



Term Limits for Boards

by Joyce Godwin

Organizational continuity and a sense of the history of a ministry and its vision, mission, and values, its dark periods and its time of joy and celebration—these are extremely important. But so too is the opportunity of bringing new people and their ideas, challenging questions, and new insights into the governing process.

Increasing the size of the board is not the answer for bringing in new blood. Governance committees that prayerfully and deliberatively work on a qualified-oriented process to develop and maintain a rolling three-year plan for charting anticipated vacancies and upcoming openings due to term limits, identifying future board and leadership needs, identifying potential candidates and interviewing same—this is the better way!

Do you think there are board members that you just can't live without? Think again! There are creative ways that you can continue to have a relationship and take advantage of the unique gifts of some of your board member "graduates."

When there's an extraordinary reason for a former board member to return to a board because his or her unique background is so important to a ministry at a particular time in its history—that is doable. Even a year's "sabbatical" can bring some fresh thinking to the board table.

Your board members are not

"disposable." Using them until the expiration date and tossing them aside . . . you may be littering the road with treasures that not only can be "recycled" but can contribute in a far more productive and meaningful way. Your exceptional board members should be treated as the treasures they have been—and can continue to be for your ministry.

In reflecting on the new members who have joined 14 of the boards in which I've been heavily involved, a smile comes to my face. Were it not for board and term limits, I would never

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new people and new ideas
to boards.”***

have had the privilege of meeting or knowing each individual. I reflect on the new insights they brought to the boardroom and all the "stupid questions" they said they were asking that were big breakthroughs to the entrenched thinking of those of us who had been around for a while. They were "new blood," bringing nourishment and oxygen to the governing process.


The dictionary says "term" means a limited or definite extent of time duration. It is good to have a term or "endurance policy," so a ministry doesn't take on the persona of its more active governance body members. This can be quite limiting to a ministry.

The gifts a ministry needs from its board members and officers differ over time. Awareness of this, as well as new gifts and experience needed for the next season, are some of the positive fallouts of term limits.

Boards flourish with new members and officers chosen in a prayerful, deliberative process.

Think about the disciples. Would they have blossomed if Jesus had stayed with them?

Three years.

Three years that changed the world. 

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