

CHAPTER 10: DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION'S STRUCTURE NEED TO BE MODIFIED?

The key to organizational effectiveness and longevity of your organization is recognizing the leadership's need to be representative of your organization and for that leadership to grow with the organization. As you begin to plan for the bar year in which you will lead your organization, you may wonder whether your organization's structure should be modified, particularly if you believe that your organization is not functioning as effectively as you believe it should.

To answer this important question, you should first thoroughly review your organization's by-laws to gain an understanding of what modifications may be possible. (It may be necessary to amend your by-laws if you decide that modification of your organization's structure is desirable.) Second, you will need to assess and evaluate your organization's current structure, the roles of your board members and committee chairs, the purpose and success of your board or governing council's meetings, and your organization's general membership. Consider the following questions in your assessment:

- **Evaluation of the Structure of your Board**
 1. How many directors are on your board? How are your directors selected?
 2. What are their terms of office?
 3. What specific board responsibilities does each member have?
 4. Does every member of the board have responsibility relating to the budget?
 5. What role does each Board member play relative to the committees? Are Board members liaisons between the Board and the committee? Or, are committee chairs Board members?
 6. Has the Board specifically given each committee a definable charge?
 7. Is there a mechanism to permit the board to grow in size?
 8. Consider the flow of work. Drafting an organizational chart may be helpful in considering this issue.

- **Evaluation of the Role of your Directors (Leaders)**
 1. What specific authority does the President (Chair) have in terms of the day-to-day operations of the organization?
 2. What responsibilities do other Board members (Chair-elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and others) have?
 3. If the organization is a section of a "senior" bar, does the President or Chair have a voting voice on the senior board of directors?
 4. What members of your board are part of an Executive Committee, if you have one?
 5. What authority do they have in making decisions without full Board approval?
 6. Is full Board ratification required for every major decision?
 7. Is Board approval required to authorize committee expenditures?

8. Does the President or Chair have the authority to act in situations requiring immediate attention and seek approval later, if approval is required?
- **Evaluation of Board Meetings**
 1. What do you accomplish at your board meetings? Do you review the budget? Do your committee's report regularly? Do you have guest attendees?
 2. What would you like to accomplish at your board meetings?
 3. Do your board members attend regularly? Do you have an "attendance policy"?
 4. Do you spend a considerable amount of time revising committee agendas or acting on committee recommendations?
 5. Are you informed of committee projects, goals, and their agenda? How specific are reports from the committee chairs?
 6. How much of each meeting is devoted to budgetary issues? Would it be helpful to spend more or less time on budgetary matters?
 7. Are budget development decisions made at meetings other than the regularly scheduled monthly board meetings?
 - **General Evaluation of your Organizations Membership**
 1. How many members do you have?
 2. What percentage of your members are active members?
 3. Has your membership increased or decreased significantly over the last number of years?
 4. Does your budget reflect any incline or decline in membership?
 5. Has the organization expanded the number of programs it produces?
 6. Have the number of committees increased to assist in new program development?
 7. Has any expansion meant additional committee assignments for each director?
 8. Is an expansion (or reduction) of the Board warranted to accommodate any incline (or decline) in membership and/or programs?

As you consider these questions, you should be able to make an overall assessment of the size, structure and success of your organization. You may decide that your organization's structure could benefit from relatively minor modifications. On the other hand, you may decide that a complete overhaul is the recommended course of action. The Affiliate Assistance Team offers the following pointers as you proceed:

- **Know the facts.** Review organizational documents, policies and procedures. Familiarize yourself with your organization's past and ongoing projects and/or events. Speak with former leaders of your organization. Consult with your organization's staff members, if any. Attend other board meetings if you have an opportunity. How is your organizations senior bar association structured? Is this a model?

- **Develop a plan.** Discuss ideas with your organization's current and past leaders. Do you have the necessary support to implement either minor or major modifications? Are the changes you would like to implement allowed by your organization's by-laws? Are you willing to amend your organization's by-laws or would you like to work within those by-laws? Answers to these questions may determine what you can or cannot do as you embark on your modification process.
- **Be realistic about your goals.** Consider your organization's total membership and willingness of your membership to participate in projects. Understand that major modifications may be time-consuming and will have an ongoing effect on your organization. Reasonable and realistic goals are the key to success.
- **Do not recreate the wheel.** Consult with experts for assistance and advice. Discuss your ideas with past organization leaders, past and current senior bar leaders, your executive bar director, and your state bar association (if applicable) and the ABA YLD.

In short, modifying your organization's structure may seem like a daunting task, but it may be the first step in improving the effectiveness of your organization and implementing organizational goals. Please contact any member of the ABA YLD Affiliate Assistance Team if you would like assistance in assessing your organization's current structure and/or determining the future needs of your organization, or if you would like additional substantive recommendations based on your assessment process.

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