

Lay Leader & Professional Relationships

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The Handbook of Nonprofit Governance

No matter what the relationship of your lay leaders and professionals are, there is either an implied or explicit “contract” between you. That is, one has expectations of the other, ways of relating to the other, credibility for the other, and confidence in the other.

In developing this unwritten contract, here are some of the elements that should be considered:

1. How regularly will we meet? Where? How will we remain in communication with each other?
2. Can the lay leader/professional be called at home/cell/business? Are there any restrictions?
3. How should notices or correspondence going out over the signature of the chair-person be handled? Can you sign for them? How much does he/she want to be visible?
4. As to publicity, how prominent does your chairperson want to be? If quoted, can you supply the quotes? Does he/she want to be consulted?
5. How will you handle the board/committee meetings? When will you develop the agenda? When will you meet to review the expected process of the meeting? How and when will you review the actions to be taken as a result of the meeting?
6. How will disagreements be handled? How will each evaluate the others performance?

In developing this lay/pro relationship, the following should be considered:

1. Establish the contract and the atmosphere of the partnership
2. Establish and improve trust – be honest, share the good and the bad.
3. Don’t spring surprises, especially in public meetings. After you, the chairperson should know the most of what goes on
4. Keep communication open, not just during times of need or just before and after board/committee meetings. Openly discuss with the chairperson divisive issues and devise strategies as to how these issues will be handled.
5. Create mutual accountability and mutual evaluation processes within the lay/pro relationship.

1. What do Lay Leaders bring to the Lay/Pro Relationship?

- Expertise in a variety of technical areas which the organization couldn't afford
- Influence to attract financial, human and public relation resources.

- An objective point of view of operations; the capacity for critical review
- Knowledge of various facts, issues, traditions and standards of the community.
- Ability to affect change in the organization.
- Collective wisdom
- Continuity of policy, programs and services.
- Preservation of the democratic process.
- Commitment to the continuity of Jewish communal life
- The sanction of the various external publics.
- The ability to be a spokesperson.

2. What do Professionals bring to the Lay/Pro Relationship?

- Expertise in his/her profession
- Commitment to the continuity of Jewish communal life.
- Basic knowledge of the purposes and operation of the organization
- Objectivity in reaction to Lay Leader suggestions.
- Ability to interpret board policy decisions and actions
- Ability to spot operational and financial problems before the board or lay leaders can.

3. What can Lay Leaders reasonably expect from Professionals?

- Attention to details of meetings, conferences, etc.
- Good use of time.
- Complete, concise and accurate information
- Honesty in individual and organizational relationships.
- Prompt return of phone calls.
- Prompt response to requests for information.
- Meeting agreed on deadlines, with advanced notification if deadlines can't be met.
- Adequate preparation for meetings in which Lay Leader must play a leadership role.

4. What can Professionals reasonably expect from Lay Leaders?

- Easy access by phone or e-mail.
- Fulfillment of commitments within agreed upon deadlines.
- Leadership rather than followership; initiation rather than response
- Support in controversial situations based on agreed upon decisions.
- Candid performance appraisal and assistance in performance where appropriate.
- Loyalty, confidentiality
- Organizational knowledge and ability.