

# Creating a High-Powered Program Board

## by Del Suggs

Even if your board is functioning well, there is nearly always room for improvement. Perhaps you'll get some ideas here that you can use to take your board to the next level. Strive to be a *High-Powered Program Board*.

### Plain Vanilla Organizational Structure

Let's begin by looking at the organizational structure of program boards. Most of them follow the "SGA" Model. You know what I mean-- there is a President or Chair, Vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Maybe committee chairs, "at-large seats," or otherwise designated additional members of the Executive Committee.

Why do we organize like this? Because it's what we know. It's familiar. Is it the best way to organize a Program Board? Maybe, or maybe not. Let's consider some other options.

Every organization needs a Presiding Officer. You can call it President, Chair, or Grand PooBah, but it simply identifies the person who chairs meetings and heads the organization. You also need a Vice President or Vice Chair, to take care of business when the President is absent or unable.

Next, you must have a historian or archivist to capture all the important actions that take place during meetings. It can be the Secretary, or Recording Secretary, or General Note Taker. But you must-- you must-- maintain accurate records of your meetings. These are called the "minutes."

There may also be an officer responsible for keeping tabs on the budget. This can be the Treasurer, the Financial Officer, the Budget Director, or some other title. Often Program Boards skip this officer, because the budget is kept mostly by the Advisor and so the Treasurer's job is unnecessary.

How about the members who actually do the work, who are in charge of specific areas or events? They are generally known as Chairs, a non-gender specific form of Chairman or Chairwoman.

### What's In A Name?

Does all this sound familiar? It also sounds dull. Why should a High-Powered Program Board-- in charge of FUN on campus-- be this boring? After all, you're not passing legislation. You're creating exciting co-curricular events on campus!

Look at some alternative structures and titles. Consider borrowing a page from Corporate America. Change your "president" to "Chief Executive Officer". Make your vice president the "Chief Operating Officer." The treasurer becomes the Chief Financial Officer, and so on. The executive committee becomes the Board of Directors.

Perhaps you could borrow the structure from the entertainment industry. Name your president the "Executive Producer." Name your committee chairs "Producers," who then answer to the Executive Producer. Call your members "Directors" or members of the Creative Team.

Don't just change the titles. Consider the entire "chain of command," who answers to whom. Keep the levels as simple as possible. You don't want too much confusion. Information gets filtered by each person as it's passed along. Keep the command structure as simple as possible.

### Members and Officers

One major, recurring problem with program boards is recruitment. Either you can't get enough members, or they are all from the same clique. The current members recruit their friends, who recruit their friends. Often, program boards consist of a group of 19-21 year old students, programming for themselves.

Diversity is vital, and I don't just mean ethnic diversity. Certainly, you want the ethnic make up of your board to mirror the campus. But does your program board really represent your campus? Are there freshmen and sophomores, or just juniors and seniors? Are there non-traditional students and traditional students, both younger and older students?

You can solve the need to diversify by actually creating positions in your bylaws or constitution that must be filled. For example, amend your bylaws to require four members of the freshman class on your board. That will *make* you recruit freshmen. Or you could call for the Freshman Class President to appoint a certain number of members.

Consider reaching out to other organizations to help you broaden your Program Board. You could stipulate in your bylaws that you have a representative from each active club on your campus-- whether it's the Chess Club, the Black Student Union, or the Spirit Squad. It's always a good idea to bring in new people and new ideas to your program board. If you can't just find them, create a structure that will bring them to you!

### Who's Responsible?

Define the duties and responsibilities of your officers. Spell them out clearly, and make sure that everyone is aware of their obligations. And not just for your officers and executive committee. Make sure the regular members are also aware of their commitment.

But take it a step further. Draft a contract for your officers and members to sign. If "contract" sounds too legal and scary, then call it an "agreement." List the responsibilities for each officer. For example, the President must preside over meetings, appoint committee chairs, and more. A general member of the program board might be required to attend meetings, serve on a committee, assist at events, and the like.

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Having a signed agreement serves a multiple purpose. It will define the duties for each member. It will make each member aware of their duties. It will also add a sense of obligation, even though it's not legally enforceable. You obviously won't be able to force a board member to come to meetings or help with events. But if he or she signs an agreement that lists attendance as a duty, then you know that they are aware of that obligation. It does take things a little more seriously.

