

# How to Cultivate a Great Board



How do you find,  
educate and retain  
members who take on  
board leadership?

Nora Riva Bergman®

## Gardening “101” - Board Basics

The Board is responsible for setting the policy for the association.

- **Planning:** Creating the mission and vision statements and strategic plan.
- **Personnel:** Hiring the executive director, evaluating the executive director. The board approves salary scales and personnel and administrative policies for the association.
- **Finance:** The board approves the budget for the association and approves major contracts and grants.
- **Public Relations:** The board is the public face of the association. Everything board members do reflects on the association.



# Gardening “101” - Board Basics

## Board Member Responsibilities

- Working with and providing support to the executive director.
- Preparing for and attending Board meetings.
- Setting policy in alignment with the association’s mission and vision.
- Documenting policy decisions to create institutional memory.
- Orienting and mentoring new board members.
- Taking reasonable care in making decisions.
- Avoiding conflicts of interest.
- Acting in the best interests of the association.



# Gardening "101" - Board Basics

The board members should not . . .

- Micro-manage the day-to-day operations of the association.
- Give assignments to staff members.

The board members should . . .

Create a list of typical decisions and agree on whether they should be made by:

1. The executive director alone?
2. The executive in consultation with the board?
3. The executive in consultation with the president?
4. The board alone?
5. A board-appointed committee?





# How to Cultivate a Great Board

- **Deciding what size flower bed is best.**  
Big board? Small board?
- **Growing stand-out board members.**  
Keep a hot-house full of candidates.
- **Choosing your plants.**  
Remember the most beautiful gardens have a variety of different flowers.
- **Planting.**  
Orient your board for success.
- **Feeding.**  
Keep your board healthy and growing.
- **Weeding.**  
Gardens need regular weeding to stay healthy and beautiful. So does your board.

## Deciding what size flower bed is best.

Big board? Small board?

The number of members on your board should not be too big - or too small - but just right!

But how do you determine what is just right?



## Deciding what size flower bed is best.

**Larger boards** - about 15 members are useful when fundraising is a main function of the board. Bar foundations may want to consider a larger board that includes fundraising subcommittees.

**Smaller boards** - Seven to nine member boards can operate more informally and more quickly.



## Growing stand-out board members.

Keep a hot-house full of candidates.

- Seek out people who have experience working with the association.
- Grow new board members in your committees & sections.
- Look for potential board members who compliment rather than duplicate each others strengths.
- Provide opportunities for those who want to serve but who are not ready for the board.
- Give your Young Lawyers Section a seat at the board table.
- Assign board mentors to committee & section chairs who have expressed an interest in board membership.





**Growing stand-out board members.**

Keep a hot-house full of candidates.

What can your bar association do  
to grow stand-out board members?



## Choosing your plants.

Remember the most beautiful gardens have a variety of different flowers.

- Board members, the executive director, *and* key staff should work together to identify people who can strengthen the board.
- Keep a running list of potential stand-out board members.
- Create a sub-committee with the task of listing potential candidates.
- Interview potential candidates in advance.



## Choosing your plants.

Remember the most beautiful gardens have a variety of different flowers.

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Private/Public Practice
- Large Firm/Small Firm/Solo Practitioners



## Choosing your plants.

Remember the most beautiful gardens have a variety of different flowers.

### Diversity = Creative Solutions

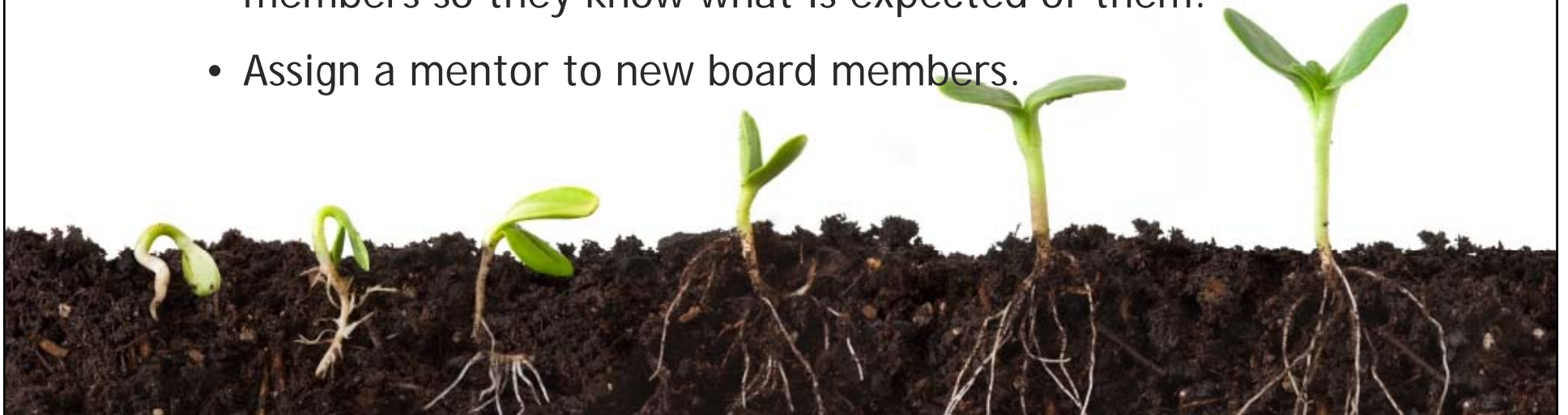
- A diverse board is more likely to consider various perspectives & come up with creative solutions, if . . .
- They recognize that a diverse board also presents potential conflicts.
- They understand that there are not “good” or “bad” boardroom styles.
- The president encourages participation from each board member - especially the “quiet ones.”



