

“Get Your Board Involved in Change through Strategy” by Jeff Rendel, Certified Speaking Professional

Your credit union’s board of directors might seem like the last place you would anticipate change. Taken together, your board exists for member representation, dedicated leadership, fiduciary matters, and ensuring the longevity of the credit union. Boards of directors are about permanence and not change, right? Perhaps, not.

As credit union leaders, we always ask ourselves, “What’s next?” as we accept that continuous reinvention is necessary to remain relevant for our members. New products, services, and technologies are the authority of executive teams; however, boards of directors should see change strategies as a sphere they retain as partners with management teams. When it comes to strategy, boards of directors should fine-tune and lead change with management.

One exercise that works well with directors is to, as a full board, develop a list of ten strategic initiatives or goals that would serve the credit union well. From that board-developed list, ask your board to select three that hold the highest priority. Naturally, the CEO in all of us is attentive to the danger that directors might drift into the jungle of operational matters. Task your board’s chair to keep all ideas out of the thicket and focused on long-term strategy.

As CEO, conduct the same exercise with your management team. When your ten ideas are winnowed to three of the highest priority, compare your list with your board’s list. Have you found areas of consensus? Odds are high that you have discovered a new strategic direction. Areas of difference? A deeper conversation is necessary to determine practical and relevant strategies for your credit union.

For example, one mid-sized credit union discovered that its board and executive team wanted to expand the branch footprint of the credit union. However, the board listed a neighboring state as an area for expansion, whereas management saw the west, east, and south sides of the metropolitan area as the most likely areas of immediate success. After a meaningful discussion, the strategy was set to grow the branch footprint, first in the local area, but with an eye (and regulatory approval) toward a natural fit in the state next door.

Directors who learn to lead change through strategy with their chief executive represent an irreplaceable advantage. One credit union CEO puts it best: “I need a robust set of thinkers on the board who know more than just the market place; they know our members. When we change as our members expect change, our credit union moves forward with our members. That leads to growth for our members and credit union. I always want our board of directors to push me to the next level of change and success for our members.”

As you plan for 2015 and beyond, consider increasing your board’s involvement in leading change. When board guidance complements management execution, your credit union’s members benefit

from an enterprise committed to right and relevant change; as well as a place of permanence – through change – in their lives and communities.

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