## Office Time

Back in the day, Program Board members actually had to physically be in an office to answer the telephone and reply to correspondence. Today, with cellphones, computers and the Internet, you can do all of that work and more without ever setting foot in the office.

But you still need to set office hours.

The problem with working away from the office is simple: procrastination. It's too easy to avoid doing your job if you're away from the office. Most successful professionals such as writers, composers, and other artists, have offices and studios other than their home. It is more conducive to doing productive work.

If you set hours for the officers on your program board, then they will have to be in the office taking care of business. It's not a time to do homework or surf the Internet or play video games. It's the time to review CDs and DVDs of new artists, to create promotional materials, and respond to program board emails. Setting aside just a couple of hours each week to focus on your program board duties in the office-- and nothing else-- will result in an enormous increase in efficiency.

## Time Management Tools

There never seems to be enough time to do everything. And yet, some folks get much more work done than

others. A lot of productive people use good time management tools. Such tools enable you to do more work in less time, and assist you in doing a better job. While it's important to work quickly, it's even more important to do the best job you can.

First of all, have a good scheduling system. It doesn't matter if you use a Blackberry or another PDA, a Day Planner, a plain old calendar, or a pad of sticky notes. What does matter is that it work for you, and that tasks don't go uncompleted or forgotten.

Everything you do in programming, from scheduling events to promotion to election of members, has a deadline and a timeline. A deadline, of course, is when something needs to be completed. A timeline is a list of actions that must be completed-- and when they must be complete-- in order to meet the deadline.

## Timelines Matter

Create a timeline for your events by listing everything that needs to be done, starting at the end. Do it like a David Letterman "Top Ten List."

Let's use my concert for an example. Take a page and have two vertical columns labeled "Date" and "Action." List the concert as the at the bottom of the page: "Del Suggs Concert." Then list the date of the event to the "Date" side: let's say "February 14." Above concert write: "put up posters, and start publicity blitz." Since you want to do that a week before the show, count back seven days, and write "February 7" in the date column. Say the campus newspaper comes out on the first of the month. Write "Newspaper story" as an action. Then find out the deadline for that issue of the paper-- it may be five to seven days before publication. When your find out, fill in that date: "January 21."

When you've finished this action and date list, you'll have a timeline for everything that needs to be done for the event. Try this for your programs. It's like an old school "To Do List" only

with the deadlines for each item. It's a great way to both break down the big event into smaller tasks, and to make sure that the tasks are completed at the proper time.

## Using a Form

Schedules and forms are excellent ways to manage the myriad of tasks involved in activities programming. I've drafted a "Campus Event Form" and posted it at my website for your use. Go to [www.SaltwaterMusic.com](http://www.SaltwaterMusic.com), and click on the "Ed Resources" link in the menu bar. Near the bottom of the page is the form (it is a PDF, so you'll view it with Adobe Acrobat Reader).

This form covers most of the steps involved in presenting an event on campus. Each item (such as "Request Contracts" or "Reserve Venue") has a line for you to date and initial upon completion. The idea is to have a list of everything that needs to be done, and to keep a record of when it gets done. Feel free to change it in any way to fit your own program board needs. I really believe you'll find it helpful.

You can always create your own forms, too, for completing frequent yet complex tasks. For example, I have a personal form I created for tracking every single concert or lecture I present. At the top, I have blanks for the school, date, showtime, topic, and all those little details about the actual event. Then I have a date and checklist of business matters, such as "Contracts Sent," "Contracts Returned," "Promotional Material Sent," and more. At the bottom is pertinent information such as "Accommodations," "Directions to Campus," and a general "Remarks." I even have a blank for "Thanks to:" that I complete immediately after the show, so I don't forget the people who helped me out when I was visiting your campus.

## All That?

Do I have to have a form for all of this? Probably not, because after

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more than 750 college appearances I know what needs to be done. But you and your student programmers probably don't have that depth of experience. In fact, some of your board members won't even know everything that must be done, much less when it should be done. That's why a form can be so helpful.

And, it makes things simple because I can look at the form and see exactly when I send posters to a campus, rather than having to go to my computer database and search. I generally apply Occam's Razor to my use of technology. In Latin, "*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*," which translates to "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity." To paraphrase-- simpler is better!

