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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Advice, insight from past board presidents

By Barry VanderKelen

Many nonprofits have just started a new fiscal year, and there is a new person leading the board. Who better to understand what it takes to lead an organization than those who just completed a presidency?

I asked some of those who recently completed their terms to share their wisdom. Each one responded to the question, "What do you know now that you wish you'd known at the beginning of your term?"

"Make sure your board has the necessary background information it needs to make proper decisions. As chair, you are privy to more details than the average board member who attends just one meeting per month.

It's important to take time necessary to 'set the stage' and make sure your board is up to speed on all facts that are pertinent to the decision that must be made."
--Beth Marino, San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce, 2008

"I wish I knew the value of taking the extra effort to keep all board members fully appraised, especially during times of change in the organization. Of course, times when the organization

and board business is intense may be the most difficult period to squeeze in the time to keep the news flowing to board members."

--Herb Kandel, Dana Adobe Nipomo Amigos, 2008-09

"Recruitment of new board members has to be an ongoing process and it's everyone's responsibility. Life circumstances cause some people to drop off which means we need to continually recruit."

--Al Amaral, Community Counseling Center, 2008-09

"We all know life gets in the way, especially in the world of volunteerism. I've learned that you have to keep the board engaged not only on meeting day, but throughout the month. Everyone's world moves in different directions and ways. The challenge is find the button(s) that when pushed create the most productivity for the organization."

--Carl Dudley, United Way of San Luis Obispo County, 2007-09

"I wished I had known about and was more knowledgeable about how organizations operate. Gaining the proper balance in the relationship between board and staff makes the organization that much more productive."

--Marilyn Blake, San Luis Obispo Little

Theatre, 2008-09

"Each day brings different tasks and challenges. You can't please everyone, but you can resolve to do your best. Transparency is healthy, and you need to stay focused on the big picture. An enormous amount of work goes into the final product, so everyone is important and must contribute what they can."

--Sandy Dunn, San Luis Obispo Symphony, 2007-09

"If I had known how much extra time and 'brain space' I would have needed to do my job as president more effectively, I would have allocated much more time for that. I found that it was a challenge to juggle family/work/volunteer demands."

--Laura Murphy, YMCA of San Luis Obispo County, 2008-09

In light of the current economic recession, Kandel states: "I'm glad I didn't know all that I know now. Being naïve of certain details fueled me through more work than I would ever have agreed to take on if I knew it was coming!"

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Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.