mentor, or you come up through a company that grooms its people for association work. Even so, I wish I had understood a bit more about governance – who has the control and the power to get things done. It can be pretty daunting when you go up to provincial, and all these things are on the agenda. You haven't been involved in the discussions to date and you have to vote on it – and then you realize you are representing 1/5 of the voting power! Also, you'll hear at least 400 new acronyms. I remember one of the delegates saying: "Seriously, what is this? Does anybody know what this is?" Everybody else was just pretending.

Fortunately, you're not alone. Your local and provincial HBAs and CHBA national are made up of committees and task forces that have a huge amount of information and do a huge amount of work. Other members of the board of directors help to carry the load, and your executive officer (EO) and other staff are a very valuable resource. Listen to advice and ask questions.

▶ | **JAMES BAZELY**

It's very important to ask questions. I wish I'd been encouraged to do that during my first year on the board – I think I assumed maybe I should have known it all. But if you're voting on something, you ought to know what it means. As president, I asked our accountant to work through the financials line by line for the board – not everyone is a financial guru or a business owner. I regularly said: "Is everyone clear? Please don't hesitate to ask." That made it a little easier for people to ask questions about other stuff as well.

Learn how to delegate. If you've raised alarm bells about an issue and made sure it's gone to an established committee who can deal with it, then you've done your part as leader. Delegation is not always easy. But it's the only way to handle the demands.

▶ | **WALLY MAH**

Take me: I'm computer illiterate. That means I'm stuck in my own little prison. Life has gone on way past me. But I've hired people in my company who fill that gap. As a leader in the association, you can be weak in some areas, but you'd better have people and committees around who aren't – and use them.

When an issue is delegated to a committee, it is important that they know exactly what is expected of them – the issues they are to address, the kind of action you expect, when you expect it and how they are to report back. Volunteers' time is limited: tasks may have to be shorter term and higher impact than they have been in the past.

On the other hand, leaders can't just sit back and let other people do all the work. You have to be properly prepared.

▶ | **JOE WAUGH**

As you are coming up the ladder, it is important to schedule time for reading and thinking about association work, so that it becomes part of your business. Even just one hour a week will make a huge difference. More is better.

▶ | **JOHN FRISWELL**

Remember the time commitment isn't spread evenly, either. As you get more involved, what with leaving town and attending meetings, there will be some periods when you could be spending half your time on association work. You have to have your business set up so it can run without you when that happens – and you have to have the support of your staff, your business partners, and your family.

▶ **DIANE BUSH**

To chair a committee at national, you need to commit a good hour a week plus time for reading and travel for meetings. A provincial president probably should expect to commit 12 to 15 hours a week. But it's really true that the more you give, the more you receive. Remember you bring your own skills with you. Maybe you are a really good marketer or you have great technical or financial experience. Bring those skills to the table.

And you have to get involved.

▶ **JAMES BAZELY**

Your job as president is not pointing fingers and giving direction to others. You have to lead by example. Don't ask anyone to do anything you wouldn't do yourself. Get down there too, get dirty and get the job done – and then thank everyone.

▶ **SUZANNE BONA**

You have to be realistic about what one person can do and do well. But you also go the extra mile. You have to be there and be involved. It's just part of how you conduct yourself.

5

USE YOUR EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Delegation includes making good use of staff. Once the board of directors has determined what it wants to accomplish, EOs and other paid staff help the board to make it happen. The most successful elected leaders turn to their EOs for information, advice and leadership.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

1. Promote the aims and objectives of the association.
2. Assist and advise the association's board of directors on policies, their development and implementation.
3. Implement association policies.
4. Consult and advise the president and executive on relevant items and priorities.
5. Initiate and maintain liaison with government officials involved with matters affecting the housing industry. This includes a specific municipal area and surrounding communities.
6. Assist in the preparation of briefs and submissions.
7. Assist the president with articles, news releases, presentations, special projects and public forums.
8. Liaise with management of other industry-related organizations.
9. Ensure that the association's official minutes are prepared and circulated.
10. Liaise with committee chairs and the members at large to ensure the continuity and coordination of association programs and activities.
11. Prepare a monthly progress report and future action report for submission to the board of directors.
12. Promote the association as a professional organization.
13. Ensure requests from the executive are acted upon.
14. Engage and dismiss employees.
15. Office management and planning.
16. Accounting.
17. Media relations.
18. Awards programs.
19. Membership campaigns.
20. Events organization.
21. Membership communications.

Actual responsibilities of EOs differ in local HBAs across the country. But if the EO and any paid staff that report to them are not doing all of the things in this chart, someone else will have to fill in. And if the EO/staff is not being paid to do all these things, it is not fair to expect them to provide the services for free.



▶ **GREG HUSSEY**

It's a lot more critical now to have proper staff. You will notice I said 'proper' staff, not just staff. The role is not just fundraising any more. The staff people at national know the topics twice as well as the chairs. And the locals that are really strong have staff that know the industry and what's important, and can get things done.

▶ **ALLAN KLASSEN**

Leaders need to value the EOs at all levels. In fact, we've got to make sure we continue down the road of hiring professional staff people for full-time government relations, training, and marketing. If we do that, the next generation of volunteers will step forward – and maybe they won't have to put in quite as much time as some of us have had to do.

The EO provides continuity from year to year, while the volunteer leaders can and do change. EOs can concentrate on day-to-day activities: this is their 'day job' (although there is always a problem for EOs in finding enough time to do everything the board wants to accomplish). They do all the details that volunteers don't have enough time for. They read the materials that come into the office, and they keep in touch with government officials and the association's members. If you are looking for information, they would be the first people to call.

▶ **LOU FRUSTAGLIO**

If you don't have the staff, you're nothing. Good staff are your eyes and ears. They know the background and prepare things for you. They have knowledge of the different committees and government departments, and they know what's coming down the line. You give them the directions and the goals and they take it from there. There was a time when one of my committees didn't have staff for a year or two, so I've experienced it both ways. They are so key, it's unbelievable.

Elected members decide policy and represent the association in all public forums. The staff role is to provide necessary administrative support and background information. The EO works for the board of directors. Other staff work for the EO.

▶ **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

Often the EO has been there for a long time, and they have a lot of influence in the association, its meetings and communication. But you have to maintain the right balance. The year before I became president in Red Deer, we lost our EO and I had the opportunity to hire the new one. It became more like a for-profit situation where you hire them and they report to you. Before, it was more like the president reported to the EO.

The EO should report to the board on internal administration and association affairs. However, it's important to keep the board focused on policy – not paper clips.



▶ **JAMES BAZELY**

An EO working with a board of directors can be like one staff member with 12 employers. If the office needs a new laptop, the board should give the direction and say: "Here's the budget, you go and get it." You don't need the input of 12 people on what type.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The strength, relevance and value of the CHBA to members are direct results of the commitment by the leadership. Strong industry leadership must come from within the membership, and strong management must come from Association staff at each level.

- Elected industry leaders represent the Association to governments, public agencies, the media and the public at large. They present the industry's policies and priorities and give expression to the strong commitment to the private-sector values that form the foundation of the CHBA. One of the great strengths of the CHBA is that many of its elected leaders are drawn from the ranks of new home builders, renovators and developers.
- Professional staff leaders manage the day-to-day affairs of the Association, ensuring that short- and long-term plans are carried out, and providing counsel and support to elected leaders. Executive officers at all levels are responsible for maintaining the vitality of the Association and ensuring that members benefit fully from belonging to the CHBA.

From *Vision Action Plan, CHBA Strategic Plan, 2006* ⁱⁱ

▶ ALLAN KLASSEN

You need to have a clear idea of what the board needs to focus on and what's management. For the board to get involved in the minutiae of management is crazy. You need to stay out of the EO's backyard. They're the pros; that's what they're there for.

Good leaders work with staff, back them up when necessary and protect them from unrealistic expectations and personal criticism.

EOs can't walk on water. But they have experience, information and ideas – make use of them: "How long would this take? How much money? What background information do we have already or can you assemble? Can you suggest other ways to meet these objectives? Who are the key people? Can you foresee problems? Who would be good to work on this?"

