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Props at the Board Meeting

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The chief elected officer is given a gavel. Its purpose is to convene the meeting and maintain order. What else could be on the board table to enhance the meeting?

Consider props. Props are used to augment an experience. For example, a magician has a wand to improve the effect.

Stuffed Squirrel – Board conversations can be exciting. An idea is proposed and without considering how it fits into the budget and strategic plan, it is chased up a tree and down a rabbit hole. The toy squirrel reminds directors to avoid the chase.

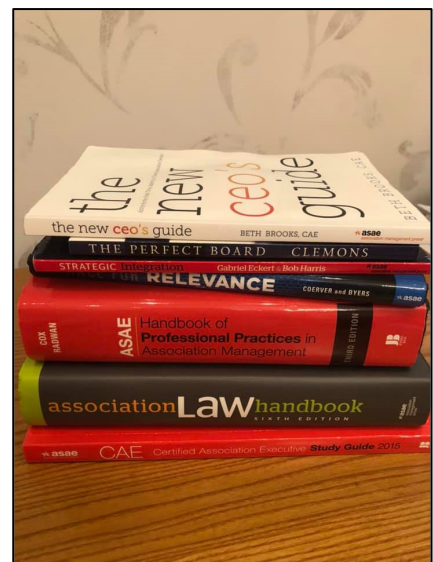
Tent Cards – The most valued real estate on the board table is the reverse side of the name tent card. Facing directors should be the mission and vision statements, to frame all discussions and decisions.

Toy Helicopter – When conversations go low, the helicopter reminds directors to gain altitude. Having it on the board table is a reminder that the board sets direction rather than doing tasks of committees and staff.

Weed Wacker – Conversations can drop into the weeds. A discussion about the annual convention might end with, “which dance band should we hire?” Without a Weed Wacker, rely on a sign that reads, “We’re in the Weeds.”

Rubik’s Cube – For every good idea, recommendation, and motion there is an impact on other programs, budgeting, and staffing. The Rubik’s Cube reminds directors that a change in one program will impact others. And they should look at every side of an issue.

Books – Place a book on the board table for a subliminal message, such as “Good to Great” or “The Speed of Trust.” Books can remind volunteers, “We can’t afford to be just good enough, we have to be a great board of directors.”



Ballcap – When directors enter the boardroom, they should wear their governance hat. They might forget to take off their local chapter hat or to leave personal business and conflicts outside the room. Don't be surprised to hear another director ask, "What hat are you wearing when you make that suggestion?"

Strategic Plan – Format the multiyear strategic plan to be laminated and always on the board table. Directors should check it often to be sure they are working within the roadmap. If not on the board table, print it on a pop-up banner or display it as a poster in the boardroom.

Props might seem dramatic. Yet if they keep conversations on track and add some levity to the meeting, what can it hurt?

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

