

# Moving On: Leaving the Board

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**People end board service for any number of reasons, but most of them fall into one of two categories – either you no longer need the board or the board no longer needs you.**

### When you no longer need the board

You may feel that you have outgrown your board role when:

#### **Your goals have been achieved**

Some people join a board with a specific purpose in mind, for example, to oversee a specific project. Once that goal has been achieved, you may decide that it is time to move on.

#### **You have stopped growing**

Many people join a board to improve their skills or encounter new challenges. After a while it may seem that your development as a board member is stagnating.

#### **You feel a need for new or different challenges**

Even if you are still finding your board role challenging, the time may come when you will want to make a change in direction.

#### **Your personal circumstances have changed**

Changes in your work or personal life may leave you with insufficient time to devote to your board role.

#### **You feel a problem has become unsolvable**

Board conflict is not uncommon, but can usually be overcome. Occasionally, however, a board member may have a personality clash with another member that is making her role unpleasant, or there is a major problem she feels unable to solve.

#### **You feel you have contributed enough**

Many board members who are invited onto boards accept the invitation out of a feeling of altruism or a desire to give back to their community. Eventually, a board member may feel she has fulfilled this responsibility and would like to concentrate on other things.

#### **You want to pass the baton**

Many long-serving board members eventually feel an obligation to stand aside from their board role and give someone else a chance to contribute.

## When the board no longer needs you

You may feel that your board no longer requires your services when:

### **Your term has finished**

This is the most common reason for a person to leave a board. Some boards impose maximum terms to ensure a regular and orderly turnover of members, avoiding burnout and gaining new members with new ideas.

### **The needs or role of the board has changed**

Sometimes board members are recruited to use their skills and experience to address a particular project or need. A person brought onto a board with a specific project in mind may feel she has outgrown her usefulness to the board once the project is complete. Similarly, boards can go through different stages of development, changing and adapting with changing internal or external circumstances. It is possible that a changing board will outgrow the need for a member's services.

## Think and rethink

While it can be useful for boards to be exposed to new members and new ideas, it is important to keep in mind that good board members are never easy to replace. Think carefully before resigning a board role. Consider:

### **If your goals have been achieved or you feel you have stopped growing or need new challenges**

Are there new roles that you could take on within your board? Could you work on developing new skills that could be of use to your board?

### **If your personal circumstances have changed**

Is there any way you could continue to serve on the board? For example, if you have moved and find board meetings hard to get to, could you participate via teleconference?

### **If you are dissatisfied with your board or are experiencing friction with a board colleague**

Is this a problem that affects the whole board and that needs to be solved in the long-term? Should you stay on to help fix the problems rather than leaving it to fester? Is there someone you could discuss the problem with (the board chair, for example), who may be able to provide solutions?

### **If you feel you have contributed enough and want to pass the baton to others**

Could you contribute to the board in some other way, such as acting as a mentor to new members?

## Exiting with grace

It is personally and professionally rewarding to end your board service neatly and amicably. Once you have made the decision to leave, think about the ways you can benefit your board, or make things easier for your successor. Some ways you can do this include:

### **Formally resign in accordance with your board's rules**

Don't rely on a verbal indication of your intention to finish your board service; if you have never officially resigned from your board, you could leave yourself open to legal problems much further down the road.

### **Give as much notice as possible**

It is not always easy to find a person with the right mix of skills, experience, time and inclination to take on a board role. Giving as much notice as possible (as much as 12 months) will give your board colleagues the chance to find the right candidate.

### **Replace yourself**

If you know a woman who would make an excellent replacement for you on the board, put her name forward.

### **Be honest about your resignation**

A swift, unexplained exit may be more comfortable for you, but it can be very destabilizing for your board. Explain clearly the reasons for your decision to leave and be sure to give constructive feedback.

### **Agree with the board chair what you will say about your resignation**

Even if you are leaving your board in acrimonious circumstances, do not forget your obligation to act in its interests.

### **Ensure that you leave a history of the work you have done**

Document any lingering ideas or organizational knowledge as this will be invaluable to new and future board members. Also, make it known that you would be happy to answer any questions about work that was carried out during your term.

### **Fulfill all outstanding commitments and refuse to accept any new work**

When your time on the board ends, make sure it really ends. Do not load yourself up with work you have no hope of completing in the time you have left the board.

### **Return all property or material belonging to the organization**

### **Remain loyal**

A board position is for life. By all means if you have legitimate concerns about a board you are leaving, report them to the right people. But remember that being a disgruntled former member can cause problems for a board and will probably not paint you in a favourable light either.

## Tying up any legal loose ends

Your legal liability does not vanish with your last board meeting. In fact, you may be liable for something your board did or didn't do during your term for several years after the end of your service.

Many legal actions are subject to a limitation period. This is the period during which a course of action may be commenced in court. The length of limitation periods varies depending on the cause of action and the province/territory in which the action is to be commenced. For example, actions in negligence typically have a limitation of six years, although this may be extended particularly if one is dealing with a minor. There is a limitation of two years for an action in contract. Actions involving a government authority have particular requirements and may require that notice be given of a possible action in very short order.

Boards need to have in place good risk management practices such as keeping and safely storing waivers of liability and other important records to help protect themselves from potential liability issues.

Before you leave the board, make sure that any insurance held for you extends for an adequate length of time after the completion of your service. It is a good idea to get legal advice about your continuing liability and what sort of insurance you need.

## How you can stay involved

While it is important to avoid interfering in the work of your board once you have left, there are ways you can continue to make a contribution. Some examples include:

- Offer your services as a mentor or advisor to new board members to help ease their transition into the role
- Take a keen, but unobtrusive interest in the board and attend open meetings and other public events that may arise
- Sign up for any newsletters relating to the board's work and keep abreast of relevant issues
- Use your networks to help highlight the board's work
- Become a donor, or offer your services as a volunteer
- Offer to serve on any appropriate advisory committees that may exist and could use your help





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