

Boards Are The Life Blood of Organizations, or They Should Be!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I'm a big believer and promoter of civic involvement. This doesn't mean that I expect everyone to run for political office. But there are lots of opportunities for many of us to serve on the various boards and committees of organizations, groups, or entities that we all belong to. It never ceases to amaze me, or perhaps disappoint me, that it seems like the same people serve on all the various boards around town. I know it's the same people because I keep seeing them at board meetings!

Someone once said that the world is run by those who show up. Organizations all over the country seem to be struggling with maintaining members. There's so many groups, organizations and causes to belong to it's easy to be overwhelmed. Or you get involved in so many that you don't spend very much time in any of them. Then the people who feel most responsible agree to serve on the board of directors and before they know it they are overwhelmed. After they become overwhelmed the common next step is to resign from the board and it becomes a vicious cycle.

Entities are so desperate to fill vacancies on their board that they start begging people to serve. They'll say things like, "Oh, we just meet once a month for an hour or so." Or, "there's not really much to it, show up and vote on a few things once a month." But sadly, this approach isn't fair to the potential board member or to the organization. New board members all of a sudden are being asked to make some tough financial decisions for the organization or they are being asked to do evaluations of paid staff and they were never given the tools to know how to do this properly.

By virtue of my job and position, I serve on a lot of boards, often in an ex-officio capacity. But I also have served on boards of organizations that I belong to. I've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of boards from both sides of the table. I've also had the pleasure of helping boards learn how to be more effective in what they do.

To this end, I am teaming up with the Junction City Chamber of Commerce to teach a session on "Board Governance". This is going to be a 90 minute crash course on how to maximize your effectiveness on a board. During the session I will help you learn how to determine your responsibilities. I'll talk about the importance of separating yourself and your daily business from the role you serve on the board, which is sometimes a bit tricky! We'll briefly discuss liability issues. We'll also discuss some of the dreaded mechanics of how to help make sure that your board has a quality meeting including how to plan out the meeting and set up a proper agenda before the meeting so everyone knows what to expect at your next meeting.

The session will be this coming Thursday, August 29th from 10:30 until noon. We will be meeting at the Opera House and the cost is free! But I will guarantee that even though it doesn't cost anything, you will still learn a lot from it. The only catch is that you need to call the Chamber of Commerce Office at 762-2632 ahead of time, at least the day before, to register. This session is open to anyone who is serving or may be thinking about serving on a board of directors, an advisory board, a not for profit board, regional board, elected body, just about any kind of board where you have a meeting with an agenda. Please take a couple hours out of your day to learn how to be a better board member and a more involved citizen!