6

PROMOTING A LEADERSHIP CULTURE

a) *Open the Association's Doors*

This is not the 'Our-Group-of-Old-Guard' Home Builders' Association. It is the vehicle for the entire industry: for diversity, not sameness. All companies who meet the Code of Ethics and the membership criteria should be invited in and welcomed. However, even when the leaders know this, members – and potential members – can feel left out.

▶ JOE WAUGH

I first joined the association when I was in my late 20s, but I quit because I just didn't seem to be able to break into the group. As a result of that experience, I always look around at gatherings. If you see someone standing by themselves, invariably they're newcomers. Go over and talk to them. Take them around and introduce them to a few people. Everybody should be doing that, but as you get into leadership it is especially important.

With the way the world is changing at the moment, it may be even more important to reach out to people who are not yet members but should be: those who are female, and/or young, and/or from other cultures.

▶ GARY FRIEND

If we don't get people from these groups involved, we're going to be sorry. The talent pool is small, and we need them. We can't afford to have them say: "This is just an old boys' club. It's a waste of my time and I'm gone."



▶ **DIANE
BUSH**

I used to go to dinner meetings and be the only woman. That's changed a lot. Now there are new ethnic groups we need to bring in. Some have joined and become quite involved – others don't seem to think they need to join the association. We have to actively pursue them, invite them in, and make sure they get welcomed at dinner meetings and on committees. Every segment of society has something to offer. Their involvement will help to shape our industry for the future.

The wider the perspectives brought to the table, the more successful the association will be in meeting the real needs of the housing industry and its customers. Welcoming those perspectives will require some new approaches. The 'same old ways' of doing things won't be good enough. It is unwise to assume that the people currently in office think the same way as those who are not. For example, the 'old guard' rarely has the same priorities, the same ways of interacting or the same motivators as the 'new generation'. But you need both in the association.

'Baby boomers' have been quite different from the generation before: they question their leaders (from doctors to politicians) much more, and they want to be involved in the decisions that affect them. The next generation is different again. Time pressures keep growing exponentially, and people are not willing to participate in work that doesn't produce important results on meaningful priorities. These members may expect different things from the association in terms of opportunity, results, service delivery, communications methods, or decision-making.

ATTRACTING VOLUNTEERS

Susan Rogers of Rogers Leadership Consulting has crystallized the new environment for volunteerism:

"Recognize that the marketplace has changed. Your organization is one of approximately 180,000 trying to attract the best and brightest leadership volunteers, when an increasing number of Canadians are deciding not to volunteer or to volunteer less time."

Here are some of the suggestions from her article 'The Crisis in Board Management'ⁱⁱⁱ:

- Create and promote a culture of respect. "People are not attracted to meetings; they are attracted to meaningful work in a collegial and trustworthy environment."
- Reconnect with your purpose.
- Recruit based on leadership criteria, such as "ability to grasp the big picture and create alternate futures, moral courage, and the willingness to allow others to lead."
- Set high expectations.
- Invest resources in team building, coaching and governance development for the board.
- Celebrate success.
- Play fair: "Become known in your community for trust and innovation, fair play and fun, the right results and respect for staff, both paid and unpaid."

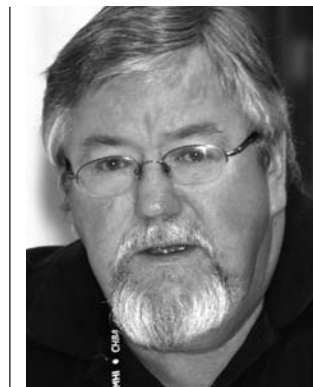
▶ **LOU
FRUSTAGLIO**

Compared to the builders of 25 to 30 years ago, I think this new breed understands business a little better. They are really interested in finding out what people need, how to solve problems, serve the consumer and become better business people. They want to balance their business time and their family time. So they don't want to spend all day in meetings – they really want to move things forward. And they want to work on the public image of builders – to show how they care about the environment, they care about people, and they care about building a good product.

Leaders must appreciate and work well with people from diverse backgrounds. They must also check their own behaviour, jokes, and so on for unintended bias.

b) Understand Volunteers' Motivation

Leaders must recognize the special concerns and needs that bring people together for a common cause.



▶ **BRYAN
KLINKHAMMER**

People get involved on committees and boards for so many different reasons: they have a passion or a feeling for one particular issue, they need to stay up to date, they think they want to meet customers or do networking, they want to work with government, they feel that they want to progress further up the association leadership, they want to find things out before anybody else does, they realize the industry has been good to them and they want to give something back. You want to make sure they're there for the betterment of the association, to get involved and not just to fill a seat. You look for people with higher energy and with commitment – that shows in everything they do in life.

▶ **VINCE
LABERGE**

It's very important that builders allow their staff to volunteer. In my own operations, I send my draftsman to the Built Green committee, my safety guy sits on the safety committee, and so on. If someone's got a construction manager, that person should be on the builder council. If they're not, why not? Maybe some of our members don't even know their people can go to these committees.

▶ **GARY
FRIEND**

If someone asks you for help with an issue or work situation, be willing to help them out – and then, that's a perfect time to say: "You know if you went to this meeting you'd find out more about what's going on with that." In everything we do, we can scout out new members' interests. Then you can recommend they go sit in on a committee meeting tailored to their interests, their vision – why they joined. I usually suggest they go to a couple of meetings and find out if it works for them, and then call me back. I call ahead to the chair and say: "I've invited this person ...," and a bit about why. It seems to work really well.

Human beings like to buy from, work with and donate to companies and organizations that they admire. They also like to surround themselves with winners – people and organizations that are going places. An active, successful association that is working on worthwhile, achievable objectives will find it attracts motivated volunteers.

For many people, getting involved in volunteer work provides another interesting – and unanticipated – motivator. It is a major opportunity for personal growth and self-realization. Volunteers can take on new challenges like making a presentation or helping to organize an event. They can learn in depth about issues and take part in meetings with influential people. Mentoring can help people to take part and grow. If a promising volunteer appears interested, but hesitant to speak out or take on a responsibility, leaders should recognize that and help the person overcome it.

If a leader can offer real opportunities for recognition, satisfaction, teamwork, pride, and so on, members' own inner drive to achieve personal satisfaction will lead them to get more and more involved.

▶ | **JAMES
BAZELY**

When I came in as president of my local association, morale needed a boost. We decided to start a community project – ‘Build for the Cure’. It took six months of my time with two other fellows to get it going, but people got really involved. We built a house in 57 hours and we were able to donate \$200,000 to the regional cancer centre.

It was something everybody was proud of. It showed the community how builders and developers are not ‘the big bad wolf’ – how we put a lot back into the community. The benefits went on for years. And the membership started to grow again. Now we do a small community service project every year – and every three years we do one big project.

c) Ask People to Participate

A 2001 survey^{iv} found that when adults had not been asked to volunteer for something, only 29% volunteered on their own. But of those who were asked, 71% volunteered. People like to be invited, and they’ll often hold back if they aren’t asked. In a sale, it’s called ‘the close’ – ask for the sale.

When you ask someone to do a job or take on a position, make sure the objectives are clear, as well as the expectations, the time commitment and specific goals.

d) Recognize Achievements and Commitment

Remember how important thanks have been to you and to others. Thank people at various stages of a project, instead of waiting until the end. Don’t forget to thank staff as well. Many EOs work as much for the love of the job as for the money. They usually don’t get enough positive feedback.

In addition to public thanks at meetings, recognition of volunteers can include such simple things as:

- a short personal note of thanks
- passing on comments from others (e.g., if the mayor compliments you on a position paper or a creative policy recommendation)
- offering leadership roles (e.g., the opportunity to present awards, introduce speakers, moderate panels, head up delegations)
- seeking out their opinions on important issues
- asking them to move up in the association.

RECOGNITION AND REWARD

There is nothing more fulfilling than public recognition and praise from one’s community and peers. Create a program to recognize and reward your volunteers. It’s OK to make a big fuss!

People don’t respond if they know you do not care. D. Quinn Mills, an award-winning professor at the Harvard Business School, said, ‘People really don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care’.

Care for individuals, their dreams and their needs. If a prospective volunteer feels that you will genuinely listen to and act upon his or her ideas, you will have created a significant incentive for that person to become involved.

