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[Board Cafe](#) [1] • By Tim Wolfred and Jan Masaoka • July 16, 2011 • [Email](#) [2] [Print](#) [3]



Let's turn our attention away from the departure of long-time executives to the arrival of the next executive directors. Here are 12 easy and important ways for board members to help a new executive get started fast and on the right foot:

When a new executive is hired, a board usually works extra-hard for weeks or months. In addition to meetings about candidates to make the hire, board members often take on additional tasks, such as managing a fundraising event or overseeing the audit.

How the board and board members can support a good transition:

1. Ask a board member (perhaps the vice president) to be the **ED Transition Adviser** for six months. This person can check in with the new executive, touch base with board members on how they see things going, and make sure the board continues to pay attention to a successful transition.
2. Write and send out a **press release** either by email or hard copy. Send it to local and neighborhood newspapers, local ethnic presses, newsletters for your organization's field (i.e., disabilities or theatre) and your national office and affiliates (if you're a chapter organization such as Planned Parenthood), and local television and radio stations.
3. Don't forget: the **most important recipients of the press release are probably not the press**. Send it to funders, donors, significant volunteers, former staff and board members, city officials, and peer organizations. They'll appreciate the news, and it will give you a chance to tell them more about the new executive and spark their interest in working with her.
4. Have the board president or chair **introduce the new executive to the staff**. Doing so sends a message that the board has hired this executive, who reports to the board, to manage the staff.
5. At a board meeting, **make a list of the influential people** your new executive should meet and see which board members can set up coffees or lunches with them. A board member can invite the new executive to a lunch with other Chinatown leaders, for example, or schedule a coffee with the school superintendent.
6. **Make a personal donation** to the organization now to demonstrate your confidence in the new executive and the organization's future. Bonus: She'll really, really appreciate it.
7. Set up the new executive for success by giving **positive messages** to the community about him, especially ones that point the way for working together. Example: "We are so thrilled we were able to hire him; he's just what our organization needs for the future. In particular, I think you'll appreciate his experience with innovative programs involving kids and sports." If you have private reservations about the new executive, keep them to yourself.
8. **If you're the board chair**, take extra care working with the new executive on board meetings and board packets. She'll just be finding her way in a new environment, and you can help find a balance between what the board is familiar with and her style as it develops.
9. Take your new executive out to lunch, and listen. Don't forget that he's in the process of forming his big ideas,



and you can help him by listening, asking questions, and encouraging him to be creative and bold. You can also help him think through which kinds of issues need to come to the board and which are appropriately up to him. Remind him what the board expects in terms of support and information from its executive and, in turn, ask him how he'd like to be supported by the board. A relationship has a better chance of thriving when the expectations of all parties are explicit.



10. Look for opportunities, especially at board meetings, to praise the new executive. "The directions you're talking about are just the ones we're looking for," or "The board packet was excellent -- I especially appreciated the inclusion of the article about changes in funding for neighborhood arts."

11. Even the best baseball players work with batting coaches and fielding coaches. Let your executive know that the board supports her use of organizational funds to pay for a coach -- perhaps in fundraising, or public speaking, or general leadership development.

12. Don't let all the good feelings distract you from the board's responsibility to establish and monitor benchmarks for performance. Clear performance goals for the first year will go a long way toward keeping the board and the executive focused on what's important. Some boards ask the new executive to use the first 45 days to learn and then present a set of draft benchmarks to the board, while others establish the benchmarks together as part of the hiring process. Either way, be sure the board fulfills its responsibility to oversee its chief executive. If things begin to go bad quickly, having established benchmarks will allow early termination. If things go well, these benchmarks will be a contributing factor for this success.

See also in *Blue Avocado*:

- [How Much to Pay the Executive Director](#) ^[4]

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