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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Searching for the right board members is critical

By Barry VanderKelen

Why do some nonprofit board members leave before the end of a term? Since losing a team member slows the momentum of the organization, how can this disruption be prevented?

To answer these questions, I spoke with Lyn Baker, a local community leader who served as president of such boards as the Foundation for San Luis Obispo County Public Libraries, Cambria Community Healthcare District, Festival Mozaic and the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation. She has worked with a wide variety of organizations and people during her board service. "People leave most often because they joined a board without realizing the responsibility and feel over-

whelmed," Baker explained. Sometimes, life circumstances change and continued service on a board is not possible.

Baker has learned that the process of recruiting and orienting new board members is critical. Being honest about the expectations of board members before someone joins allows people the opportunity to adjust their view about what it means to be on an organization's board.

"It's rare when someone leaves a board in a huff," Baker said. "When this happens, something serious is going on." And she points out both the individual and the board may have had a role in creating the tension.

For example, when a board member doesn't think an or-

ganization is adhering to its by-laws and policies, that person has the duty to bring the matter up in a constructive way. The rest of the board has the duty to listen respectfully and address any real issues that are identified. If that person doesn't feel heard, then it may be time to leave.

"It's more important to be heard than to be agreed with," Baker said.

Everyone benefits when the responsibilities are clear, the length of a term is defined and people feel like they are making a contribution.

Barry VanderKelen is Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation. He can be reached at barry@sloccef.org.

Resource Use

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

Nonprofit Business Column of *The Tribune*

Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes a bi-weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community.

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Each column is reprinted as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@sloccef.org.