Jack Shand and Kenneth Thacker,
The Role of Volunteers in Non-Profit Organizations ^v

e) Reach Out and Be Accessible

Volunteers also need access to their leaders. There is something about the title of ‘President’ that makes even the most approachable person appear ‘different’ to many members. It doesn’t help that some leaders will come to the dinner meetings just as everyone is prepared to sit down for the meal and be gone as soon as it’s finished. Those who make a point of being available and connecting with people on a personal level – talking before meetings or at informal gatherings after, remembering names and issues and following up on concerns and requests – can be far more effective.

▶ | **JOE
WAUGH**

Use every opportunity you get to talk to members. Ask them how things are going in the association – asking for feedback helps you find out where everybody is at.



▶ **SUZANNE
BONA**

It's important to reach out to members in different areas too. Sometimes it feels like smaller centres get overlooked, as though they don't face big issues or come up with solutions that could work in other places. As well as making sure to include all members during the committee meetings, a personal call every once in a while, or a visit if you're in their region, can really help. You'd be surprised what you can find out by asking: "How is this working in your area? What could be done to make it work better?"

f) Plan for Leadership Continuity

Ensuring political continuity is very important. To make sure the association can continue to fulfil its mission, it must not change direction from year to year and from president to president. Otherwise, it loses credibility with government, with the public and media, and with its own members. You should be grooming people for future leadership roles at all times. As well, some associations have 'shadow boards', some make sure committee chairs sit on the board of directors, some ask vice presidents to take a very active role sharing duties with the president during his or her term of office. See section 9.

g) We're All in This Together

It is important to keep the different parts of the Association functioning together properly: every group from subcommittees to standing committees, from staff to the board of directors and the executive committee, from the local to the provincial and the national levels – they all need to understand

how they fit together into the collective decision-making process, and how their collective achievements benefit ALL members. Otherwise, it's far too easy to fall into dissension. One group starts pointing fingers at another: staff, one particular member, a subcommittee, or another level of the association becomes the scapegoat for anything that is going wrong.

Leaders must guard against this and nip it in the bud. The first important change is one of language. There is a world of difference between a report that begins: "Here is what *THEY* are doing at the provincial level ..." and one that begins: "Here is what *WE* are doing at the provincial level" It is important to point out, over and over again if necessary, how all three levels are made up of volunteers from the housing industry, across the country, working together for the common good.

▶ **JAMES
BAZELY**

There can be animosity between the different levels of this association. It's important for the president of a local to put that aside. He or she should be participating in provincial board meetings and coming back and reporting on what is going on, saying: "This is a good thing. We signed up for this as an industry."

Positive reporting, and giving proper credit for achievements, helps to build the strength of the Association at all levels.

Another extremely effective response is to get people more involved, and let them talk about what they are doing.

▶ **JOE
WAUGH**

Once you've had the opportunity to go to the national level committee meetings, you don't question where your dues money goes. As a leader, you should try to make sure that people get around to the locals and talk about what's going on at provincial and national. The members remember that much better than reading a report.

7

CHAIRING THE BOARD

One of the president's main functions is to chair the board of directors. In essence, the board members are responsible for setting policy for the association as a whole. They define the vision, goals and strategies on behalf of all the members.

a) Boards Are for Big Decisions

There can be difficulties in properly involving a board. Many an executive committee has ended up treating its board as something not much more than a 'rubber stamp' – and then wondered why it was facing dissent and unhappiness!

The board has limited amounts of energy and time: focus its attention on important strategic and policy issues and make sure it is thinking proactively towards the future and is dealing with action that is of real interest to members. If the board is to be a true decision-making body, it must be presented with questions, not answers. There must be real information and real policy alternatives. Then the board must be allowed to discuss them as a group and make informed decisions. This does not mean rehashing issues that have already been resolved in a committee: the board's job is to move committee recommendations or questions forward.

▶ SUZANNE BONA

Committees are often a lot more vibrant and full of life and discussion than the board. I think it's the job of board members who sit on those committees to take that vibrancy with them. I know people are busy, but it's not just a matter of the board just receiving reports all the time. At Central Nova, a committee chair would say: "OK, now. This is what's going on and how we think it's going to affect us. Here are the time frames, and this is what we need from the board." There should be real, healthy debate. The board should create direction and set guidelines.

b) Members Have Duties and Responsibilities

Being a board member is a real and important job. In *Duties and Responsibilities of Directors of Not-For-Profit Organizations, Second Edition*^{vi},

Hugh Kelly outlines some key duties of board members. The list below is based on his categories, with selected quotations.

• **Duty of Knowledge**

Board members should understand the purpose and governance of the organization, as set out in the charter, mission, strategic plan, operations and by-laws.

• **Duty of Care**

Perfect business judgment is not expected, but generally there is a duty to act in good faith, with the care, diligence and skill that would be expected of a reasonably prudent person with the same knowledge and skill. Directors "may incur personal liability where the conduct falls short of this criterion," Kelly says.

• **Duty of Skill and Prudence**

This is similar to the above, but "the duty of prudence forces a director to act cautiously and anticipate any probable consequences of any course of action that the organization may choose to undertake."

• **Duty of Diligence**

This includes reviewing agendas and background materials, attending and participating in meetings of the board and committees to which they've been appointed, being prepared to discuss issues knowledgeably, and voting, except in cases such as where they are in a conflict of interest.

• **Duty to Manage**

Members are responsible for electing officers, appointing and providing guidance to staff, applying the association's by-laws properly, and so on.

• **Fiduciary Duty**

In essence, this means being loyal to and acting in the best interests of the association, avoiding any conflict of interest and putting the interests of the association ahead of all personal interests. "Perhaps the easiest way to avoid personal liability is for a director to disclose to the board at the earliest opportunity all situations in which a conflict of interest may arise," Kelly writes. "This is particularly true for any personal interests related to the transactions of the organization. Disclosure should take place regardless of whether the interests are direct or indirect Further, the director is precluded from voting on any contract, transaction or matter in which the director has any interest, no matter how remote."



▶ **JOE
WAUGH**

People need to understand what a conflict of interest is. Almost everybody comes into a situation at some point where they have a personal interest in what's being discussed. For example, because my company acts as a file manager for the R2000 program, I'm getting fees for service for a program that the provincial association administers. Sometimes, the association has to make decisions about things like hiring, fee levels, and so on, where it would be difficult for me to be objective. In these cases, it's important to declare that you have a conflict and leave the room. Sometimes, you may have grey areas, but it is always best to err on the side of caution. A good principle to remember is: "When in doubt, get out."

Kelly's book also lists liabilities directors may face under various laws, if they allow the association to take part in such things as fraud, discrimination, endangering employees or the public, failing to keep required records or pay employees' wages or make sure taxes are being remitted properly, or for any illegal trade practices the association engages in, such as misleading advertising.

Where a director thinks a proposal or action breaches one of the duties or legal responsibilities, or is outside the association's authority, they should oppose the action at the meeting where it is discussed/authorized (or the next meeting, if they were absent), and demand that their opposition be recorded in the minutes.

c) Collaborative Process

A board of directors is supposed to work in a collaborative process, like a committee.

There's an old joke that 'a camel is a horse designed by a committee'. In fact, when you work through the committee process for a while, you realize that the opposite is closer to the truth – a horse might well

be one non-desert-living individual's first stab at designing a camel. It's only when you get the benefit of a lot of people's direct, first-hand experience with actual needs and conditions that you end up with something well suited to them.

▶ **DIANE BUSH**

If you are going to propose a technical change, for example, you'd better make sure you understand how it will affect everybody in the association – not just you the builder or you the manufacturer. There may be other people saying: "I don't want to do this" – for some very good reasons. Change should always be well understood and meet the needs to better the industry. This includes considering the interests of the customer.

The collaborative process offers several advantages:

- more knowledge and information can be brought to bear on the issues
- a variety of approaches and personal creativity can be considered
- committee members 'buy in' to group decisions and can communicate them to others, leading to better acceptance.

There are also some disadvantages:

- the possibility of personality conflicts and hidden agendas
- the process takes time.

