



Ousting Board Members Via Term Limits

Term limits are one way that nonprofit boards can address ineffective or difficult board members. While they're not the perfect solution in every case and might create their own issues, the benefits of term limits far outweigh the challenges, according to James Mueller, author of the new book, "Onboarding Champions: The seven recruiting principles of highly effective nonprofit boards."

Mueller founded the consulting firm, James Mueller & Associates, in 2005 after serving as chief operating officer at Grenzsbach Glier & Associates and holding executive positions at several nonprofits.

"I can count on one hand the number of times I have seen ineffective or difficult board members gracefully separate from a board," in more than 40 years working with boards, Mueller wrote. "Removing a board member is risky and potentially embarrassing, and I have not encountered even one board chair who is comfortable with the task." Term limits are one way in which those situations can be addressed, he said.

An organization is better able to adapt to changing needs when it changes the composition of a board. Mueller argues that term limits can:

- Be more attractive to busy, productive people as opposed to a perpetual commitment that requires them to resign if they want to end their service.
- Provide the impetus to think about recruitment strategically and for the long term, stepping back to think about what the board needs in terms of character, competence, connections and culture.
- Help prevent stagnation and bias as board members could lose the ability to see issues with fresh perspectives without new members joining the board.
- Help maintain diversity and balance, providing consistent opportunities to recruit people with diverse or underrepresented points of view.
- Allow boards to release members who are not suited to the responsibilities of governance, allowing non-engaged members to cycle off without the potential for embarrassment.

Term limits are no panacea, Muller warned. "Even when a board has term limits, careful vetting of candidates remains critical. Don't get caught up in the trap of

thinking you can change disruptive or difficult behavior. We carry on in life in a way that has evolved from childhood through our life experiences."

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