



Culture of Inquiry

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Welcome to LeadingAge Kansas' ninth issue of For Your Board. Each quarter this publication focuses on a specific governance topic to help you, your leadership team and your board in planning, strategic thinking, and execution as you seek to sustain and amplify your mission. Our next 10 issues will continue to highlight a principle from BoardSource's The Source – Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards.

Remember, exceptional governance does not happen by accident. If we want staff and volunteer leadership partnerships that add value to our organizations, we must intentionally focus on our governance practices - constantly refining and evolving.

Please [let us know](#) how you use this publication, if it proves helpful, what other topics you would like to see us focus on and how we can best serve you and your board. We would love to discuss being part of your next Board or Leadership Team retreat, so contact <mailto:debra@leadingagekansas.org> to learn more.

Culture of Inquiry

“Exceptional boards institutionalize a culture of inquiry, mutual respect, and constructive debate that leads to sound and shared decision making.”

– BoardSource, Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards

Governance is a team sport between the Chief Executive Officer and the Board, and teams require the ability to engage, learn together, respect one another and share in wins and losses. That means agreeing to a culture of questioning (not micro-managing), dialogue and debate. If these practices don't come easily to your board, consider assigning a Devil's Advocate at the start of a board meeting to take on this role and begin to utilize it with intention. Over time, it will get easier.

Mutual respect is also fostered by getting to know one another better. Build in opportunities for networking or conversation starters in your regular board meetings. Beginning with questions like “who is your favorite musician/band and why” or “if you could walk in anyone's shoes for 30 days, who would

it be and why” reveal insight into each other we might otherwise not see. Relationships are the key to higher board engagement.

Cultivating a culture of inquiry is foundational for your board to embrace generative thinking in your regular board conversations. Asking the right question is a difficult task but also one of the talents of an exceptional board. Board wisdom is an under-leveraged asset. Unleashing that wisdom, however, requires board members to come prepared to meetings and be active listeners in addition to participants. One of the most important resources we have is board member perspective – let’s make the best use of it!

Starting the Conversation

[10 Signs You Have a Culture of Inquiry](#) by Warren Berger for Fast Company

[Three Rules for Constructive Debate](#) by Randall Peterson for Financial Times

[Generative Thinking to Improve Strategy](#) by Peter Dean for Wharton Magazine

[Generative Governance: Making Sense of Problems through Critical Inquiry](#) by Makiyah Moody for BoardSource

[For Argument’s Sake](#) (Ted Talk) by Daniel H. Cohen

[The Power of Generative Thinking](#) by Natasha Dresner for Jewish Philanthropy

[An Imperative for Nonprofit Boards: The Time is Now to Step up Your Game](#) by Jean Case for BoardSource

[A Good Question Can Be a Game Changer](#) by Anne Wallestad for BoardSource

Adam Grant: [Encourage a Culture of Inquiry](#) (YouTube Video)

Tools & Templates

[Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards](#) by Chait, Ryan, Taylor

[The Practitioner’s Guide to Governance as Leadership: Building High Performing Nonprofit Boards](#) by Cathy A. Trower

[How to Ask the Right Questions in the Right Way](#) by Ray Zinn for Entrepreneur

[How to Ask Better Questions](#) by Judith Ross for Harvard Business Review

[5 Steps to Asking Good Questions](#) (infographic) from Wabisabi Learning

[Catalytic Questions to Get the Conversation Going](#) from BoardSource

[Culture of Inquiry: Healthy Debate in the Boardroom](#) by Nancy R. Axelrod for BoardSource

[10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation](#) (Ted Talk) by Celeste Headlee

Did you know that LeadingAge Kansas provides consultation services to improve your board's effectiveness? Contact [Debra Zehr](#) at 1.800.264.5242 to learn more about how we can help you and your board.

Special thanks to LeadingAge Virginia for allowing us to use their "Guiding Governance" newsletter