



Be a Better Board: 6 Tips for Improving Meeting Dynamics

Not everyone you meet is exactly like you. Attend any HOA board meeting, and you'll know this is the case. Each board member and resident is unique and has different viewpoints, backgrounds and preferences when it comes to your community. And while having a diverse group of opinions and perspectives on your board can be a great thing, it can also lead to challenges and conflicts that can manifest in board meetings.

One of the ways you can build better relationships and hold successful board meetings is to partner with an experienced and knowledgeable community management company. They can help you develop a solid vision and give you the tools and resources to succeed as a group. The result is a more unified board, which can ultimately boost engagement and enhance your community's reputation and relevance in the broader market.

To begin setting you and your community up for success, here are 6 tips to improve meeting dynamics:

1. Prepare, prepare, prepare

Before your meeting even begins, make sure that you've reviewed the agenda. A responsive and accessible community management company will provide the resources you need to prepare mentally and assess the topics ahead of time. For example, FirstService Residential's policy is to send out a board packet about five days before a board meeting. The packet may include an agenda, suggested motions, answers to common questions and other important information.

2. Keep it professional

It's great to be passionate about your community, but don't turn board meetings into a platform for personal agendas. Treat your position on the board as you would any job, keeping board meetings productive and professional. Make sure the agenda is mapped out ahead of time and your fellow board members know the basic structure and procedures involved, such as making and seconding motions. Work with a community management company to provide you with the training you need to tackle interpersonal issues and communicate effectively.



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FirstService
RESIDENTIAL



MESSAGE FROM JOHN KEMPER

President, Arizona

OUR MISSION: Deliver exceptional service and solutions that enhance the value of every property and the lifestyle of every resident in the communities we manage. At FirstService Residential, it is through this mission that we have grown to become Arizona's leading HOA management company.

Looking back on 2017, I'm deeply grateful and proud of our team for adhering to the mission and core values that our company was founded upon five decades ago. Through our team's dedication and service, we have earned the opportunity to manage several new communities totaling over 8,000 homes as of January 1, 2018. We are honored to have been selected to manage so many wonderful communities and look forward to fostering lasting relationships with board members and residents as we continue to deliver on our mission.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our existing communities for a fantastic year. As we look ahead in 2018, we stand committed to providing you with the same exceptional service that you have come to know as a hallmark of FirstService Residential. We are dedicated to continually improving our services and implementing best practices that help you achieve your goals as a community. Ultimately, it is our mission to help you create a vibrant and engaging community that residents and board members alike are proud to call their home.

We enter the new year with gratitude to all of the board members and communities that allow us to do what we love every day. Thank you for your valued partnerships and for putting your trust in FirstService Residential.

Here's to a great 2018!

Sincerely,

John Kemper, President
FirstService Residential Arizona

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3. Keep meetings short

No one wants to be in a long meeting. And in the case of a board meeting, the longer the meeting goes, the more likely decision-making quality will suffer. As a best practice, try to keep the meeting from around 45 minutes to an hour. By working with a community manager who has the resources and necessary support to plan the agenda ahead of time and keep the discussion professional, you'll be able to keep the meeting concise and purposeful.

4. Create a no-venting zone

Venting can quickly change the tone of your meeting from professional to personal and can often take precious time away from the agenda. To help mitigate venting, it is a good idea to have some limitations surrounding each topic and speaker. For instance, some best practices to implement may be that no one can speak on a topic for more than three minutes, and the topic must also be on the agenda. A knowledgeable and well-trained community manager is adept at facilitating and enforcing these best practices.

5. Adhere to a basic code of conduct

All board meeting attendees should follow a basic code of conduct (outlined in your governing documents) to ensure a respectful and courteous environment. As mentioned previously, a board meeting should maintain a professional tone, as all business meetings require. This code of conduct should include basic rules like time limitations on speaking, who can attend and speak at meetings and members' right to record meetings. If you don't have a code of conduct and need one, a knowledgeable community management company can help you develop one for your board and enforce it.

6. Listen, listen, listen

When it comes to managing board and resident relationships, a listening ear goes a long way. At the end of the day, everyone wants to feel heard and valued. That means when you are at a board meeting, you should give everyone who is speaking your full attention. Actively listen to what each speaker is saying and respond with a summary of what they just said. This doesn't mean you have to agree with each speaker, but you need to offer them a listening ear.



