In early December, ISCA (the Independent School Chairpersons Association) hosted a one-day workshop for board leaders in San Francisco. In a lively session about school leadership, participants identified their expectations for the head of school.

Not surprisingly, most concurred that the head would need to come from an educational background and be a role model as a lifelong learner. All felt that s/he must embody the school’s mission, be a proven educational leader, and be able to orchestrate all constituencies for the overall benefit of the school.

Courage and innovative skills were mentioned as necessary personal qualities for a head, as well as the ability to be a fearless communicator (compelling spokesperson), and to understand organizational behavior.

Board leaders also thought heads should possess such management-oriented skills as fiscal acumen, play a strong role in strategic planning, and have an understanding of legal issues (or at least know when to ask about them).

TTL is particularly interested in how this daunting list of expectations would compare with other constituency groups within a school and with the head himself/herself. Is there congruency? And if not, can one person meet all of the diverse expectations in an effective manner? And if the expectations are widely disparate, what does that bode for the success of a head?

We noted that, despite the ongoing debate as to defining a 21st-century education, curricular expertise was not offered as a necessary skill.

These are salient questions that warrant further research. We invite you to share your views. Take a moment and fill out a short survey on this topic at: www.surveymonkey.com/trusteelettersurvey. We will report back to our readers on the results.

As an organization of current and former board chairs, ISCA (www.iscachairs.org) offers an opportunity to network and share resources, experiences and viewpoints. The organization also provides regional conferences, periodic mailings and a list-server.
Although a school’s core mission should endure through the ages, the way in which a head and board carry out that mission can change dramatically with the times, according to a university president who led in the 1980s and ‘90s, and again in 2010.

“In fundamental respects, the job of the university president remains the same...have a strategic vision and shape priorities; be able to make the difficult, sometimes painful decisions;...and work in concert with the governing board,” writes Stanley O. Ikenberry, former president of the University of Illinois and the American Council of Education (“The Changing Demands of Presidential Leadership,” Trusteeship, November-December 2010).

The big differences in the demands on academic leaders today lie in two areas: electronic communication and a restrained economy. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the sheer volume of email and the expectation that a school leader respond immediately to what Ikenberry calls the “unrelenting tsunami of electronic communication that floods the president’s office and personal life.”

When communications are moving rapidly, so too are the school’s issues and decisions. A school leader today may find that waiting to respond to an email or an issue more than a day can render the leader ineffective. “Unless presidents stay connected, they can clog up the system and—in desperation—the decision train may leave without them.”

A wise head will use that digital flow to his/her advantage as “it is much easier for institutions to reach students, faculty members, the public, and other specific audiences that matter most—like alumni and donors.”

A head must have a physical as well as digital presence. “A presidency that combines sophisticated communications technology with a powerful human presence can be an unbeatable combination.”

The restrained economy affects the demands on a school leader today because the importance of a good education has never been greater while at the same time the resources to fund a school’s programs may be shrinking.

Focusing on a head’s leadership ability remains the critical concern for both head and board. A head must be adept at the traditional leadership duties of articulating the school’s mission and acting as the “living logo or personification” of the school. Even more important in today’s challenging economy is meshing the school environment with the outside world. A head can accomplish this feat by leading change in two ways:

- Internal: A head must lead change within school to “help it adjust to the realities and opportunities of the environment in which it finds itself” all the while ensuring core mission and academic values remain intact.
- External: A head and board must lead change in the “external environment—to influence public policy, inform public attitudes, advance alumni giving...to create a more sustainable, supportive context.”

Given these challenges, a board must rethink the way it selects and nurtures its school head. “The external environment will continue to cry out for attention. At the same time, many of the answers to the current challenges facing...education will be found on the campus, from within.”
One common trait of high-performing boards is that they make self-assessment a board priority. “A board needs an opportunity, every year or two, to step back and reflect on its work, makeup, structures, and practices,” writes governance consultant Barry S. Bader (“Is Your Board Bored with Self Assessment?” Great Boards, Oct. 11, 2010). Here, five steps for waking up your self-assessment process.

