

I acknowledge the traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. In particular, the local Gadigal people of the Eora Nation – the land on which I work. I pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders both past and present, and thank them for their wisdom handed down over generations.

Developing your new not for profit board. Conversation starters.

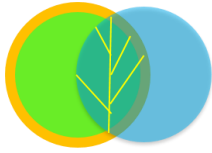
You've had your AGM. Now the all important board development... where do you start?

A David Puls becoming/change blog.

There are no right answers to what constitutes great governance. There are some givens like ensuring regulatory compliance. There are some sensible benchmarks you might use where appropriate.

Beyond that the board needs to be able to adapt its governance and governance style to suit the organisation's strategy and get the most from the board team, to best govern the organisation. And that requires conversations.

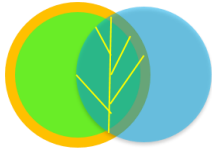




Great governance starts with great conversations.

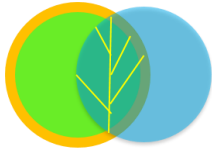
To get you started on great governance, here are some conversation starters that I believe will move you and your board in the right direction. If you want something more detailed I've put a link at the end to some more structured questions about board skills, strategy and leadership. But in the meantime here's ten high level conversation starters.

- **Getting beyond the induction:** board induction will generally include new directors being given documents relevant to their new position (hopefully already read as part of due diligence, but generally not). But what do these documents mean? For example:
 - The constitution is a contract. What does that mean for you?
 - There's a strategic plan that lasts another three years – do you have to agree with it?
 - How is the board charter actually enforced?
- **“Roles of engagement”:** What sort of roles might board members take (questioning, expert, pace setting, representative). What are you? What would you like to be? How can you get there? How can the board support role growth?
- **Understanding required skills:** not for profit boards positions are increasingly focused on skills. If this is a new board role for someone that needs to build skills, how will the board manage skills training or transfer? There are lots of useful governance resources online to get you started. Some that I know well because I contributed to their writing can be found on the FACS website, here: [Good Governance: It's your Business](#). While there is the occasional reference to the NDIS, they're good for everyone.
- **Understanding not for profits answer to different stakeholders:** with increasing focus on skill based appointments there are more board members that don't have previous not for profit experience. What does it



mean when an organisation isn't driven by shareholder value? How will you balance the often conflicting demands of stakeholders?

- **Leadership:** how does the board see its leadership role? How do individual members see their role as leaders, and how do they differ from the board's role? Where will you exercise your leadership – the board, the organisation, the sector, the community? Assume you're being watched as individuals and as a board – if people are modelling your behaviour, are you happy with it? How will you change it?
- **Followership:** not everyone can be a leader all of the time. And leaders can't be leaders without followers. Followership is a highly under rated (or unknown) concept, and yet teams can't function without it. A good follower knows when to trust – when to step back and support. But how and when do you do that within the confines of your duty as a board member? And how is trust built?
- **Ongoing development:** What's your ongoing development plan for you as a board member, and for the board. How will you evaluate your performance and the boards performance? There are lots of ways to do this, but one of the quickest and easiest is for a different board member to give feedback at the end of each session on predetermined criteria – such as keeping to time, quality of argument, focus on strategy.
- **Strategy, strategy, strategy:** as one of the main responsibilities of the board, a good question for the board is how it will stay focused on strategy on an ongoing basis? Do all board papers have a section on strategic alignment? Has the board considered an “inverted agenda” – an agenda that focuses on strategy before formalities? Can you create a strategic dashboard?
- **Setting expectations for the year:** ever heard the saying: “culture eats strategy for breakfast”? A new board is a great time to be honest about what may have gone before, and set intentions for going forward. Things don't have to continue as they always have, but they probably will without new intentions and new actions.



- **In-camera sessions:** this point is a bit more process less leadership, but this is such a rarely used or discussed governance tool the it's worth including. When will you have board members only sessions? What will you use them for? They should be a regular part of board business – how will you include them? Talking about this now avoids that difficult situation of having an in camera session become the focus of staff attention because it's so rare.

For some more detailed discussion starters about board skill sets, strategy and leadership, follow the [link here](#).

If you have questions feel free to visit www.becomingchange.com.au to see what I'm about.

David Puls



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* I don't have a current practicing certificate and I do not give legal advice.