# Planting.

Orient your board for success.

- Orientation is critical to the overall success of your board and to bringing new board members up to speed quickly.
- Orientation should begin during the recruitment and nomination process.
- Responsibility for effective board orientation should be shared between the board and the executive director and staff.
- Create a job description to provide to new board members so they know what is expected of them.
- Assign a mentor to new board members.



# Planting.

Orient your board for success.

- Before the first board meeting, schedule a meeting between the new board member(s), president, executive director and any other key individuals in the association.
- Provide a detailed board member manual, which should include:
  - Mission Statement & Strategic Plan
  - Bylaws & Articles of Incorporation
  - A thorough description of programs and services
  - Current budget & recent financial statements
  - Minutes from the previous year
  - A list of board members and contact information
  - Lists of committees, sections and chairs



# Planting.

Orient your board for success.

What can your bar association do  
to improve your board orientation process?





## Feeding.

Keep your board healthy and growing.

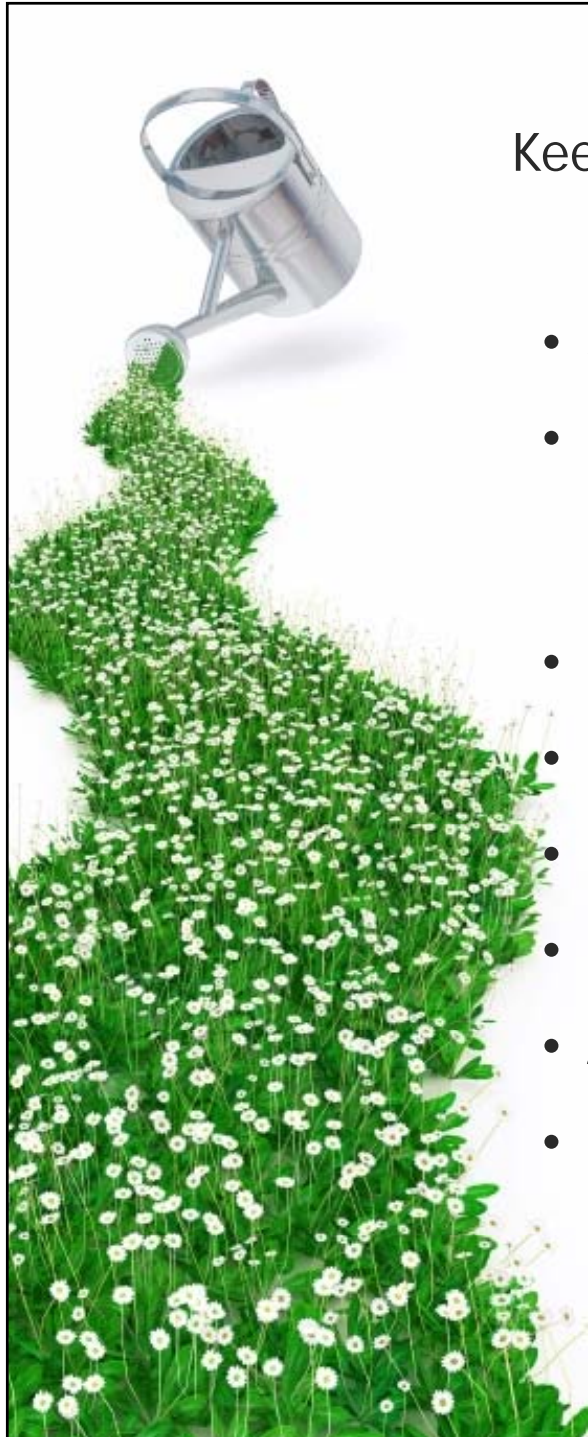
Create a culture of respect for each other.