## Resolving Conflicts

Let's look briefly at conflict resolution. Every program board has conflicts and disagreements between members. Why are there conflicts? Let me give you five quick causes of conflict:

- **Interdependence:** Every member of the board depends on other members for help and support.
- **Differences of Values, Goals, or Beliefs:** Board members can be diverse, and have widely varying assumptions of worth, what is important, and even basic ideas.
- **Stress:** Program board members have an important job to do in producing major events on campus. Sometimes they actually have to take exams and write papers, too!
- **Scarce Resources:** Imagine a program board meeting when the homecoming budget just got slashed *after* the planning was completed. Who gets their event cut?

- **Uncertainty:** Not knowing the outcome of an issue, problem, or concern.

It can be difficult to resolve conflicts. One reason is the concept of winning and losing. If you feel strongly about something, then stepping back from that conviction might make you feel like you lost the conflict. Nobody likes to lose.

Another reason is sometimes referred to as "zero-sum." That's like a balanced budget, where in order to have one thing you have to eliminate something else. So, in order for the conflict to be resolved, someone has to give up something.

The last reason conflicts can be difficult to resolve can be the famous divorce term: "irreconcilable differences." Some times the sides just can't be resolved. In that case, you have to agree to disagree and move on. But when that happens, you can count on conflict recurring.

## Conflict Management and Strategies

Here are some ways to handle conflict. See which strategy works best for you and your program board.

- **Competition:** Essentially, having each side compete against each other. You might see this as a discussion and vote on the matter.
- **Accommodation:** This means finding a way to have both sides win. It can be tough to do.
- **Compromise:** Basically, each side gets part of what they want, while giving up something they want, like a negotiation.
- **Collaboration:** Having both sides work together, and come up with a mutually agreeable outcome. This can be the ultimate team building experience.

- **Avoidance:** Just ignore the conflict. This is a bad choice, because it won't go away by itself.

## Negotiation to Resolution

If you are faced with a dispute among your board members, you may need to take action. Here are some important things to keep in mind when resolving conflicts.

First, prepare for the negotiation. Just because you will be the mediator doesn't mean you can enter the negotiation without adequate preparation. Learn as much as you can about the issue, what is involved, and who is involved. It's important to be ready when you face the two sides.

Second, focus on the process. You do this by keeping the people separate from the problem. If it's a budget matter, that means looking at the budget process and the outcome of that process, not "Brandi wants this much money, and Billy wants this much." Try to take the people-- and the personalities-- out of the problem.

Third, deal with the actual issue or interest, not the position. That means look at the Big Picture. For example, it's less important what program each of the opposing sides wants to present than it is to consider whether the entire event matters.

Ultimately, you want to seek a balanced solution. You may have to pick one side as the winner on occasion. You may find a way to have both sides win sometimes. But true long-term conflict resolution involves compromise and collaboration. The sense that you are fair to both parties in resolving the conflict will go far in reducing future problems on your board. Plus, it's the right thing to do.

## Branding and Marketing

You may already be familiar with the topic of marketing. Sometimes we use other terms, such as advertising,

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publicity, or public relations. However, this time we're not dealing with marketing your board's events (concerts, comedians, films, etc.). We'll be looking at ways to publicize your programming board. And that all begins with Branding.

## Heat Up The Branding Iron

Branding comes from the old West, as you might guess. You've seen cowboy movies where the branding iron is heated red-hot, and then applied to a steer. The scar, like a tattoo, identifies the steer as belonging to a particular ranch. That way, when the cattle were all together in a herd, it was obvious who owned each steer.

In contemporary marketing, branding uses that same concept as a metaphor. By creating a brand, you will allow the public (your customers) to identify your company. And likewise, when your campus events happen (like a herd), it will be obvious who "owns" each event.

## Creating Your Brand

We tend to think of a brand as something as simple as a logo or symbol. It's actually much more complex than that. Branding is a kind of shorthand, or abbreviation. It's a summation of your "product" and all that your product embodies.

Let me give you a simple example. We all know McDonald's, the famous hamburger chain. You might think of their brand as the famous "Golden Arches." But that's really just their logo. Their brand is much more.

Ray Kroc, the developer of the modern McDonald's enterprise had a number of corporate goals: good food, fast service, and consistent flavor at every restaurant. So that's what he created. You know at every McDonald's the food will be reasonably good, prepared reasonably fast, and that it will taste exactly the same at every McDonald's.