As outlined below, a good chair can build on those advantages and overcome most of the disadvantages to achieve strong, well-thought-out policies and decisions.

d) Dealing with Personalities

The CHBA came into existence because of the vision and commitment of a group of individuals – a vision of how the Association could play a strong and positive role in housing in Canada, and a commitment to promote and protect the interests of both those who produce homes and those who rent or buy them. In fact, it is not uncommon to see people working for goals that are really not in their own short-term interests – simply because they know that those goals are in the best interests of housing over the long term.

On the other hand, you still have to reach consensus among people with very different personalities. At the most basic level, there are at least four different communication styles, sometimes classified as 'Doer, Creator, Listener, Thinker', or from a somewhat different analysis: 'Tell, Sell, Listen and Write'. Tellers are direct, assertive pragmatists who enjoy taking centre stage for their vision and opinions. Sellers are talkative and social, liking to discuss all the benefits of their ideas and create buy-in. Listeners are people- and relationship-oriented, holding back more, and comparing new proposals against the status quo before making up their minds. And Writers are the ones demanding data, seeing the possible problems, and refusing to let 'half-baked' proposals go ahead^{vii}. It's not hard to see that these people can infuriate each other. But they are all needed to vet projects and see them through successfully from start to finish. It is important to recognize and respond to these styles.



▶ LOU FRUSTAGLIO

A good chair has got to be a bit of a shrink, to analyse all the different personalities around the table. And one of the most important things for any leader is to try to put yourself into other peoples' shoes: How are they thinking? Why is it that they feel that way? How do they tick? And how can we end up doing what's best for the industry as a whole? I found that sales and marketing seminars on how to deal with different kinds of customers have helped me understand people on committees and in government liaison as well.

Human nature is still at work. There will be times you have to calm somebody's hurt feelings, deal with jealousy, find compromise where individuals have become locked in competition, stare down bullies, or look for underlying personal agendas.

▶ JOHN FRISWELL

If you can't get over the personalities, you're doomed for failure. You've got to breathe deeply sometimes, and count to 10. If you've got somebody rambling on, you can say: "Thanks, you have made a good point. Now we need to move on." And if you know you're a difficult person, you should probably ask yourself whether you really want to get more involved, or would you just be making other people's lives difficult.

CHAIR LANGUAGE

In his guide to better meetings, Eli Mina says that, "The chair should use carefully crafted interventions which are both **soft** (on the people) and **hard** (on the issues and principles)." For example:

- "In fairness, there are members who are waiting to speak for the first time. We need to give them priority."

Here are some other useful phrases from Mina's book:

- "Can we please speak about the issues, not the people."
- "As agreed, discussion of this item will end at 10 a.m. It is now 9:50."
- "I must say, I am puzzled by a few of the points made. For example, _____, Am I missing something?"

Eli Mina
The Guide to Better Meetings for Directors of Non-Profit Organizations ^{viii}

People are not always noble – either individually or in cliques. To avoid being manipulated, it's a good idea to do a reality check once in a while. "Who will benefit and who will lose in this decision, in terms of ego, power, money, opportunities or prestige?" Beware of people who volunteer and then try to make the association's agenda match their own sales agenda: that is not networking, it's exploitation. Both inside the association and in the public forum, anything that smacks of self-interest, self-aggrandisement, or a private agenda is an abuse of the common trust.

e) **Disagreement and Controversy**

Dealing with conflicts requires a special set of tools. This list is expanded from one by association veteran John A. Long^{ix}:

- **Empathy**

Understand people's opinions and don't embarrass or isolate them. Welcome different views. Conflicting opinions are not necessarily bad – they can identify pitfalls and encourage creativity. Wherever possible, take ownership of the disagreement on behalf of the group: "We feel ..." or "We are having this problem" (On the other hand, it is important that those disagreements not continue into the public arena.)

- **Explanation**

Many disagreements can be cleared up with information.



- ▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

I'm not naive enough to believe my opinion is the only one. There are many times I've gone to a meeting and been turned around. When you're sitting in one area, you can't possibly know it all. There's way too much. And what may be good for the goose in Edmonton may not be good for the gander in Newfoundland.

- **Openness**

If a member is showing aggression, sympathy-seeking, blocking, showing off, or dominating the discussion (verbally or with body language), try to find out what the underlying problem is and deal with it. If that doesn't work, point out constructively that the behaviour is bad for the group. If all else fails, ignore them. If you think someone has a hidden agenda, try to draw it out into the open. "Do you have some other thoughts in mind?" or "Are we right in thinking you feel differently?"

- **Reconciliation**

Ask for suggestions on how to resolve conflicts.

- ▶ **SUZANNE BONA**

If the debate seems like it's going on and on, that requires a strong chair. You have to say: "Let's look at what we're talking about here. What's the problem? Let's resolve it now."

- **Compromise**

Admit error; make changes to reflect justified views.

- **Courage**

When it's impossible to keep everyone happy, take the high road. Make sure that everyone knows their views have been heard and taken into account. Then, call the vote.

After the vote is taken, the disagreements should not be taken out into the public realm. All members must support the board's decision, in the common interest.

- ▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

You and I can have a really good and passionate debate at the table, but after the decision gets taken we all have to 'carry the company flag'. When I lose, the message I promote is the one we all agreed on.

f) **Focus on Action**

Although a number of items are for information only, the basic role of the board of directors is to direct action. Some people include the specific goal on their agendas (*Action required: Set up task force ... or Decide approach ... or Allocate budget ...*, etc.). Many associations write minutes with the action to be taken and the person responsible clearly marked.

Deal with controversial issues straightforwardly, and don't get drawn into fights.

- ▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

When I came in as the local association president, I told the EO to give me the dirty work. We had proposals for a new building – which is always controversial – and a dues increase. Discussion got pretty heated. But I'm pretty good at saying: "Yeah, well people have been calling me that since I was two and it's water off a duck's back. Can we get back to the issue?"

▶ **BRYAN
KLINKHAMMER**

When you really dig down into the facts, you take the personalities out of it. You are dealing in black and white and people can see the patterns, so most of the time you can come out with a consensus.

If no action or direction is required on a project, the board doesn't need to spend time discussing it. If the meetings are getting bogged down because there's too much on the agenda, delegate some to committees or task forces and/or narrow the list of priorities. And be willing to accept that 100% achievement of goals may not be possible – or necessary.

▶ **GREG
HUSSEY**

Once a group has been asked to do something, we don't really want to hear about it until it's finished, unless they've got specific questions or problems. In my committee meeting, we said: "If it's in your written report, you're not allowed to read it out." The reports are for the boring data. At the meeting, you should be saying: "Here's the one thing from our area that was important."

Also, we get so much information on all of these agenda items, and half of it is really important and the other half is supporting data, and people don't have the time to pick it apart and find out which is which. So for the builder-member pre-meeting, we said people only had to prepare for four items – and they all prepared.

Finally, we decided we don't need total, across-the-board perfection. If eight out of ten provinces had finished something, we could consider the project done. Or if we could isolate the four to five questions that have to be answered to make a program palatable to the majority of provinces, then we would concentrate on answering those questions and let the other areas figure it out as they go along.

A focus on action includes making things easier for the volunteers.

▶ **WALLY
MAH**

The amount of paper that comes through the system is amazing. I have an assistant who goes through and highlights things for me. By the time something gets to my desk, it has notes saying: "Take a look at this, and this" But I have 100 employees and I can ask one to do that. Some people only have one or two.



▶ **GARY
FRIEND**

We need short summaries. When builders make a pick-up list on the job site, we don't write things out in sentences. We do it in point form – short, but complete. For association information and tasks, I want to see a one-page document with bullet points. The background needs to be there so I can look it up if it doesn't smell right, but mostly we've got to trust our staff and our committees. If it's easy to read, it is easier to get results.

It also means setting meaningful tasks and deadlines and providing support. Make sure your HBA is asking its volunteers and committees to do things they recognize as valuable.

▶ **DIANE
BUSH**

A good leader should be getting everybody involved, by shaping the agenda and giving people things to do within that agenda. Too often, volunteers come to the meetings and they get all engaged with the issues, they're involved and motivated. But then they go back to their day-to-day work and they forget about everything until it's time to go back for the next meeting. It works much better if the committee comes up with a list of half a dozen goals to accomplish, and a list of tasks to support those goals. Then, the leader should be saying to each member: "We need you to bring this to the table by such and such a date."