Following these easy tips can help your board function more effectively and unite toward a common goal of improving the community. By working to implement these best practices with an experienced community management company and community manager, you'll be well on your way to smoother, more productive board meetings. These practices can help build your HOA board's reputation, boost your community's relevance in a changing market and positively affect property values.

FirstFeast Recipes

*Classic recipes from
our table to yours*

Slow Cooker Moroccan Chicken & Olive Tagine



Moroccan Chicken and Olive Tagine is a classic “set it and forget it recipe,” which means you simply add the ingredients to a slow cooker and wait for culinary magic to happen. The fragrant, Moroccan-inspired meal tastes labor-intensive because of the many spices involved, so it will certainly impress your guests. Perfect for lunch or dinner, the dish can be served over couscous and garnished with chopped pistachios or almonds.

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a slow cooker, combine all of the ingredients (omitting the cilantro and lemon). Stir contents together.
2. Cook on low heat for 6 hours.
3. When ready to serve, sprinkle with fresh cilantro and serve with lemon wedges.

4 Servings

INGREDIENTS:

2 lbs chicken thighs, boneless and skinless
4 carrots, chopped into 1-inch pieces
1 yellow onion, finely chopped
1/3 cup dried prunes, halved
1/2 cup green olives, pitted
3 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsp all-purpose flour
2 tsp paprika
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp cinnamon
2 tsp ginger, minced
1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
1 tsp salt
Pepper to taste
Chopped cilantro, for serving
Lemon wedge, for serving

RECAP:

2017 FIRSTSERVICE RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

Thank you to the board members and vendors who attended the fifth annual FirstService Residential Conference and Exposition at Talking Stick Resort and Casino!

The conference was the largest to date and drew over 600 attendees from across Arizona. Board members networked with FirstService Residential associates and 107 industry vendors, shared best practices at two educational seminars and participated in free legal clinics with HOA attorneys.

Connect with FirstService Residential on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for updates on this year's expo!

“ I thought it was amazing. The venue was large enough that it wasn't overcrowded. We were looking for some new vendors and I was able to get a lot of vendor information without being rushed. Thank you, FirstService Residential! ”

**– Barbara Rycombel,
Wigwam Creek South**





107 Industry
Vendors

Thank you to our 2017 sponsors:

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For a complete list of vendors that attended the expo, please visit
www.azhoaexpo17.com/vendor-booths

How to Prevent HOA Board Blunders

Everybody makes mistakes.

That's why it's crucial to know what you should and shouldn't do as part of your association duties. By knowing how to avoid common blunders before they happen, you'll help your board successfully build goodwill with the community at large and enhance lifestyles. An experienced community management company can assist your board by providing tools and strategies to help prevent these mistakes. Most importantly, they take care of day-to-day tasks, so that your board can focus on building your community's brand, which will help enhance property values and resident life.

To assist in this area, we've highlighted four common board blunders and included some practical tips for avoiding them. It's important to identify these potential blunders early to save yourself and your board time and frustration.

Board Blunder 1: Your HOA education is limited

Individuals often join a board with great intentions, but limited knowledge. Just as in any new job or position, it's a new experience with brand new responsibilities. If they jump headfirst into "solving" community issues without having any background into these matters, it may lead to disappointment or tension on the board. To help mitigate these problems, every board member needs to start with a basic understanding of what their role is and what is expected of them. This includes getting up to speed on board documents, operations and what it takes to be successful. Veteran board members aren't out of this equation, either. With new legislation, technologies and changes to your competitors, it's important to continue learning as much as you can in order to stay relevant.



How to prevent the blunder: Arm yourself with knowledge

Of course, a good working knowledge of your role on the board begins with an initial orientation. But the most successful board members take it a step further via ongoing board training sessions. An experienced community management company will offer additional board training opportunities, including both in-person and online sessions. Another good way to mitigate a lack of knowledge is to reach out to outgoing board members or the existing board to learn more about community-specific issues that they may not know otherwise. Lastly, you may want to review past minutes to help boost your understanding of your role and the community. An experienced community management company can help you with this step.

