

## TOP TAKEAWAYS

### Making Effective Presentations to Your Board

These are the top takeaways from the roundtable on **Making Effective Presentations to Your Board** moderated by Steve Barth on November 17, 2011, during the NDI Executive Exchange, a segment of Foley's 2011 National Directors Institute. Featured participants included Thomas F. Kissinger, Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary, The Marcus Corporation; Marya M. Rose, Vice-President – Chief Administrative Officer, Cummins Inc.; and Nancy R. Tuor, Group President and Executive Sponsor for Sustainability, CH2M Hill, Inc. These takeaways reflect the input of the audience members in addition to the individuals just mentioned.

#### 1. What Does Board Expect / Want?

- **Talk to Board Members in Advance of Meetings.** Speak with your Board Members before meetings. Ask the Board about what issues they would like to address. Make sure to dialogue with Board members before and after meetings. Open lines of communication to Board members will lead to effective meetings.
- **Introduce the Board to Middle Management.** Board members want to meet people “on the ground”. Increase touch points between middle management and the Board. However, prepare middle management ahead of time. Help them create an effective presentation.

#### 2. Focus Your Message

- **Use the Power of the Written Word.** Provide written information to the Board in advance of meetings. Have clear headings, and highlight the questions you want to ask. Ideally, use the same formatting for your information before every Board meeting.
- **Provide Clear Decisions and Action Steps.** Be very clear with your Board on what decisions you would like them to make, or what actions steps you want them to take.
- **Present Options with Reasons.** When you need the Board to take action, present the Board with options, your reasons for the options, and your recommendations. Options are critical. Boards want to choose between presented options – they do not want to come up with their own options. Be sure to let the Board know the costs of different options.

#### 3. Think and Act “Strategic”

- **Keep Your Presentation at a High Level.** The key is to provide your Board members with everything they need to know, and nothing they don't. Do not provide details unless they are necessary for the Board to make a decision.

#### 4. Visuals Must Be Clear And Concise

- **Remember “10 in 10”.** For any presentation, have no more than 10 slides, with no more than 10 words on a slide. Do not use “eye charts”. Be clear, brief, efficient, effective, and when possible, funny.

## 5. Be Briefer Than Brief

- **Prepare a Short Presentation.** Prepare a short presentation, but be prepared to give the presentation in even less time than you are officially allocated. Often, Board meetings go off track, and you end up with a compressed window time for your presentation.

## 6. Leave Lots of Time For Q&A

- **Anticipate Questions.** Brainstorm potential questions from the Board in advance of any meetings, and practice your answers. Answers should be short and to the point. Take time to understand the context of the question, as the context will give you a clue as to why a Board member may ask a particular question.

## 7. Practice, Practice, Practice

- **Practice Your Presentation.** Practice your presentation multiple times in front of different high level officers of your company. Simulate both giving your presentation and answering questions.
- **Remember, Board Members Absorb Information in Different Ways.** Make sure your presentation addresses the proclivities and learning methods of your particular Board members.

## 8. It Is Not a Speech

- **Build “Dialogue” into Your Presentation.** Do not talk at your Board. Rather, speak with the Board. Have a conversation.

## 9. Professional But Engaging Tone and Demeanor

- **There are No Dumb Questions.** Take every question from a Board member seriously. Do not get into arguments with Board members. Answer their questions, and offer to address any concerns at a future date.

## 10. Avoid These At All Costs

- **Avoid Conversational Tangents.** Often, a Board can go off track on conversational tangents. Keep the Board focused on the issues at hand.
- **Avoid Disengagement.** Boards want to be involved. Avoid items or language that will lead to disengagement. Do not have complicated slides. Avoid the use of iPads or similar devices, if you think the devices will distract the Board.
- **Avoid “Too Much Information”.** Present a focused message, and then use strategic repetition to keep the Board engaged. Tell the Board what you are going to tell them, tell them what you want to tell them, and then review what you told them.

### For more information

For more information on the Making Effective Presentations to Your Board session, please feel free to contact the moderator directly:

Steven Barth  
Foley & Lardner LLP  
[sbarth@foley.com](mailto:sbarth@foley.com)