

What's On Your Board's Tool Belt?

Every board needs to refresh itself. One way to add “fresh eyes” is by bringing on a new board member. Sometimes that's good and necessary. Another way to look at “refreshment” is to consider what tools are on your board's tool belt – and how often directors use these tools.

All directors use the “management driven information” tool. Directors receive pre-meeting materials from the CEO and often receive in-between meeting updates. The content discusses strategies, “strengths and opportunities,” and may suggest alternative views of particular matters. It's an important tool.

Other tools that many directors use include: executive sessions during meetings; a pre-board meeting dinner with management; the annual strategic retreat. Lesser used tools are listed below. Which ones would help your board add value?

Board Tools:

1. Environmental Scan. Ask management to provide a summary sheet in the “no discussion required” section of the board materials. The scan should highlight national and local news about the company, competitor news, industry trends, analyst comments and other key information. Engaging an independent provider for this scan is a valuable option.
2. Site visits. Get out of the boardroom and visit company plants, stores, offices. Tour and receive updates from operators who do not regularly appear at board meetings.
3. Invite an outside expert to a board meeting to lead a discussion on one agenda item.
4. Annually, participate in a “white board” session, either at your retreat or make it an agenda item during a regularly scheduled meeting.
5. End of the meeting questions. Ask, “How did we add value today” and “What could we have done better?”

Individual Director Tools:

6. One-on-one conversations with key executives. Managers present and lead board discussions. Make it a priority to arrive for board meetings early and have breakfast or lunch with one of these managers each quarter.
7. Look at social media. Scan twitter and other social media outlets to see firsthand what others are saying about your company.
8. Periodically google the CEOs name, the company's name.
9. Read industry magazines or newsletters.
10. Participate in an independently run full-day board education program. Then comment on a key takeaways at the next board meeting.

BQs are published monthly. Discuss your answers in the executive session at your next board meeting. It could help your board become more effective.



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