

CEO TO CEO: DISCUSSING STAFF SALARIES WITH THE BOARD; FINDING MOTIVATION

TEXT BY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT, ASAE & THE CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC.

FOUR CEOs ANSWER THE QUESTION:
HOW DO YOU CONVINCING YOUR BOARD
THAT STAFF SALARIES AND BENEFITS
ARE IN LINE? SIX CEOs ANSWER THE
QUESTION: HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE
YOURSELF TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVE?

Q: How do you convince your board that staff salaries and benefits are in line?

Our board of directors approves our annual budget, which contains allocations across programs tied to our strategic plan. Our board members do not receive a salary line item with the proposed budget, but they do see one in the annual audit. The finance committee does have the option to review the salary and benefits line items with the management team before the recommended budget is forwarded for board vote. While we have discussed it, I have never been in the position of having to convince the board regarding staff salaries.

It is clear in my contract that this responsibility is the president's alone. It is also clear in the position description that the board charges the president with "attracting, hiring, retaining, developing, supervising, setting goals, motivating, and evaluating an

outstanding staff." I have found the board to be very supportive of compensating our staff appropriately. The board entrusts me to measure compensation based on retention and achievement of organizational objectives. The board is also aware of ASAE's and other salary surveys that I use as a benchmark.

**Cynthia Mills, President,
National Arborist Association, Inc.**

Generally speaking, the question of salaries does not arise. A listing of staff salaries by position is provided to the board once a year, but rarely are there questions or comments. Board members are informed at that time that salaries, wages, and benefits are in line with the local market for like positions and are in compliance with our internally

established salary and wage schedules. They are also reminded that the distribution of the list is for their information and not for their approval or rejection.

The only question that occasionally arises is, "Why are staff members paid more than the people we represent?" In such a case, I give a detailed explanation of the market in our community, the established schedules, and the data we use to determine what is appropriate for each position.

Mary Riemersma, Executive Director, California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

The obvious answer is to be armed with meaningful comparative salary information. It is not difficult to find useful salary surveys that tie to your positions. Nor is it difficult to get good economic data that describe how your area of the country compares with others. Melding this information can produce a strong case for your salary recommendations.

The much trickier part has to do with making it clear that "we are not you." It is almost instinctive for a board director to extrapolate

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from his or her world into yours. Directors will tend to use their organizations as reference points. The executive's job is to make the case that the association world has different jobs, skill sets, and industry norms. We owe it to our staff members and our organizations to succeed in making this point.

Nelson E. Fabian, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, National Environmental Health Association

The quick response to this question is to always make sure you have or know where to obtain the latest salary statistical data. Make sure that all staff position descriptions are up to date and available for review. Your data should also be pulled together by budget, type of organization, and location. If you have board members from geographic areas where the cost of living is much lower than where your organization is located, have information about your local economy on hand.

Taking a closer look at the question, the word convince pops out. If you are in the unenviable position of needing to convince your board of anything, there may be some underlying issues at play. I would recommend the concept of knowledge-based governance. This taught my organization how to stay focused on the most important issues and needs of our membership. We also acknowledged the partnership that exists among our board, committee members, and staff. If you have a true partnership with your board, you will not be second-guessed, micromanaged, or made to convince board members about staff salary and benefits.

Kathleen Larmett, Executive Director, National Council of University Research Administrators.

Q: How do you motivate yourself to continually improve?

I think of rock music and how when I was 18 I knew all the words to all the top 40 songs and could not understand anyone who didn't enjoy the beautiful melody "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." This reminds me how easy it is to slip, to be quietly left behind by advances in technology or the latest research in our profession. I also think of the association

that employs me and the trust that members have invested in the staff and me. Members trust us to find ways to help them continually improve. That's the reason the association exists. To effectively serve as the chief executive, I think it is important to value continuing education and professional development as highly as members do.

Marge Dover, Executive Director, National Association of Legal Assistants

I strive to expand my horizons and learn through my volunteer activities. When you've been in one position at any association for a number of years, while there are always new projects and endeavors, there is also a sameness to the organization and your job that

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precludes significant growth after the first several years. I look to my involvement in local and state allied societies and in ASAE. In this way, I get to serve in various capacities, learning and hopefully contributing, and meeting new people from whom I can learn.

Eve Becker-Doyle, Executive Director, National Athletic Trainers' Association

It may be trite to say, but motivation must come from within. One must have a desire to be professional and perform his or her job in the best manner possible. This is particularly true when working in a very small office where there is less interaction with colleagues than in other offices and the opportunity for exchange of ideas is not as great. Having said this, one must remember that no one is indispensable. The fact that there are other talented people keeping up with today's fast pace and continually improving their skills is also a source of motivation.

David Cotte, Chief Executive Officer, Textile Care Allied Trades Association.

I motivate myself by networking with colleagues and participating in committees and listservers; reading association-oriented magazines and newsletters, newspapers, and other leisure reading; and keeping a relaxed atmosphere in the office and a well-balanced work and family life.

Patricia G. Spira, President, The International Ticketing Association

One look at the composition of our board would convince anybody to try to improve oneself. Our volunteer leadership comes from the top of the profession - deans from prestigious universities to Nobel laureates. Keeping up with these individuals is both challenging and rewarding. Part of my motivation is to make the organization live up to their high levels of achievement and expectation.

Perhaps the most significant current motivating factor is that we have found ourselves in the midst of a revolution of our key product: our journals. I'm stimulated and excited by what is happening in the publications arena and scrambling to learn more.

Mark G. Doherty, Executive Director, Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences.

As I conclude my career, I am surrounded by young, dynamic, and forward-thinking employees, who inspire me with their enthusiasm. I am doing everything possible to make my final year an example of the highest operating standards, quality customer service, continual curiosity, and fun.

Just because a person is white-haired and has eight grandchildren doesn't mean that she can't be adventuresome, relevant, and innovative. I'm in the second stage of negotiating the merger of two 75-year-old associations with different cultures, disparate management styles, and diverse boards. When this is achieved, I will have come full circle to the dream I had in 1979 when I started this job. Who could ask for anything more?

Danna L. McDonough, President and Chief Executive Officer, Los Angeles City Employees Association.