

Board Member Personalities & How to Work with Them



Personality Style	Description	What to Try
The Big Idea Person	Spontaneously suggests LOTS of things the Board should take on.	Acknowledge idea, say you should add to “the list” or refer back to strategic plan (which you should have)
Rambler	Takes the floor and “thinks out loud.” Tends to go on and on.	Timed agendas State that time is limited, must move on out of respect to others, “would you see me after the meeting so we can discuss” or refer to committee if appropriate
Negative Nelly	Insists that “it will never work,” or “We tried that before and it was a failure.”	Ask for their ideas (and if they are good ones, are they willing to take it on?)
Debbie Downer	This person’s negativity sucks all of the oxygen out of the room.	Make a practice of opening board meetings with one good thing they’ve done, seen or heard related to the EF. Soon board members will look for good things in between meetings.
Just Can’t Let it Go	Brings up the one mistake or the bad turnout that happened “that one time,”	Meet privately, ask what they would (have the EF) do differently, What are they willing to do to fix in the future, etc. “I can tell this still bothers you so I wanted to make sure we had covered it all.”
Micro-manager	Thinks that being on the board makes them the office supervisor	Bring in president’s help. If it’s the president, will have to have a truthful meeting. Use “I” words instead of “you” words. Ask for priorities, do they want to carve out a meeting time weekly so you can use their time more effectively?
Space Cadet	This person rarely responds to correspondence, appears to be unprepared, or asks questions that indicate they didn’t prepare for the meeting	Ask if they are getting your emails, because you feel like they are missing information and you want to be sure it’s being received, etc. Ask each time it comes up, letting them know that it is noticed.

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If you have troubles/conflicts

- Confront the issue head on, and in person. Don't do it alone; ask President or other officer to help
- Focus on the organization, not the person. You need for them to change a behavior not because they are a "bad person," but because doing so will be better for the organization & your clients/donors
- Reminder that we are here to serve the students and our focus should be on the outcomes, not the differences
- Specific examples of the reason changes are needed. Don't be general, such as "you don't care enough" but rather "You've missed 3 meetings". Look for successful outcomes, the "win/win" situation
- Listen – State your desired outcome and stop talking.
- Sometimes you just have to remember that "this too, shall pass"

"Conflict is inevitable but combat is optional." Max Lucado