

WELCOME!

Differing Dynamics Between Civilian and Firefighter Boards...And How to Work with Both



Fire Chief / Staff perspective

Kristy Olme, Fire Chief, North-West Fire

Schelly Olson, Assistant Chief, Administration, Grand Fire



Legal representative to Board of Directors perspective

Linda Glesne, Partner, Collins Cockrel & Cole



 Poll Everywhere

Use your smartphone and

Text “SDA2646” to 22333

What is your role?

Fire Chief/District
Administrator

Board member (fire
service-past or present)

Board member (civilian-no
fire experience)

Fire department Command
Staff / Officer

Other Staff

What word describes a challenge your organization faces regarding Board and Staff relations?

communication
cooperation
lack

What is the biggest challenge your organization faces regarding firefighter (past or present) board members?

Directors attempting to get involved in day-to-day operations

Directors using personal agendas ("My way")

Directors focusing on small line items in the budget

Directors in conflict more than cooperation

Directors overly focused on fire operations vs. community needs

None of the above

What is the biggest challenge your organization faces regarding civilian board members?

Conflicts of interest

Limited knowledge of fire service

Personal agendas

Micromanaging day-to-day operations

Lack of involvement

None of the above

Board's "Lane" within Chain of Command

- Boards are about leadership and governance, direction, mission, tone and vision
 - Long term planning: *“How are we going to continue serving our community?”* *“Can we make improvements?”*
 - Board adopts policy and is responsible for financial management and direction of the organization
 - Board hires, directs, disciplines and retains the Fire Chief/CEO
 - No individual Board member - regardless of office - has any greater authority than another Board member...unless delegated or by practice (i.e. Chairperson works with staff on agenda/primary contact with consultants and Chief)
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Chief's "Lane" within Chain of Command



- Fire Chief/CEO (or others in org chart who report to Board) responsible to implement Board policy direction and manage day-to-day operations
 - Chief takes direction from Board within authority/job description
 - Chief works in cooperation with Board to prepare job descriptions and supervises staff through chain of command
 - Chief manages daily finances, facilities and personnel and regularly reports to Board
 - Chief delegates functions appropriately within organization
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Common Board Chief Interaction Challenges

- Duties of Obedience, Care and Loyalty...as a Group as well as Individual
 - Has the Board given the Chief clear direction and expectations?
 - Is the Chief allowed to do their duties without being micromanaged?
 - Board involvement in day-to-day personnel or operational matters undermines the Chief's authority (the "End Run" problem)
 - The Board hires the Chief to lead and direct subordinate employees. If the Board is unhappy, they should convene an executive session with the Chief.
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Common Chief Board Interaction Challenges

- Do you know what your job description says?
 - Do you have clear direction and expectations from the Board?
 - Is Chief “running the board” vs. being a consultant / advisor / educator to the board?
 - Chiefs also have a “lane” regarding Duties of Obedience, Care and Loyalty
 - Stay within the appropriated funds of the budget
 - Allow the Board to set policy and follow the policy that is set
 - Are you the spokesperson for the District? Do you know who is?
 - Public information is another lane to consider
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Board Members: does your Chief/CEO have clear direction on what the Board expects?

YES

NO

Fire Chiefs/CEOs: does your Board give you clear direction on what they expect?

YES **A**

NO **B**



Civilian Directors

- Might have little or no fire service experience and want a lot of detail about how things work
 - Directors, remember that a fire department/special district is not a private corporation
 - it is a 24/7/365 operation that needs to be flexible and adaptable
 - Chiefs, assure civilian directors of the Chief's (and subordinate staff's) credentials and inform about training at meetings (*Director does not feel they have to become a firefighter to serve on the Board*)
 - Reminder on limited authority of the special district under Title 32, C.R.S. (the District's "Lane!")
 - Chiefs: Consider giving tours of the stations and apparatus to new civilian directors
 - Board Member 101 training is a must!
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Firefighters on the Board



- Knowledge base may create issues with micromanaging operations
- Telling the Chief how “their department” would handle the job
- Chain of Command confusion
 - A volunteer firefighter serving under the Chief and a member of the Board supervising the Chief?
 - Bonus question: Can you be career/paid firefighter and serve on the Board?
- Pension Boards of Trustees and conflicts of interest—what do you do and how does the Chief help directors to “direct traffic”?
 - Trustees voting on increasing or decreasing pension payments, etc.

Common Organizational Issues



- Is the Board hearing complaints about Fire Chief?
 - Or other firefighters/staff?
 - Board has one employee, the Fire Chief
 - Chief supervises subordinate staff
 - Consider executive session
 - Consider outside investigators
 - Grievance Procedures/Board's role
 - Does a Director have the right to disagree?
 - Do they have a right to be openly “disagreeable?”
 - Elected (or appointed) public officials
 - The role of the Board Chairperson in mediating/managing meeting conduct and beyond....
 - Does a Director have the right to ignore the Chain of Command?
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Other Issues



- How to build community

- Ideas from both fire and non-fire sectors
- Team Players
- Connecting with neighboring jurisdictions
- Get involved! Ask good questions, participate in department community events, know other agencies...
- Recruitment and retention: not just the Chief's challenge!

- You took the oath!

- Changing focus from a single purpose to a GREATER purpose
 - You are a part of the team
 - Bring in the POSITIVE! Push out the positive to the community members you engage with
 - Communicate the agency's goals and "gut check" them in the community
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What word describes your organization's greatest success?

“Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.” –Habit #5 of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand;
they listen with the intent to reply.” –Dr. Steven R. Covey



*“A good board is a
victory—not a gift...”*

--Nancy Axelrod (author of
Governing for Growth)



**GOVERNING
FOR
GROWTH**

Using 7 Measures of Success to
Strengthen Board Dialogue and Decision Making

BY NANCY R. AXELROD



Be curious,
not judgmental.

–Walt Whitman



*...and a great
Chief/Board
relationship is
icing on the cake!*



Contact us at:

Linda M. Glesne

Partner

Collins Cockrel & Cole

390 Union Blvd. Suite 400

Lakewood, Colorado 80220

(303) 218-7200

lglesne@cccfirm.com



Schelly K. Olson

Assistant Chief / Public Information Officer

Grand Fire Protection District No. 1

60500 US Highway 40, PO Box 338

Granby, CO 80446

(970) 887-3380

solson@grandfire.org

Kristy Olme

Fire Chief

North-West Fire Protection District

21455 Hwy 285, PO Box 1090

Fairplay, CO 80440

(719) 836-3150

kolme@nwfpd.org