

YOUR PERSONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Ever wonder why corporations have boards of directors?¹ In most cases, it is to have a group of people not intimately involved with the day-to-day workings of the business to advise them on how well things are working now and how they should function in the future. They offer strategic feedback and advice, information you can't get anywhere else.

As we progress in our career, we often hit junctions – points where we could use some solid advice. Do I take a job that is offered? How do I handle being given an assignment I feel I can't do well? What might be holding me back from being considered for a promotion? How could I do more of X and less of Y while still seeming valuable? Is this a good time to ask for a raise? Too often, we find ourselves stuck because we don't have all the answers. The answer is to have your own board of directors.

Savvy career-managers understand this. Though there are many names one could apply to the team you may select, your "personal board of directors" (PBOD) makes their role clear. This should be a collection of friends, family, work colleagues and ideally, some people at the next level up in your company. The important criterion is that they be people you trust, both to keep your confidences and to be completely honest with you. We all know sterling practitioners of the "white lie"; these are not the people you want on your board. As a writer, I belong to two critique groups to ensure that I get unbiased impressions of my writing. Family and close friends have to live with me; I value knowing what really works and doesn't in my writing. My groups will tell me the truth.

¹ BODs are required by law for corporations, but in fact, provide real value if the board members are selected carefully.

Unlike a corporate board, your PBOD members may vary as your needs do. When you wish to aggressively pursue a goal, you will want a group of people who understand your abilities, comprehend the challenge and hopefully have some internal knowledge of the challenges you will face achieving that goal at your company. Your mentors should be a part of this group (and if you don't have at least one, start working on that). Mentors should be people who can assist you in formulating a career goal, working on yourself to be ready for it, laying the groundwork so the company can understand the value and then help you "seal the deal."

At another time, you may face a personal challenge, such as a health issue or family problem. Then, your PBOD is more likely to be your closest friends and trusted family members.

Have some of these names in mind before you need them. If you want a person to invest time in you it helps to let them know you might be asking for this help before you need it. Even before you perceive a problem, your PBOD may. "Career-limiting behavior" may be detected while you still have a chance to fix the problem if you have people on your team watching out for you. It's a good part of your personal disaster recovery plan, though the PBOD is good in many situations, not just disasters. But as with any DR plan, having it in place before the disaster means you can rely on it when you need it.

What's in it for your board members? While not everyone will agree to help you out, many will be flattered to be singled out to help you. Others may like the idea for themselves and be willing to work out a reciprocal arrangement. The two rules to make this work are to gracefully accept any criticism or suggestions and to respect your PBOD by not expecting a huge investment in time. As more people begin to learn about this concept, it will be easier to get people on board. We can all use a helping hand.

Your PBOD doesn't have to be a formal entity, like a corporate BOD. Yet, you do have to put some thought into it. Make a vow to start writing down names today, considering who could be of most service to you. Start a tidal

wave of support, which, unlike Hurricane Sandy, will bring the seas of positive change washing over you.