Often, though, volunteers don't have the infrastructure to take things back to the local association, get builders involved and move things forward. So it's helpful to have something after each meeting that can be published – 'How-To' steps, key points, implementation ideas, etc. – that the committee members can use at their local associations.

Focusing on action doesn't mean you can't have fun, though – and educate people at the same time.

▶ | **GREG HUSSEY**

The first time I chaired a meeting of the National Education and Training Advisory Committee, we started the 'Buck in the Cup'. We told everyone they weren't allowed to use acronyms instead of full names of programs or groups. If they did, they'd have to put a dollar into the pot. I think even if people weren't really interested in what someone was saying, they were keeping score of those acronyms.

g) Keeping Things on Track

A common complaint about all meetings is that they take too much time and accomplish too little. A good chair working with good rules can really make a difference.

▶ | **JAMES BAZELY**

In a well-run organization, the president's job includes running meetings efficiently so you don't waste people's time.

▶ | **GREG HUSSEY**

Sometimes, you'll have someone come into the presidency who hasn't chaired a committee or come through the mentoring or grooming process – and they don't understand how to run a meeting and keep it on track. If that happens, decisions can take much longer and disagreements can blow up into real problems.

▶ | **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

One of the first things I did in Red Deer was to introduce Robert's Rules of Order. That helped to deal with the informality of the meetings and the social banter that was going on during them. The meetings were taking 2½ hours and that didn't seem to be a good use of anybody's time. By focusing better we cut our meeting times down to 45 minutes. And because we put them just before the evening dinner meeting, people still had plenty of opportunities for the banter later on.

▶ | **JOE WAUGH**

In most smaller organizations, people work a lot to make decisions based on consensus and they just have a vote for the record. But if you get into a contentious issue, Robert's Rules really help keep things on track. They are based on having a motion proposed and seconded – which defines the issue – and they set out who can bring issues back, how changes can and can't be made, and so on.

Where the board has decisions to make, the leader should make sure that everyone has a say in the process. It's often best to ask a specific question, like "How would this option work in your area?" rather than just "Do you have anything to say?"

▶ | **JOE WAUGH**

You often find that some people dominate the discussion. A good leader will always, at some point, go around the table and ask each person to give their opinion. That way, everybody realizes that what they have to say is valuable. If you use this practice, people come to expect it. They don't wait for the chair – if someone else feels a discussion has gone on for too long between two people, they'll say: "Let's check what other people think."

However, the leader should also be ready to recognize when people need clarification, to summarize, test consensus and call votes. There can be a fine line, though, between moving the meeting along efficiently and cutting off important discussion. Taking notes can help you see when comments are just repeating. And it can be really useful for summarizing main points and moving on.

▶ | **JAMES BAZELY**

You are never going to come up with a theory or plan that everyone will agree to. You've got to recognize the importance of everyone's input – all their reasons and opinions should be heard. But at the right point, you've got to be able to wrap it up. I would say something like: "It's evident to me that the consensus is that we are going to do ... (fill in the blank). I move that we end the discussion and move forward to the vote."

RECOGNIZE EVASIVE TACTICS

Leaders should recognize and be prepared to deal with tactics that just evade action. The following list is drawn from an article by Stephen C. Rafe^{xi}.

1. Someone says the committee should not move too rapidly (so it doesn't get started).
2. Discussion shifts to a scapegoat (so the issue itself never gets addressed).
3. Decisions are always opposed (so the committee decides the middle ground is best – which assures indecisiveness).
4. Someone says the problem cannot be separated from other problems which must be solved at the same time (this can preclude taking any action at all).
5. Someone says the problem occurs everywhere (this may be true, but it's not a solution).
6. Someone asks the group to clarify and define terms, or asks for the problem to be narrowed down and explained (if this becomes the committee's main focus, no actual discussion will take place on the real issue).
7. The committee gets into 'thinking' and 'discussing' and forgets it's supposed to be problem-solving.
8. The group retreats to general objectives on which everyone can agree – but recommends no real changes (this just enforces the status quo).
9. A committee is appointed, or the problem is tabled (sometimes these are important tactics – but other times they are just intended to delay action).
10. Everyone looks slightly embarrassed when the real problem is brought up, indicating that it is in bad taste to articulate it, that it is premature to discuss it, and that it would be misrepresented and misinterpreted by outsiders (this stops discussion/problem solving).

h) More about Group Dynamics

Keep in mind that groups tend to follow the ideas and approaches that gain acceptance at the outset of the discussion. Sometimes they deliberately avoid divisive issues because they're looking for an easy way out. If the discussion begins with taking a risk, then risks will be seen to be acceptable. But if the initial trend is to be conservative, that will be amplified. If you're talking among people who share a point of view, then discussions will be weighted in favour of uniformity. Leaders should watch out for 'group think': self-censorship, the illusion of unanimity, guarding against conflicting ideas, or feeling invulnerable.

Make sure people know they can get their questions and ideas on the agenda. Encourage anyone with problems or new information to talk to the committee chairs or the EO before the meeting. Equally, if you have a local issue to raise at the provincial or national level, it's only courtesy to let them know in advance. Otherwise, your association may find an angry member confronting the board with something they didn't even know was an issue. If left unresolved, serious, committed people may end up feeling that their concerns go unrecognized – and they may leave the association.

Leaders must also recognize that dissension can be based on external factors or fear. Here's Lawrence Ecroyd^x on how economic problems can affect associations.

Major discord occurs in an association when there are economic problems in the industry, trade or profession, or during a recession or period of major adjustment in the economy. When members face financial or career crises, it is common to find them attacking the association or its programs. Despite an association's good financial condition, members may insist that the association share the misery by making cutbacks in staff and programs. Under these circumstances, the (president and) chief executive should enlist the help of supportive 'thought leaders' on the board to disparage such counter-productive measures.

8

REPRESENTING THE ASSOCIATION

One of the key roles for your HBA is communicating with its various publics: government, the general public and the media. Members consistently identify these as top priorities – the main reasons they joined the association.

▶ **WALLY MAH**

You never know when you might get called and asked if you can come for an important meeting. So I always keep a suit and razor in the office now. While you can take off your jacket and roll up your sleeves and make a suit look less formal, it's really hard to make a sweatshirt look more formal.

a) *Government Liaison*

i) **Program**

Members expect the association to be pursuing a substantive agenda. That can only be done through an active government liaison program. Volunteers expect to work as a collective on important policy issues – ones they care about, and ones that affect society.

▶ **BOB FINNIGAN**

On Day One when I started getting active in the association, I was focused on the construction and land issues that would affect my business. But when I got onto the executive, I realized how important the political role is – acting as lobbyists for the benefit of the whole industry. If I'd realized the extent of that role earlier, I would have spent a little more time understanding the politics affecting the industry. That would have made the learning curve a little shorter, and not so intense.

▶ **ALLAN KLASSEN**

I wish I had paid more attention as a general member to how deeply all three levels of the association are involved. You don't actually realize how politically engaged the association is in impacting housing policy and influencing decisions until you get involved. Then you see what they are doing and the potential of what they could be doing.

To liaise with government effectively, association members must find out about different viewpoints; they must know the opposing position well enough that they could argue it themselves; they must understand that people who hold those opposing viewpoints also care about the issues. The association's positions must reflect an open decision-making process, based on solid information and thoughtful analysis. They must be non-partisan, commenting on policy rather than 'politics'. Behind everything, there must be a commitment to professionalism and ethics.

Just because the industry wants something, that doesn't necessarily mean it's the best thing for the government and for consumers. You have to sit down and say: "Let's find out what's best for all of us."

▶ **LOU FRUSTAGLIO**

You've got to walk a mile in someone's shoes to know what they think. When you're meeting politicians or government staff, you have to put yourself into their role, by thinking about what they are trying to do, what their mandates are, and what their responsibilities are to the people who voted for them. Sometimes, it's difficult to do that. But you need to know how they think if you want to change that thinking. And if you can't get the conclusion you want, you'd better find out why and how you can resolve the concerns. Sometimes you have to adjust what you want to do to what you can do together.

