

Like Basketball, Master the Fundamentals to Improve Association

Bob Harris, CAE

“Get the fundamentals down and the level of everything you do will rise,” said Michael Jordan of NBA fame. The principle applies to basketball and associations.

Basketball engages an array of people and elements, including the players, coaches, owners, arena, referees, fans and media. Every component has to master the basics to be effective.

Associations too have many elements that must interface to achieve the desired results. These include the board and committees, the staff, members, chapters, external stakeholders, the media and allied organizations.

Everything and everyone must work in harmony to have impressive outcomes. Consider how the purpose and behaviors of these elements engage.

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Mission – There must be consensus on the statement of purpose or mission. The statement should clearly communicate the reason for the organization’s work. The mission frames nearly every discussion and decision in the association.

Passion – Directors and staff should rally around the purpose and work passionately to advance the mission. The phrase “butts in seats” as a way to populate a board of directors is detrimental. Everybody on the team should be capable and eager to play.

Determination – It takes drive to work move the ball. The governance and management teams must be committed. Equally as important is developing a culture of trust. Without trust there will be many fouls.

Leadership – The board is responsible for governance. They lead by setting a vision and serving the membership. Boards should desire to be high performing, producing results at every opportunity.

Management – Administration of the association is handled by professional staff. Directors must recognize the distinction between the roles of governance and management.

Strategy – The board and staff create a multi-year strategic plan. A good plan is a signature-quality document. Always keep the strategic plan on the board table and weave it into board discussions to serve as a roadmap.

Performance – The association (like the NBA) is a business. Set performance measures regarding finances, membership, events and outcomes. Report on progress by using dashboards for visual depictions of data and trends.

Evaluation – Continuous improvement is facilitated through evaluation. At the end of every game, or in this case events, board meetings and transitions, progress should be evaluated.

Fouls and Infractions

A foul is defined by rules as a violation of the rules to gain advantage by physical contact. A foul may result in a change of possession of the basketball or free-throw opportunities.

In associations governing documents guide the efforts. Infractions may include disregard for the strategic plan, directors with personal agendas, missing funds, or a lack of respect among leaders and staff.

Finally, there is a significant distinction between basketball and associations. In basketball the NBA has an off season. In associations it's a year round effort with no down time.

Michael Jordan was right about mastering the fundamentals so that results are improved.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

