



BoardLink

Your connection to effective bar governance

Board Members as Bar Ambassadors

Taken from "This Quarter's Main Motion," in the Spring 2012 issue of BoardLink

Over the years, we've devoted a lot of space in BoardLink to the board's fiduciary responsibility, particularly its direction-setting and oversight roles. In this issue, we'd like to address a role that tends to get short shrift because, frankly, we tend to take for granted that everyone already knows and understands it. That's the board member's role as ambassador for the organization.

Like all the other board member roles discussed in this column, the ambassador role is grounded in board members' legal responsibilities. The Duty of Care and Duty of Loyalty require board members to protect the organization's assets, and those assets include the organization's reputation. But beyond the expectation that, as board members, we don't do anything to harm the organization's reputation, most boards expect that board members will *actively support and advance* the organization's positive reputation with members, within the profession and within the community-at-large.

In other words, it's not just the president who sets the tone for the organization. Our members, our partners in the profession, our donors and community leaders are all influenced by the engagement demonstrated by the board of directors. So what makes a great ambassador? Below we've listed a handful of great practices. None of them are difficult, but they take time and attentiveness. Talk about them with your board, prioritize them, and make a commitment to carry out those responsibilities that will advance your organization best.

So, how can you be a great ambassador for your bar organization?

1. Show up and be visible by committing to:

- Put all the organization's must-attend events on your calendar early.
- Talk to at least three people at every event you didn't previously know.
- Sit with members you don't typically see. At large, sit-down events, each board member might host a table, for example.
- Introduce or connect at least four people.
- Make sure your name is on the list of contributors. Provide financial support at fundraisers. If money is an issue, commit your time.
- Deploy board members strategically. Presidents and staff: Do you hold events where representation from two or three board members is adequate? If so, don't ask everyone to participate. Make assignments and spread the responsibility throughout the year.

2. Play a part in the membership recruitment and retention effort by committing to:

- Develop a 30-second elevator speech that describes why the bar is important to you and why a lawyer should join or stay a member.
- Contact lapsed members to find out why they haven't renewed and encourage them to do so.
- Identify colleagues (especially within your firm or practice setting) who are not members, and encourage them to join.
- Reach out to individuals from underrepresented groups.

3. Cultivate member engagement and be on the lookout for new leaders by committing to:

- Be a point person for information about bar activities within your firm or place of employment.
- Bring a less-involved attorney to a committee or section meeting.
- Contact a new member and invite them to meet you at an event.
- Have the board host a formal welcome for new members.
- Reach out to individuals who may not be as well connected with the bar: new lawyers, solos, and government attorneys, for example.
- Encourage two colleagues to take on more responsibility within the bar.
- Identify two individuals each year who you think would make great future leaders. Share those names with the president and the executive director.

4. Help get the word out by committing to:

- Actively represent the bar in everything you do in the community. Look for opportunities to share what the bar is doing in other aspects of your personal and professional life. For example, share information about a bar resource that may be relevant to members of your church, synagogue or mosque.
- Support the bar through social media. For example, “Like” the organization on Facebook, and periodically comment on bar activities in which you participate.
- Be attuned to opportunities where the bar may have a role or be able to assist. Be sure to discuss those opportunities with the president and executive director before making any type of proposal or commitment.
- Be a conduit. Share any feedback you receive from bar members or members of the community with the board so that the organization can respond, if necessary.

Again, you can't do it all, so prioritize. Which aspects are requirements for board service? What's optional? Create an action plan for the year, and hold yourselves accountable. Six months through the term, evaluate your performance:

- How have we performed as a governing body and as individual board members?
- Are our efforts making a difference?
- Do we need to do anything differently?

With a plan, you're giving the board a greater chance for success and yourselves an opportunity to have a more meaningful board experience.

Does your board have other ways it carries out its ambassador role? [Share your ideas.](#)