Do not assume that someone must always 'lose' in public policy decisions – often your challenge is to show that this is not the case. The most effective municipal liaison results in a real partnership 'win-win' approach – because you find the improvements that everyone supports (or, in more controversial issues, the solutions that everyone can live with) BEFORE the issue even approaches being a crisis on the front pages.

To do that, you need:

- to be involved early and on a regular basis in the decision-making process
- to ask enough questions to identify the real underlying problems or goals
- to create and promote workable solutions.

That process can be extremely creative – and very satisfying.



▶ **WALLY
MAH**

The feeling that you can make something happen ... it's unbelievable. We've changed public policy in a major way – at the city, at provincial and at national.

▶ **BOB
FINNIGAN**

This gets into your blood. You have to do the homework just like everyone else, and you've got to believe in what the association's doing. But that's not hard. Everybody has to have housing. Our industry is a necessity, and our issues are consumer positive.

ii) Process

Politicians and senior public servants want to talk directly to industry practitioners. They can get in touch with staff whenever they want to – and they often do. In fact, that is one of the things that makes your EO valuable to you. But politicians and senior public servants want the kind of insight that comes 'straight from the horse's mouth', so they want to talk to real life new home builders, renovators and developers who have been elected by their peers. That last point is especially important when dealing with politicians. Never forget that the president of a local HBA is also a 'politician' – an elected leader who has to report back to his/her own constituents: the board and the membership.

▶ **STEVEN
CROWELL**

Elected association representatives should always be front and centre when meeting with government. Politicians are elected by the people and they appreciate contact with the elected representatives from the industry. Those association representatives should be supported by a team of advisors comprised of staff and other association members.

▶ **WALLY
MAH**

You need to find the best people to talk to councillors. Find members who have a good working relationship with them and can make things happen. Have them ask: "Would you do this? And if not, can you give me the reasons why you wouldn't, or make any suggestions?"

Government liaison is not something that can be done on an ad hoc, crisis-management basis. The local HBA needs to promote municipal liaison as a vital part of membership services and retention^{xii}.

- At least one senior staff member (usually the EO) must be given the responsibility, the time and the budget to set up and maintain contact with municipal officials. In urban areas with more than about five municipalities, more than one staff member likely will be required.
- The association should set up at least one committee with the specific purpose of meeting regularly with municipal officials and politicians. In large urban areas, separate subcommittees likely will be required for each area municipality.
- Since municipal liaison is at heart a communications activity, clear lines of communication must be kept open at all times – both between the municipality(ies) and the association, and within the association itself.
- There should be frequent reports to the board and members spelling out what is going on, options, and what input or action is needed from the board.
- There should be frequent reports to the board and members showing what has been accomplished and what your successes mean to them.
- Funding for consistent, ongoing liaison should be a board priority.

Many of the comments made in Section 7 about working through the board and committees also apply to government liaison – it's a bigger, more diversified committee.

▶ **STEVEN CROWELL**

Preparation, organization and effective presentation are necessary. It is good to keep in mind that government representatives are not industry experts. They are, however, experts at evaluating people. Being knowledgeable and articulate gains instant credibility for the position being discussed. It is important to think globally beyond the industry, and to set the objective in a context that is politically correct.

▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

You have to be consistent, and make sure the message that's going out is the one you want. The last thing you want is for someone who doesn't understand all the background to come in and ramp it up at a government liaison meeting, or start writing their own letters to the editor. We need to be more political as an association, taking well-thought-out public positions, based on solid facts. I think in Edmonton and Alberta we're absolutely fighting the fight. We're looking at what we need to do to maintain our message over time, and we've hired the staff to make it happen.

As long as you can show that you've done your homework, the leader doesn't have to have all the answers all the time. It is OK to admit you don't know something, especially early in the process, and there are times when it's the best thing you can do.

Respect differences. Create relationships based on trust. And never lose your temper.

▶ **LOU FRUSTAGLIO**

You've got two eyes and two ears, but just one mouth. That should remind you to be patient: watch, watch, listen, listen, formulate your thoughts, and then talk. Don't just run off at the mouth.

▶ **WALLY MAH**

A loose cannon can destroy things for everyone. In the old days, people used to go in to city meetings and be very antagonistic. You can't get away with that any more.

Integrity, knowledge, character and reputation are vital. Government, media and the general public must know you are working for the common good.

You can and should use personal examples ("This is what will happen on my job site if you pass this policy"), but never use them for personal gain. Take the high ground. There is more than one reputation at stake when you are president of an association.

▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

At our SAM awards three years ago, we had a politician come in and say to us: "Look at all the fat cats in this room. What have you done for the community lately?" Well, we have to fight that kind of perception. So we went out to the membership and asked them to tell us what they had done over the past year. It turns out that we're an industry that does a lot of things anonymously. Within a week, we found \$30 million in contributions to the community. And we started a charity fund with \$1 million. Now we tell people about that.

Even though you're only in office for a year, keep the long-term view. Don't push for decisions when you still need more time to convince people of your position. Compromise on details or timing if necessary, so you can come back to argue the point again. But never compromise on principles.

▶ **VINCE LABERGE**

There have already been 25 or 30 presidents before me – I'm just the next one in a long line. And I don't want the person coming in after me to have more problems because they have to deal with the wake I left behind.

For more information, see the CHBA's *Municipal Liaison Manual, 2007*.

b) Public Speaking

All the experts agree it gets easier as you do it. Take every opportunity you can get – take a course if you can – prepare well, practice, and forgive yourself the failures.

▶ **JOE WAUGH**

Every region of the country has leaders and speakers that people really admire. Most of these people weren't born with these skills and if asked will often tell you: "Ten years ago, I couldn't do this stuff." There are a lot of places where you can learn speaking skills. I've been around Toastmasters a lot, plus I've had coaching through Train the Trainer sessions for R2000, CMHC's International Training Team and the Air Quality Guide programs. Seek out opportunities to learn.

▶ **GREG
HUSSEY**

When I went to my first dinner meeting, everybody had to stand up and say their name. I almost decided I'd never come back, I was that shy. They say you can't change those fundamental traits, but now I can stand up and speak in front of 500 people and it doesn't bother me in the least. I actually half enjoy it now.

Never talk about something you don't know enough about. Use your EO to get useful background information about the subject and the audience, and to help write the speech. Then prepare properly, and practice, practice, practice.

▶ **DIANE
BUSH**

Communication is one of the key things you need to do as a leader. Remember: always understand your audience. A lot of people make a speech by starting from what they want to say. So they just end up with a lot of association rhetoric. But if you understand your audience and what they care about, you can relate what you want to say to how it affects them. You will be talking about their goals and concerns – and they will find it much more interesting.

If you're talking to a local, you don't want to say: "Our national president had another meeting with somebody important." The membership doesn't care about numbers of meetings: they care about results. So you say: "Here's what we accomplished this month on this goal."

When I spoke to the Canadian Wood Council about the economy and changes in our industry, I related it directly to them – how the trends might affect the industry, things to watch for, how to deliver product to the builders, and how they could make a difference.

c) Dealing with Media

Again, the emphasis is on preparation and integrity. Try to anticipate questions – actually sit down with your EO and some board members in advance, figure out what questions might come up, and decide how you'll answer them. If you are asked a question that's too general, stop, thank the questioner and ask them to be more specific. If someone asks something you don't know the answer to, never try to wing it; you'll just end up looking evasive. Say you don't know, but you will get back to them as soon as you find out. Follow up.

▶ **JAMES
BAZELY**

Also the president can't be the authority on everything. If a reporter wants detailed comments on things being done by the Municipal Affairs Committee, the chair of that committee should be the one to answer the questions.

Media training can help. It can show you different situations and how to handle them. Some set up and record interview situations, so you can practice alternative approaches and see how you appear to others.



