

8 Essential HOA Board Member Traits

By: The Avalon Management Group, Inc.

Serving on an HOA Board provides a way to take an active role in maintaining your community's value, security, and aesthetics. In this position, with a wide range of personalities and perspectives -- not to mention a detailed set of regulatory guidelines to adhere to -- it can become challenging to accomplish what you set out to do when you initially volunteered.

To be a successful HOA board member requires a specific set of traits like these listed below:

1. Goal-Oriented: Setting goals in work and life help do to more because there is a formal list of things you want to get done or where you want to make certain improvements. It involves looking ahead and making plans that guide the intended results.

That same trait can be useful in the association management setting to focus on each quarter and year to make your community better. For example, if you set property maintenance and amenity upgrade goals that align with your available resources, then you will spend more time enjoying the community rather than dealing with a costly repair crisis.

As a board member, work with other members to establish a clear vision to complete quarterly goals. Include community members in getting feedback on what they would like to improve or change.

2. Financially Literate: With a significant inflow of monthly association dues, a board member must manage and budget that money in a way that ensures a fiscally healthy community. That means you need to know how to oversee financials, maintain cash flow and reserve funds, and make sound financial decisions about how and where to spend money. The level of financial knowledge and skill necessary is akin to what's required to operate a business. And, like a business, you will have stakeholders (community members who pay their monthly dues) to answer to about how you spend their money.

Before taking on the role of an HOA board member, it's a good idea to increase your financial literacy through an online course, books, and/or workshop. You can also learn from others in the property management industry that hold classes about HOA financial management.

3. Open-Minded and Flexible: No one has been successful in business by staying the same or sticking with the same processes that they've always used. That's because everything is changing around them, and what might have worked well once doesn't forever. But, if you are open to change, you'll be more likely to create an innovative, forward-thinking HOA.

While an HOA community often feels like its own world, the reality is that it is part of a bigger society where trends and changes impact those who live there. For example, with the advancing importance to be more environmentally conscious, you, as a board member, should be considering community upgrades like solar panels, LED lighting, or drought-resistant landscape materials.

Also, being open-minded means recognizing the value diversity plays rather than seeing the differences as conflict waiting to happen. Each board member has different backgrounds and experiences and varied skills and knowledge that they bring to the table. Appreciating and leveraging these wide-ranging perspectives will only make your community better.

4. **Fair:** Emotions often run high among community members. If they are dissatisfied with how issues are being handled, then they will vocalize these to the Board. It's critical that you are able to look at situations rather than the people involved in them, using the Association's rules and regulations as your decision-making framework.

Knowing how to balance individual and community needs is integral to board member success because you are looking to the overriding impact on everyone. That means having the ability to be firm and tough, yet agreeable and willing to work with members of the community.

Every situation you encounter as a board member will be different. You have other board members that you can confer with as a checks and balances system. And, with the right property management company partner, you also have an more advisor to help ensure you have addressed everything fairly.

5. **Consistent, Collaborative, and Communicative:** These three traits are important on an individual basis but even better if you have -- and use -- them all. All three traits can build trust and understanding with others, including other board members and those in your HOA community.

As a board member, being consistent means always delivering information and completing your work when and where you say. Collaboration and communication involve being transparent with information related to the community.

Providing regular updates like newsletters and emails as well as asking for feedback keeps all community members involved. Also, creating committees that include more community members is another way to exchange ideas and give everyone a voice.

6. **Professionalism:** When situations become heated in a community, members often become angry and take it out on those that they can see. In this case, that's board members. As a result, you need to develop a thick skin and not take these things personal. Instead, in your leadership role, it's important to remain professional and courteous to everyone regardless of what they say.

The best approach is to stay calm, ask questions, listen to what's said and, if possible, look to provide a solution. Look at each community member as a successful business would view their customers, and you may be able to diffuse the anger and win them over.

7. **Honesty:** It's important to be ethical in everything that you do as a board member and as a representative of the HOA community. This means adhering to all the bylaws, covenants, and regulations that govern the board and the community.

It's important to understand and value every legal aspect of your role even if you may not always agree with every rule. Even outside your board role, it's important to value honesty in everything that you say and do because it reflects on your reputation in the community.

8. **Tech-Savvy:** You may already be a lover of gadgets and like to stay current on the latest technology like virtual assistants, connected devices, and more. At the very least, you must be willing to evolve with the times as a board member, understanding that technology can improve community relations. For example, that might mean offering a community app, digitizing all

forms and board paperwork, providing mobile devices like tablets for board members, and/or using live stream video feeds for board meetings.

Besides being aware of what technology is out there, even more beneficial is having a board member who is savvy enough to understand how it can be used to benefit the HOA. This includes increasing transparency so everyone is aware of what the board is doing through shared digital documents and information access. Also, technology can enhance and speed communication across multiple channels as well as improve member experience through secure online payments.

Traits in Action

You can develop and improve these HOA Board Member traits over time. These admirable traits may get you elected to the board, and they can influence and enact greater change in your HOA community.

For more information about community associations, please visit our website at: AvalonWeb.com