How about Nike? You probably think of the "Nike Swoosh", that reverse check mark they use as a logo. Or maybe you remember their famous tagline: "Just Do It."

Again, the Nike brand is far more than that. It includes the athletes who wear their shoes on the field and court. It includes the promise of enhanced athletic performance, comfort and foot protection, and durability.

See-- it's that consistency of the product that is the "brand." It's not just the logo. A brand is like a deal that a company strikes with its customers. It says "this is who we are, and this is what we do." Brands are important because they convey a lot of information very quickly.

## Why Is It Important?

You may be thinking "what does this have to do with my programming board?" Branding is essential to creating a High Powered Programming Board. Let me give you a few reasons.

First, it creates an image for your program board. It makes your board stand out from the other organizations on campus.

Second, it creates more campus awareness for your board. That means more students at your events.

Third, it helps you recruit and retain members. Does your board have too many volunteers? I didn't think so.

Fourth, it improves your "product"-- the events you produce on campus.

Finally, it strikes a deal with your students. Your brand will say: "this is a quality program" to everyone involved.

## Creating A Brand

The first step is creating your brand. Pull together a committee to establish what your brand will be. Begin by creating your organizational mission

statement. Why does your organization exist? What do you do? For whom do you do it?

Then look outside your organization. How do your students perceive your organization? How about the faculty, administration, and staff? Are you unknown? Do you have a negative image to overcome? Do you have a positive reputation you can build on?

The idea is to create a perceived, unique image for your board. Answering all these questions will help you to create a more vibrant and improved image for your organization.

By determining what you are supposed to do, how you are supposed to do it, and what you want your "customers" to think of you, all of this information will help you to create your brand. Sum it up as briefly as you can. This will be your brand.

## Searing The Flanks

Once you've defined your purpose and image-- your brand-- then you can begin to market it. Again, learn from the professionals on Madison Avenue (that's where the big advertising agencies are located in New York, by the way).

Create a brand "message" complete with a name and logo. Maybe today you're just the Campus Program Board. With your new brand, tomorrow you could be "CPB-- We Rock Your World!" Perhaps you'd develop a logo with a globe and the letters CPB, while "Campus Program Board" is in a circle around the globe. Get the idea? Something new, unique, and exciting.

## Consistency In Your Brand

Once you've created your brand-- your perceived image and your logo-- then create a "style sheet" for use. All major corporations have a predetermined style for every aspect of their marketing.

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Using our Campus Program Board example: is it abbreviated as "CPB" or is it "C.P.B."? Is it always upper case, or sometimes "cpb"? How about the font? Is it a serif, a sans serif, or something totally unique? How about the tagline "We Rock Your World!"? Is it always used with "CPB"? Is it all caps, or just the first word, or the first letter of each word?

I'm not just trying to be picky. In your Style sheet, you should standardize your name, abbreviation, spelling, font, case-- everything that deals with your brand. Look at other famous brands. You'll never see Coca-Cola spell "Coke" as all caps. You'll never see Coca-Cola written without the hyphen.

It's that consistency of style that helps to establish your brand, your image. First you create a standard style, then you use it consistently. It really works. Just ask KFC, or IBM, or McDonald's.

## **Use Your Brand**

When you have created and standardized your brand, then it's time to use it. Put your brand on everything you do! It goes on your T-shirts. It goes on your office door. Have it tattooed on your advisor (just kidding...). It goes everywhere your organization goes.

Make sure all of your board members are knowledgeable supportive of your new brand. If you've changed names, stop using the old name. So what if it used to be called the "Campus Committee on Cocurricular Activities." Now you're "CPB-- We Rock Your World!" Use that, and forget about the old name that nobody knew anyway.

Use your brand when you market your events. When you run an advertisement about Spring Fling in the newspaper, make sure your standardized brand is a part of the ad. Even when you put up posters and flyers on campus for an upcoming concert, include your brand on the publicity material.

It's that consistency of use that really establishes your brand. Earlier I said that brands are really a type of shorthand. When you use your brand consistently, and produce outstanding events consistently, then your brand will become synonymous with what you do.

Again, it's like Coca-Cola. They produced a high quality soft drink, standardized their brand style, and used it in all their marketing. Now people will order a "Coke" (meaning a cola drink) while they're standing in front a Pepsi sign. That's branding and marketing!

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