▶ **JOHN
FRISWELL**

Dealing with media just takes some experience. It's knowing the issues and not being afraid to talk. You rely on staff to give you the brief, the speaking notes, and information from the association's committees and task forces. Here, anyway, sometimes the press might ask a question on something you haven't heard about, or you might get the odd little misquote, but it's nothing serious. When reporters have a story on a bad project, they come to us for answers. We come through with solid information on how to hire a professional and avoid problems.

d) Outside Functions

As president, you may be invited to a number of semi-social functions hosted by other associations and by various government departments and agencies: meetings, dinners, golf games, cocktail parties, fundraisers, and so on.

Typically, a lot of people will gravitate to the people they know. What you should be doing is seeking out others that you don't know yet, so that you can make connections, make contacts and represent the association.

It's important not to get carried away, though. Don't oversell the association. Otherwise you'll set up expectations that will be shattered – and you'll destroy the trust and goodwill you've worked so hard to build.

9

POLITICAL CONTINUITY

In an association like the CHBA, the elected leadership usually changes every year. A few associations have two-year terms. This system has both advantages and disadvantages:

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• leaders have a strong inducement to accomplish goals• a bad leader will be gone in a fairly short time• volunteers are more likely to accept a short-term position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• leaders feel pressured to accomplish goals• a good leader will be gone in a fairly short time• leadership styles and priorities can change widely from year to year

Ensuring political continuity is very important. To make sure the association can continue to fulfil its mission, it must not change direction from year to year and from president to president. Otherwise, it loses credibility with government, with the public and media, and with its own members. (Financial continuity is just as important: bad decisions by one board can leave successors with serious problems. See CHBA's *Effective Financial Planning and Management for Local Home Builders' Associations*.)

a) Succession Planning and Bench Strength

The short term of office makes planning for your future leadership team a very important task. You need to look at who is coming up through the pipe for your board and executive committee, and how quickly – where the promising rookies are, how to get them drafted, and how to enhance their skills.

► **BRYAN KLINKHAMMER**

Make sure you're doing succession planning. Look at where you see the association in five years, and how you are going to recruit people so that each year the next executive committee is better than this one. Getting a mix of younger people with older ones to learn from is best. We have seen more of the smaller custom builders, more ethnic groups, and young people coming along – both men and women. We're actively trying to bring them in. Are we doing a great job of it? No. But we are doing it.

Whenever they plan a delegation to meet with politicians, senior bureaucrats and other key people, most HBAs make sure to include their vice presidents and one or two other potential future leaders. That way, their upcoming men and women get first-hand experience and exposure before they have to take the leadership role themselves. They have met the people, experienced the processes, and had at least a year or two of all-important 'face time'.

Serving on committees – especially in the chair – often serves a similar function. That is why so many HBAs prefer that their board members are active committee participants. And why so many board members prefer it themselves.

► **BOB FINNIGAN**

Last year, we had some comments that by being on the board you weren't necessarily getting involved in specific issues, or in your specific area of expertise. So we sat down before one meeting and went through every name on the board list. The question was: "Are they just on the board or do they sit on any of the committees as well?" At the meeting, we then handed out a list of all the committees' roles and what's involved, and said to each board member: "If you want to get more involved, take a look at the opportunities and pick one." The response was fabulous.

A growing number of groups consciously share responsibilities between their presidents and their vice presidents – and between their committee chairs and vice chairs.

b) Recruit New Leaders All the Time

The association should be actively on the lookout for promising people among its members, and grooming them for more involvement.

▶ **GARY FRIEND**

You try to learn about the people who are on committees and want to move up. If you know someone's a hothead, you wouldn't ask them to handle sensitive liaison with the government. The ones who hang back can be great to represent the association – they are often very well spoken, well balanced and see all the sides of the issues – but you wouldn't send them in to fight development charges alone. You don't want to push people beyond their own skill set and comfort zone.

I think it's very important for the president and board members to go to committee and council meetings during the year. Sit in just as a member of the HBA, not as someone who knows it all. Show your support and listen. It's a great opportunity to see the future leaders of the association in action – the people who are taking an initiative, managing things well, and doing things the public wants. You may also want to invite one of them to come along to a board meeting some time to see how it works.

Find out what motivates potential new leaders. Ego? Service? Career advancement? What has been their style on boards or committees? How is that likely to change? How supportive is this person's company and their family? What would a 'successful year' look like for them? Are they objective-oriented or member-oriented or cost-oriented? What issues do they really care about?

▶ **LOU FRUSTAGLIO**

The main reason I got involved is one of the presidents almost 20 years ago said: "Lou, either put up or shut up. There's no sense in being part of the peanut gallery, complaining in the background and not doing anything. Get in here and find out what's going on, analyse the angles and make it work."

▶ **JOHN FRISWELL**

Being a member of a committee is one thing. Being an active member is another. Your first meeting, you might look around and say: "Wow, these are some serious guys out here and I'm just a little renovator." But once you get over that and start really working and thinking, that changes. It's the day-to-day battle in the field that it's all about.

EOs can contribute a great deal to political continuity. As well as keeping open the lines of communication with government, media, other organizations, and so on, which allows new committee chairs and board members to plug straight in, they can help identify people who have the potential to become tomorrow's leaders.

▶ **GREG HUSSEY**

I think staff should be tapping new people for the leadership – they know more about more of the people, and if you leave that up to the board or the executive, they'll probably just go back to the same core group that they know.

c) Supporting and Developing People's Abilities

No one naturally fills all the requirements for an 'ideal' leader. One person may be a dynamic speaker who never remembers to follow up on requests for information. Another may be great on policy details but not so good on maintaining networks. The variations are endless.

Criticizing a person's weak points undermines self-confidence – taken to extremes it can turn an association in on itself, destroying its effectiveness. Support people instead. Give them chances to try new things, a small step at a time. Someone who hasn't done public speaking could be asked first to introduce a guest speaker at a relatively low-key meeting, for example, then to make a two-minute presentation, and so on. Let them talk to people who have been through the process and know the ropes. Make sure they get the necessary training, and/or assign other people to fill in the roles they can't. Build on their strengths.

▶ **ALLAN KLASSEN**

We've made improvements in Alberta. For example, our provincial vice presidents now go to the national meetings. And in Calgary, we have started an 'associate board' for young members that meets monthly. They hold three mentorship breakfasts a year, which are really popular – the last one had 75 people. One industry leader and one associate board member sit at a table with about eight members – usually young and from middle management – and the discussion can cover everything from how you build a company to hot issues. The associate board members also go out to high school career days and talk about the industry. Getting people involved at that age and stage is really important for the future of our association. And any time you can provide exposure to people who have been through the wars, that's very valuable.

SKILLS TO LOOK FOR AND SUPPORT IN POTENTIAL LEADERS

Environmental scanning: Explores and assesses trends and issues affecting the future of the profession or organization.

Strategic thinking and planning: Shows an appreciation for the association's mission and strategic plan and is able to evaluate and provide insight into strategic direction.

Oversight and ethics: Demonstrates sufficient knowledge of financial matters to judge financial indicators of the association's performance and demonstrates a high standard of personal values and ethics.

Communication: Understands the importance of solidarity in board decisions, even though the director may not agree with the decision taken; respects the confidentiality of the association's business information and the deliberations of the board.

Risk management: Demonstrates an ability to identify the costs, benefits and risk implications of board decisions; able to assess the organization's capacity to implement its strategy.

Teamwork: Works effectively with other board members, the EO and other stakeholders.

Overall Board performance: Indicates diligent preparation for meetings (is prepared, knows material and actively participates).

Signe Holstein, "Board and Volunteer Orientation and Training" ^{xiii}

Also, a short personal email from the president can be very powerful:

- "Congratulations on taking over the chair of the ... committee. My first time as a chair was an incredible learning experience. Hope you enjoy it as much as I did."
- "I heard about your speech at council the other day. You really nailed the issues. Congratulations!"
- "I was very impressed by your idea at yesterday's meeting. It will make things much easier and more practical – and save us all money. Thanks!"
- "Glad to hear you're on the task force. This is probably the most important issue we're facing, and your insights will make a real difference."

d) Board Orientation Sessions

Orientation and training really help new recruits get up to speed. One common comment from local association presidents is that just about the time they start to feel comfortable in the job, it's time for them to step down.

It's not enough just to hand over manuals. People have different learning styles. For many, reading is the least effective. At the very least, when you are giving out manuals point out examples of what they contain and where to find specific information.

