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# LEADING TRENDS

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## Getting Edgy With Governance Evaluation



It is once again time for end-of-year board self-evaluations, and this annual ritual has us wondering if there are ways to glean more valuable data that could inform a transformation of what happens inside the boardroom next year. One of the most frequent complaints we hear from governing board members is that meetings could be more exciting and less formulaic. As a board member at a client school recently put it, "There must be higher value, even edgier, things for us to talk about but no one seems to know exactly what."

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We have long known that plodding through committee reports and routine business late in the evening leaves little time for more substantive discussion. In response, the consent agenda format emerged in the 1990's as a way to decompress meetings thereby creating time for more fulsome discussion, and some boards shifted to daytime meetings so that members would have more energy. Nonetheless, we continue to hear about lackluster meetings and some that are downright tedious. As the member above said, no one seems to know exactly what to talk about other than the same stuff.

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A 2021 Harvard Business Review piece by Andrew White, Tazim Essani, and Eric Wilkinson entitled, "[10 Proactive Questions Every Board Member Should Be Asking](#)," aimed at the corporate sector, could be a model for how to use the annual board evaluation to find a way out of the boring meeting trap. Using their questions as a starting point, we created eight questions that governance committees can use to

gather data. If feasible, we suggest posing these questions one-on-one in an interview rather than as items on a survey. Then, the committee can collate the data, identify themes and work with the board chair and head of school to redesign future meetings.

### **Eight Provocative Questions for Board Members**

1. If you designed our meeting agenda, what would be on it?
2. What is the school administration not telling you that you feel you need to know?
3. How is the external world changing in ways not reflected in our committee and board conversations?
4. What do you see always being discussed but never resolved? What price are we paying for not resolving these topics?
5. Are we being true to our purpose, which is to govern for current and future generations of students?
6. Are we adequately discussing longer-term issues, both internal and external?

7. How would we describe the school's culture? Would we all describe it similarly, and is the culture consistent across the divisions?
8. How well do we know and trust each other? If trust is less than optimal, how does it show up during board meetings?

Only some member ideas should be accommodated--more about this in future Leading Trends--but the answers to these questions will shed much light on the health of your board and could lead to more interesting meetings and greater member engagement.

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