



The input of an effective board of directors enriches an organization.
by David Mehlis



Accountability: Publishers and their Board of Directors

How do you determine whether you are effectively leading your publishing house? Profits, the number of titles sold, distribution points, staff turnover rates, and other data are critical performance measures, but they do not tell the whole story. The ministry impact of Christian products is harder to quantify—and harder to judge. If you had to show what your accomplishments as a chief executive officer have been, what would your board say?

At Cook, twice annually I am held accountable for my performance by our board of directors. I work with my staff to report on how our strategic plans are bringing about our publishing house's vision and mission. This exercise, though stressful at times, is good practice for the day when we will all have to give an account before God for what we have done in this life. And, the results are invaluable.

A good, independent, knowledgeable board of directors provides spiritual and business leadership. All of us need input from other Christians and can learn from them. Publishers are no exception. The cares and concerns of running a ministry and being responsible for the staff who gain their livelihoods according to the success or failure of our decisions can be a heavy burden. We need the support of mature Christians who can come alongside us, pray, give us wise counsel, and hold us accountable.

A good board of directors provides resources. The members bring information, experience, specific skills, qualities, knowledge, and contacts beyond that which the CEO and staff can offer. They participate in fund raising and act as advocates for the organization with those who can donate to its work. They are ambassadors for the publishing house, representing its ministry to a wide spectrum of people. Their input enriches an organization.

An independent board makes decisions. An effective board works with the CEO to set the ministry's mission, philosophy, policies, and strategic direction. They can select, evaluate, and terminate the CEO. They engage in strategic problem-solving, rather than rubber stamp what has already been done, as I see in so many Christian organizations.

A board brings objectivity and distance to their deliberations about the company's performance. They measure an organization's financial stability, major financial decisions, annual budget, acquisitions, and progress toward goals. They weigh what risks are worth taking. The members of the board should not be involved in the everyday function of the publishing house, and so they bring perspective.

Board meetings should be a reminder that what makes all the difference, in our work of literature distribution to build of the Church around the world, is Christians coming together and working for the Kingdom of God. ❖

David Mehlis is president of Cook Communications Ministries International.

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Cook Communications Ministries International
4050 Lee Vance View
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918

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