▶ ALLAN KLASSEN

I think the orientation process is often brushed over too quickly. Time spent to really make the process and communication as transparent as you can is very, very important.

▶ GREG HUSSEY

Most new board members are lost for the first year or so. No one spells out the duties of each position for you. We should be able to lay it out: what the position is, what we want you to do, what is the goal, the time commitment, when the meetings are, who you report to. Also, the pecking order – who does what and who is responsible for what? And when you join the board, they should hand you a copy of Robert's Rules of Order.

A joint session of the outgoing board and the incoming board can be really useful. But it must deal with substantive issues – not just where the coffee room is. It's also more effective if held relatively early in their term of office. Sending local association vice presidents to special seminars and conferences organized provincially and nationally can give them a valuable immersion course. And talking one-on-one may be the best of all.

e) Reining in Loose Cannons

If you get a 'loose cannon' in a position of responsibility, it is up to the senior elected members to rein him or her in. This job can't be left to staff; it must be done by peers.

The Association's operations manual, strategic plan, position papers, statement of corporate social responsibility or Code of Ethics can be helpful. Across the country, those documents contain statements like the following:

While the industry actually builds housing, the Association endorses the principle of industry/government partnership. This partnership is required to achieve "Canadians' rights to housing" while improving quality, affordability and choice.

We acknowledge that the development of new communities, and the construction and renovation of homes, has a range of impacts on the environment, both today and in the future. We work with governments and others to develop environmentally responsible housing solutions.

To reach the goals of the Association, all three levels must work together with a common purpose—to secure a business environment within which members can operate profitably.

We act with consistency, transparency and respect to do what is honest, ethical and trustworthy in all aspects of our company's operations.

Members shall avoid all conduct or practice detrimental to the home building industry, to the association, to the good name or reputation of any of its members, or its customers.

Rather than getting into personal definitions about right or wrong behaviour, leaders and their boards can point out to the person in question that what they are doing conflicts with the association's founding documents.

f) Guarding Against Burn Out

While it's important to get people involved in the association, it is just as important not to overburden them. Check how busy they are, keep an eye out for signs they are getting overworked, and respect it if they say 'No' to extra tasks. Many people will take a short time out and then come back refreshed.

▶ **CHRISTINE SCOTT-NYULI**

The problem is that if you're doing a good job, people say: "Let's get you involved in something else and then something else and something else," and soon you're just over-burdened.

Again, it helps if there are structures to share the load.

▶ **JAMES BAZELY**

The president and the vice president need to work very closely, so the vice president has a chance to get their feet wet, and know what's going on. In Barrie, we have two-year terms now, but if you're working tightly with the vice president, the workload should be cut in half.

g) Don't Lose Your Past Presidents

Acting as president is a tremendous learning experience. By the time someone has served in that position, they have usually been a member of at least one or two committees, plus the board of directors and the executive – accumulating a great deal of knowledge and many personal contacts on the way. They can be tremendous assets for your association for years to come.

Immediately after the whirlwind of activity during the presidency, some people may need to back off for a while. But don't lose contact. Many of these people will be happy to take on a new task if you can find the right combination of time commitment and meaningful involvement. They may be asked to write an article for one of your publications, speak on panel discussions, take part in 'blue sky' discussions or focus groups, serve as your association's liaison to other organizations, offer informal advice, and so on.

▶ **CHRISTINE
SCOTT-NYULI**

Too often, presidents get to the end of their term and just say: "Thank God I'm out." I think we should ask them back to serve on task forces – a lot of those have clearly defined goals, you are getting somewhere and making a difference and the time commitment is limited. And it would be great if our past presidents acted as mentors for people coming up.

▶ **GREG
HUSSEY**

We had an issue and we asked one of the builders who had been active before to get involved. He said: "I don't want to sit here for the first time in years and complain about how things are being done." And we said: "We don't want you to complain. We want you to offer suggestions and get in here and work on this." That way, you reap the benefits of their experience back again. For me, I know way more now than I did when I was president.

10

AND FINALLY, THE PERSONAL ANGLE

Leadership can be frustrating, fun, time consuming, exhausting, exhilarating.



▶ **ALLAN
KLASSEN**

I had to enhance my time management skill set, because I had to maximize every second of the day. I was scheduled for every second from 5:00 a.m. till I hit the pillow. That's not for everyone but it's what works for me. I'm pretty tenacious and passionate. As I got involved more, I cared more. I know it cost my company sometimes – if I'd known in advance, I probably would have changed the structure and the reporting systems. But I survived and in some ways thrived. And I'm blessed to have a great family and a wife that supported me – if you didn't have that, you'd fail. Was it worth it? Absolutely. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world because I think I made a difference.

▶ **GREG
HUSSEY**

In my opinion, if you want to be successful in this business, there is no other way than taking on leadership roles in the association. You get in to see the workings and how things are done – and you start to shape things. Everyone can understand that being on the inside is better than being on the outside. On my own, it would have taken me 15 years to learn what I learned in my first two years of leadership.

▶ **CHRISTINE
SCOTT-NYULI**

When you take on a leadership position, other people in the industry look at you differently. You get a lot of recognition for who you are, and it lasts a really long time. It's like that TV show *Cheers*: "Everybody knows your name."

▶ **BOB
FINNIGAN**

Being on the board and the executive committee and becoming president is a great learning experience, not only personally but for our business as well. I got a much broader knowledge base, and that plays in to our long term planning for our company. For example, Ontario's growth plan, which is going to be the guiding document for the next decade or so, seems to be funnelling us into a certain kind of development. If I wasn't involved, I wouldn't have known anywhere near as much about it as early as I did. I used to be much more wrapped up in the day-to-day.

▶ **LOU
FRUSTAGLIO**

We don't give out as many pats on the back as we should – but that's not really what it's about. You're there to make changes for the industry. When I have new members and even older members tell me: "Hey, this is a great thing for CHBA to have done, it's great information, and it's really going to help me in my business," that makes the time and effort worthwhile.

▶ **DIANE
BUSH**

People grow by taking on leadership roles in the association. I've seen it with other people and experienced it myself. My opportunities gave me the equivalent of a university education: the networking I got to do, the speakers I was able to hear, the better understanding of the issues, and the improvement to how I communicated my thoughts and worked in front of a group. I was able to take all of that back to my business and it was invaluable.

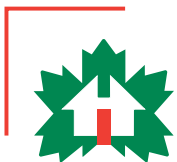
▶ **JOHN
FRISWELL**

Being able to travel and mingle with your peers across the country is great. You get to share information, and see what's going on in different places. So is the fact that you're able to change things – to get out to the public and show what the industry's all about and to take a common front that's good for all of us – you can see it happening, and it's pretty gratifying.

NOTES

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- iii See "The Crisis in Board Leadership", *Association* magazine, Jan 2006, published by the Canadian Society of Association Executives (posted online at www.csae.com)
- iv *Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001*, Independent Sector, 2001
- v Jack Shand, CAE, and Kenneth Thacker, MBA, *The Role of Volunteers in Non-Profit Organizations*, published by the Canadian Society of Association Executives, 2002
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- vii See, for example, "What's Your Communication Style?" on the American Society for Mechanical Engineering website at www.asme.org/Jobs/Manage/Whats_Communication_Style.cfm, and Peggy Grall's "Changing the Workplace – One Conversation at a Time", in the article series at www.justchangeit.com/resources.html.
- viii Mina, op cit.
- ix John A. Long, "Group Dynamics, Power Relationships and Executive Leadership", in *The Association Management Handbook*, Canadian Society of Association Executives, 1989
- x Lawrence C. Ecroyd, "The Role and Behaviour of the Association Executive", in *The Association Management Handbook*, op cit.
- xi Stephen C. Rafe, "How to Get Along With Your Volunteer Leaders", *Association Management* magazine, June 1981, published by the American Society of Association Executives,
- xii This list is taken from CHBA's *Municipal Liaison Manual*, 2007
- xiii Signe Holstein, "Board and Volunteer Orientation and Training", Chapter 4 in *Canadian Association Management*, Jim Pealow and Sandi L. Humphrey, eds, published by Canadian Society of Association Executives, 2005

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