- Listen to understand, not to judge.
- Put courtesy first.
- Be visibly prepared.
- Take your seat.
- Be professional.

Create a culture of respect for the staff.

- Ask for *and listen to* staff input on critical issues.
- Provide staff development opportunities.
- Say “thank you.”



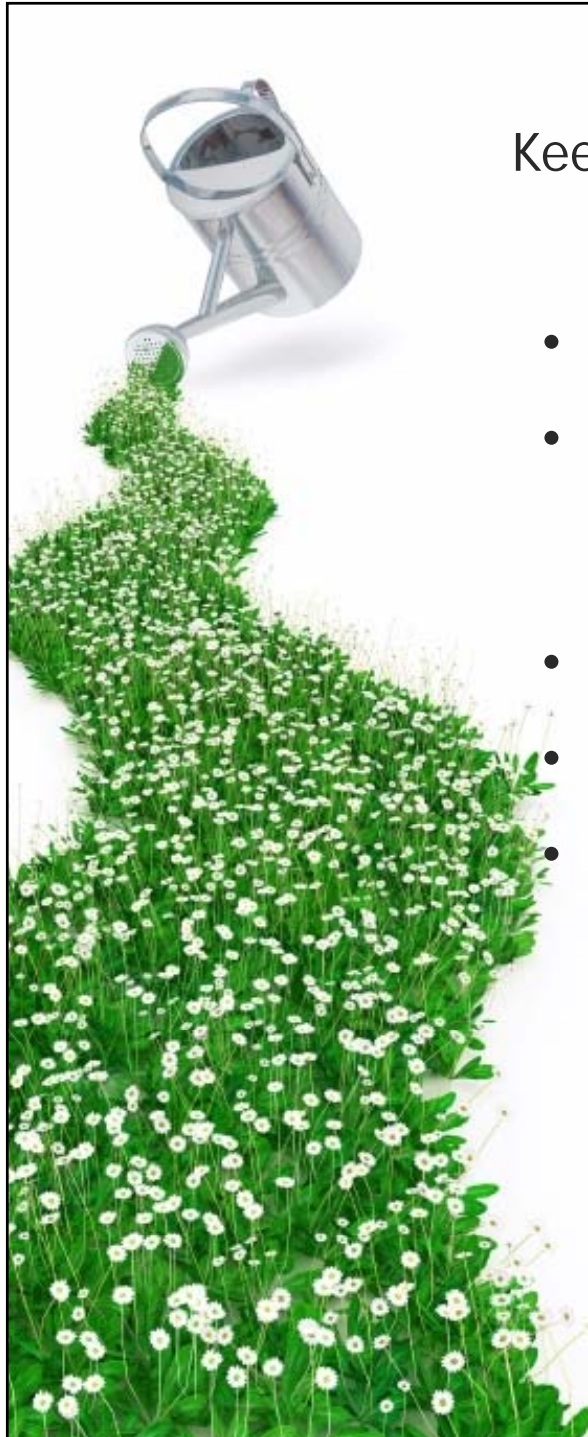


## Feeding.

Keep your board healthy and growing.

### Hold high-quality meetings.

- Set and stick to the board agenda.
- Provide information in board packets that gets members thinking about an issue *before* the meeting.
- Bundle routine items into a consent agenda.
- Condense administrative matters to a single vote.
- Discuss financials at the end of the meeting.
- Be able to move beyond details.
- Allow input from all, domination from none.
- Use an outside facilitator for difficult issues so that no member can nudge the discussion in one direction.



## Feeding.

Keep your board healthy and growing.

Make your board meetings fun.

- Serve food. Cookies & milk. Chips & dip. Popcorn.
- Have a food “theme.” All things chocolate. Healthy. Mexican. Favorite childhood candies. Pastries. Cheese (& wine after the meeting).
- Give a meeting a “cause.” Food drive. Book drive.
- Start at odd times.
- Plan a board dinner after the meeting.

**What can your bar association do  
to make board meetings fun?**

## Weeding.

Gardens need regular weeding to stay healthy and beautiful.  
So does your board.

- Include provisions for removal in your by-laws.
- Require attendance at board meetings and maintain an attendance log.
- Talk to ineffective board members.
- Ask members to rate the effectiveness of other members - 3 best/3 worst and why.
- Evaluate the board utilizing 360 degree feedback and a facilitator.





We reap what we sow.

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