

Leading Boards Mentor New Directors

Use this tool to foster the success of new board members.



This tool is part of the Inclusive Boards Playbooks. In collaboration with directors, national organizations, and leading thinkers, we have compiled these practices and tools to assess your board's practices and activities to create a leading board culture. For the complete playbook, go to inclusiveboards.stanford.edu.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Identify opportunities for growth and areas of strength for your board using the table on page 1.
- For further details and actionable items, refer to pages 2-4 for additional director-sourced and research-backed strategies and tips.

Mentor new board members to foster their success and learn from them. Leading boards have a robust onboarding plan that includes: matching a new director with a buddy, coaching, advocacy, and regular, early feedback.

Self-Evaluation: Mentoring New Directors

Check which areas you have provided mentorship to board directors.

Does your board:	Never			Always	To learn more, go to strategy:
Connect new directors to a mentor matched to best support their successful onboarding.	1	2	3	4 5	<u>1</u>
Provide onboarding about the business and the informal dynamics of the board.	1	2	3	4 5	<u>2</u>
Encourage board buddies to go through the materials in advance of meetings and share perspectives and discuss what might be added or contributed.	1	2	3	4 5	<u>3</u>
Ask about what and how the new director would like to contribute and how they observe current board dynamics.	1	2	3	4 5	<u>4</u>
Suggest ways to engage with other board members outside of meetings.	1	2	3	4 5	<u>5</u>

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Very Often, 5 = Always

Strategies for Mentoring New Directors

These ideas are gathered from board board members who practice, and recognize the value of, mentoring new directors.

1 Create a good mentoring match

Find commonalities.

- Identify someone who can form a meaningful relationship by sharing commonalities or characteristics, such as having a similar background or industry experience or having just completed their first year as a mentee.
- Ask the mentor if they have sufficient time and interest to support the new director.
- Consider assigning multiple buddies to get diverse, more well-rounded perspectives.

2 Onboard and engage for at least a year, preferably two

Clarify the business and board norms.

- In addition to any onboarding offered by the company, share narrative insights about the state of the company. Propose specific topics to learn more about, communicating what topics are on the horizon or priority issues for the board.
- Explain the dynamics or typical rules of engagement. For example, what are the norms of offering opinions versus being invited or called on during meetings.
- Address questions about the work, including the business, relationships, and dynamics.
- Set up orientations on different topics for new members and invite existing board members to join for learning and development.

3 Prepare for meetings and provide support and feedback

Get comfortable with flow and contributions (especially for first-time directors).

- After the board book comes out, share your prep notes with the new director through a pre-call.
- Identify if a topic is something in their wheelhouse, and suggest, *“If you feel you can speak on this topic, I encourage you to bring it up.”*

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- Serve as a sounding board for the comments they want to share in the meeting and offer feedback on whether their thought processes and possible comments are on point, hit any sensitivities, are welcomed by management etc.
- During meetings, especially in the beginning, amplify and support their input so that other directors may see the value of the new director's contributions.
- Offer real-time support during the meeting, especially in a virtual format. For example, offer to keep your texting open, and tell the mentee to text you if something isn't clear or if background or perspective is needed.
- Set up a post-meeting debrief to provide feedback and reinforce their contributions. Frame feedback as supporting their development and to help them be as effective as possible as a director. For example, *"We really appreciated that commentary from you on XYZ topic, that was an interesting perspective. We would love more of that."*¹
- Provide feedback when there are challenges. Try first acknowledging potential challenges, such as speaking too much or too little, not getting the tone just right, not being clear, and offer strategies to become more effective.

4 Learn from new directors

Create a mutually beneficial relationship.

- Ask what they would like to contribute; suggest ways that they can effectively add their ideas. You can try this before each board meeting.
- Ask what attracted them to the company; explore new learning or engagement opportunities based on their interests. Consider joining if these opportunities also help expand your views.
- Ask for feedback on board dynamics; encourage them to leverage their "new" eyes to support the culture work.

¹ Nasdaq Center for Board Excellence, "[Inviting Diverse Voices to Speak Up in the Boardroom](#)", Published March 28, 2023.

5 Expand relationships

Foster connections with other directors and company executives.

- Identify points of connections with other directors.
- Pay attention to social dynamics. Check to see if the new board member has someone to sit with for lunch. If other people are not engaging with the new director, encourage other board members to do so.
- Visit facilities or conduct site visits with new directors and share insights on key management personnel.
- Help other directors also understand the new director mentee's value. Especially in early meetings, amplify the value of their contributions.



Inclusive Boards
Playbooks

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Strategies in the Inclusive Board Playbook are:

- > Establish Inclusive Norms
- > Facilitate Effective Meetings
- > Build Strong Relationships
- > Mentor New Directors
- > Engage With and Value Differences