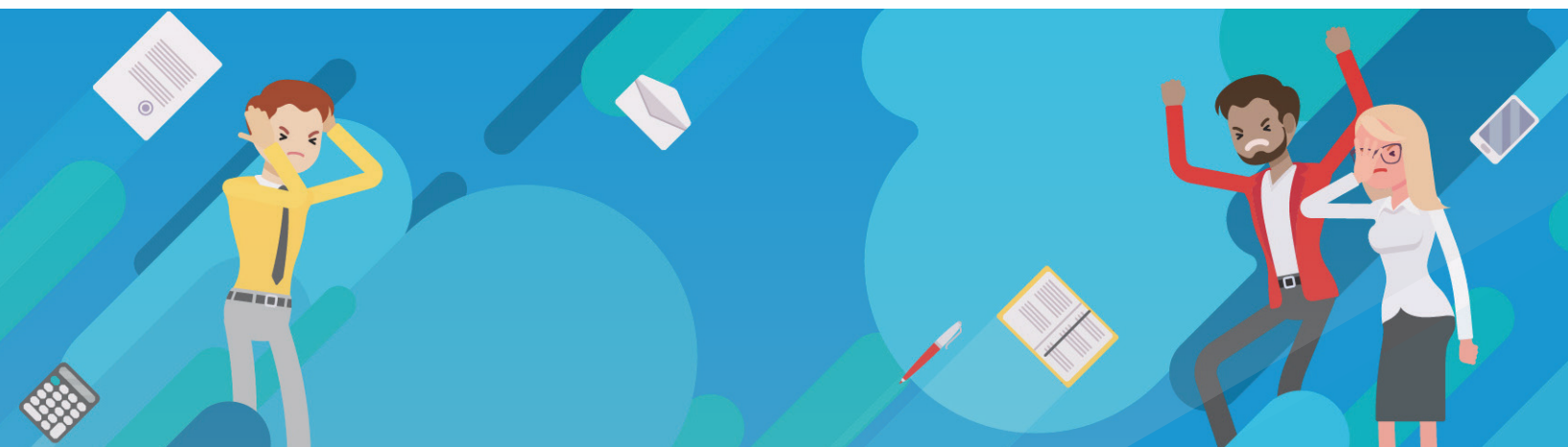
Board Blunder 2: You talk about board issues outside of formal meetings

Even though personal communication is easier than ever, it doesn't mean you have the freedom to say whatever you want about association issues outside of a formal board meeting. In fact, board members should not be talking about any association-related business outside of official meetings. According to Arizona's Open Meeting Law, board business is not to be discussed outside of a duly-called board meeting.



How to prevent the blunder: Follow Arizona HOA Open Meeting Law

First, only communicate about community matters in board meetings. If you're not sure whether you should be speaking about an issue, it's a good idea not to mention it. Arizona's Open Meeting Law applies to other community-



related items as well, not just potential policies or resident issues. Kirk Kowieski, vice president of the Southeast region at FirstService Residential, said “The Open Meeting Law carries into other business matters as well. It requires that legal issues, attorney opinions, appeals and personal, financial and health information of employees or members can only be discussed in a closed board session.”

Board Blunder 3: You are forced to manage day-to-day tasks

Board members have a primary role, and that role is to act as a “policy board,” partnering with their community management company to develop a strategic community plan (SCP) and making sure the latest policies contribute to that goal. But many boards are also forced to perform many day-to-day tasks because of an inactive or unresponsive community management company. Ultimately, your community management company needs to handle all of the day-to-day details (e.g., vendor management, property maintenance, policy enforcement, etc.) in addition to helping you with strategy and planning for the future.



How to prevent the blunder: **Evaluate your management company**

The potential blunder here is not seeking out the support your HOA needs to create a thriving community. That's why it's important to take stock of your community management company to ensure that they are completing the tasks needed to maintain a successful HOA, like managing the financials, enforcing policies and communicating with residents in a timely manner. If your community management company isn't handling these important details and helping you develop an SCP, you may want to sit down with them and discuss. By fully taking on these tasks, your board can partner with your community management company to focus on the big picture: building the community's reputation and enhancing resident lifestyles.

Board Blunder 4: You make HOA business too personal

As a board member, you should approach your role with the same level of professionalism and accountability you would give to any job. Before anything else, your association is a business. That means you should be using a board meeting as a platform for your personal views and issues. Additionally, board members should not be responding or reacting to resident and board-related issues in an emotionally charged way. And that policy applies to both in-person and email communications.



How to prevent the blunder: **Adhere to policies and be professional**

First and foremost, make an effort to bring professionalism to your board meetings. You can help create a healthy atmosphere for your board by steering conversations away from personal or emotional triggers. For example, if you see a fellow board member becoming emotional about an issue, ask for a break so that they can cool off. Respect everyone's right to contribute and have an opinion about an issue, but make sure the conversations are not only respectful, but productive. Your communication outside of board meetings should also reflect this level of professionalism, including in your emails to board members and residents. A good practice to keep in mind? Don't say anything over email that you wouldn't say to the person's face.

