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The Stewardship of Boardmanship

When I was an academy principal, I dreaded spending time in committees, never imagining that in a few years, my primary job would be to sit in board meetings all day! As a union vice president for education, I served on eight academy and two college boards. As a division vice president for education, I served as an advisor to 15 college/university boards and conducted training sessions for 10 boards. Now, as a college president, I oversee plans for four board meetings each year. As time passed, I realized that I truly loved attending board meetings and rarely looked at my watch to see when they would end.



Richard C. Osborn

Why did I change my attitude? I realized that just as God made us stewards of this Earth, I was a steward for Him in my board service. When I attended a board meeting, I always asked myself, "If my children attended this school, what would I want for them?" Six biblical principles guided my service. Let me share them with you.

1. The Lord built this school.

In Psalm 127:1, we read, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (NIV). When the financial or personnel challenges seem overwhelming, I remember who actually made the institution possible and continues to guide its operations.

2. Our purpose as a board is to share with our students the good news of the gospel.

In Joel 1:3, the Bible instructs us: "Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation" (NIV). When I focus my responsibility as a board member to ensure that the "telling" continues between generations, I pray that God will sanctify my service and make it even more faithful.

3. We are the body of Christ as a board.

Being an effective board member is a spiritual gift (see 1 Corinthians 12). The body of the church is a unit with many functions (vs. 12), and one of these functions is serving as a board member. Paul emphasizes in verses 25-27 that "there should be no division in the body" (NIV) with each having equal concern for the other. As board members, we are the body of Christ. When we disagree, I am comforted to know that we can still be unified.

4. Safety exists in boards.

Proverbs 11:14 reminds us: "Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (NRSV). When I wonder about decisions made by boards or fret about why boards take so long to reach a decision, I am reminded that when people collaborate, their decisions are usually wiser and better accepted than those of an autocratic leader. This does not mean that every board decision is correct, but more often than not, collaborative decisions are better than those made by a single person.

5. As board members, we are called to be servant leaders.

Jesus was the world's greatest servant leader. In Mark 10:43, 44, He admonished that "whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (KJV). We can make our decisions in bold humility, remembering that just as Jesus served others, we too can be servant leaders.

6. We are God's stewards and copartners in creation.

David L. McKenna, in his 1991 book published for the Association of Governing Boards, *Good Stewardship: A Handbook for Seminary Trustees*, suggests that our service as board members is rooted in the biblical story of Creation, when God charged human beings to be trustees of all that He had made. Since God inspired the establishment of our institutions, it is our duty to serve as their trustees or stewards.

When I take into consideration these six biblical principles of being a board member, I realize that there is stewardship in boardmanship.

As you read this special issue of the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, may you find renewed stewardship in how you conduct your boardmanship. ✍

Dr. Richard C. Osborn is President of Pacific Union College in Angwin, California. He has served as an academy teacher and principal, union and division vice president for education, and has logged many thousands of hours of service on various school boards.