Preventing future board blunders

Some mistakes are unavoidable, but you can help avoid future frustrations by addressing potential problems now. Partner with seasoned board members and an experienced community management company. Your HOA management company can give you the resources and support you need to do a better job and tackle blunders before they happen.



Beyond HOA Board Orientation: 5 Subjects to Master

Your continued education as a volunteer HOA board member is more critical than you think. Technology, laws and resident expectations are always changing. By equipping yourself with the latest knowledge to excel in your role, you can make better-informed decisions for your community, which can help improve the resident experience and ultimately build up your association's reputation in the marketplace. A positive impression goes a long way and can help in establishing your community as the choice place to live, which can ultimately bolster property values.

So how do you build on your existing knowledge and work toward being a better-functioning board and improved property values? Start by working with an experienced community management company. They can provide you and your community manager with local in-house training developed in conjunction with continual feedback from clients to make sure that needs are truly addressed.

Your community management company should also offer training in various platforms to line up with board members' schedules. These resources include in-person training, online programs, robust educational articles and white papers and access to industry experts. The question is, what are the subjects that will be most valuable to you and your association?

Subject #1: Your role and responsibilities

Whether you're an association board member for a single-family home community in Tucson, a high-rise in Phoenix or a master-planned community in Scottsdale, you likely took a basic orientation class when you first joined. But that doesn't mean you should stop learning about the standards and laws that apply to your role. Treat your role as a board member with the same professionalism and responsibility that you would give to your day-to-day job. As Kim Rubly, senior regional director of First Service Residential in Arizona said, "Board members should view

their role as serving the members of the community and not feeding their own personal agendas. From a practical standpoint, that means diving into their role with the motivation to learn and absorb as much as they can in order to improve their respective communities.”

Subject #2: Association laws and regulations

Potential legal issues can become a big headache if you aren't familiar with basic HOA laws and regulations. To gain a better understanding of HOA legal issues, first consult with your association's general counsel. You can never replace your association's general counsel in terms of the expertise and resources they offer. However, your community management company should be able to provide you with resources and industry professionals that can help. The best community management companies have a team of individuals who stay up-to-date on the latest legislation and regulations and provide management team members and associations with specialized knowledge and education.

Subject #3: Technology in your community

Technology changes on a dime. The software and communication tools you used in your association five years ago may not be relevant today. That's why it's especially important for board members and community managers to be trained on the latest digital tools and technologies in order to maintain relevance in their community. A proactive community management company will provide in-house software designed to work with all necessary association applications (as opposed to an off-the-shelf solution), complementary seminars and direct support when you need it. Due to the changing nature of technology and increase in cyber attacks, board members and community managers should also learn as much as they can about protecting sensitive association data. To learn more, visit our website to download a white paper on cybersecurity at www.fsresidential.com/arizona.

Subject #4: Financials and budgeting

Every association member may learn the basics about HOA financials during their initial orientation, but it's just as important to take a refresher course. While you don't need to know the nitty-gritty details about all association financials, it's important to have some familiarity with them. For financial topics in particular, your community management company should provide in-person training

sessions so that you and your fellow board members can ask any questions and get a better understanding. FirstService Residential offers a number of resources, experts and ongoing courses on financials, including Budgeting and Financial Planning 101 and Understanding Your Reserve Fund.

Subject #5: Communication and personalities

Finally, to be an effective board member or community manager, you should have a good emotional IQ. What does that look like? It involves establishing good relationships with residents and fellow board members by facilitating open communication and being a good listener. Association communication has its own set of unique challenges, so board members should consider taking courses or workshops created by a knowledgeable community management company. You may also want to expand your knowledge about your own personality through external educational opportunities like DiSC training. Learning how to communicate more effectively will leave a lasting impression on your community and may help you boost your association's reputation in the marketplace.

Knowledge is power, and that is especially the case when it comes to being a successful association board member. By partnering with a proactive community manager and responsive community management company and prioritizing education and training, you'll likely develop better decision-making skills and strengthen your relationships with residents and board members alike. The result? A better resident experience, which overflows into your reputation in the marketplace and can lead to improved property values.

FirstService Residential provides board members and community managers with flexible training sessions, seasoned industry experts and a range of educational resources that incorporate feedback from ongoing surveys to thousands of board members each year like NPS and communication with board members and community managers. These educational resources include in-person training seminars and roundtables and helpful articles and digital resources at www.fsresidential.com/arizona.



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