1. Time: Best results will come if you plan a retreat or special meeting lasting several hours. “Self-assessment is not just about completing a questionnaire; it’s about discussing the results and identifying opportunities for improvement.”

2. Questions: Instead of using a set of standard questions on best practices, develop customized open-ended questions. “Compile the results into a discussion document for a self-evaluation retreat or discussion.”

3. Practicality: The self-assessment will have more teeth if the end result of the process is an agreed-upon agenda for board work in the coming year.

4. Focus: Give the self-assessment a specific focus, aside from big-picture governance issues, such as developing a culture of commitment, or deciding the competencies of the board of the future.

5. Rigor: Each committee on your board must also be assessed, and this must be done rigorously. “Have each committee conduct a self-assessment and summarize their recommendations.”

Remember that even if you believe your self-assessment process currently is good because it consists of a reputable questionnaire and the scores are consistently high, it may still mean you should change your evaluation. After all, you don’t learn much if you get the same high scores on the same test over and over again.

New Year’s Prediction: Increased Scrutiny for Compensation

NEW LEGISLATION AND MORE vigilant tax code enforcement may prompt closer scrutiny of nonprofit executive compensation in coming months, according to an article by an accounting professor. “The current mood in Washington suggests that changes to compensation rules may be on the horizon,” writes Tom English, professor of accounting at Boise State University (“Executive Compensation is Under Scrutiny,” Nonprofit World, September-October 2010).

The best way to protect your organization is by understanding the terminology and complying with current rules. Nonprofit organizations that operate under a tax-exempt Section 501 (c) (3) status must show that insiders (defined as executives, board members or anyone “with major influence in the organization”) are not receiving compensation that is unreasonable.

Your board’s first line of protection is to follow the procedures that make it possible to claim a “rebuttable presumption” regarding compensation; this claim has in the past been a reliable way for an organization to show that compensation is not excessive. The rebuttable presumption regulation requires that:
- Compensation packages for your head or other executives must be approved by people independent of the offer
- Data on comparable compensation must be used
- Compensation discussions and data must be documented

However, recent legislation (defeated, but likely to appear again) has called for eliminating the rebuttable presumption regulation.

To proactively prepare for tighter scrutiny, English suggests that a board:
- “Form a compensation committee”: Make sure it does not include any individual who is an insider
- “Prepare proper documentation”: Remember timeliness, i.e. minutes of meetings should be completed within 60 days of any discussion
- “Collect comparability data”: Gather data from tax filings of comparable organizations; the IRS recognizes three comps as adequate for organizations under $1 million in receipts
- “Document fringe benefits”: Club memberships are considered compensation

Acting now will save trouble and money later; excess compensation is taxed at 25%, with the potential for an additional tax of 200%; participating managers may also be taxed at 10% of the excess.
Getting the Most Out of Your Committees

Committees do much of the heavy lifting on a board, but unless there is clarity about each committee's mission, these sub-groups may be squandering your board members' precious time and energy.

Governance consultant Katha Kissman suggests discussing committee work annually as a way to establish best practices. “The full board should engage in generative and strategic thinking about the use of board committees for their organization,” writes Kissman (“Ask Our Consultants,” BoardSource, September-October 2010). “Once a board has determined if there is a real need and purpose for establishing a particular board committee, it can develop a global organizational protocol for committees.”

Here, eight topics to guide the discussion on committee protocols:
1. Size: Discuss if each committee should be a standard or custom size.
2. Intent: Think about the different circumstances that will require a standing vs ad hoc committee vs a task force.
3. Members: Decide on a procedure to choose members for committees. “Will a certain expertise or perhaps a certain length of board tenure be required for service on a particular committee?”
4. Staff: Discuss which committees need a staff member.
5. Chair: Establish a procedure for selecting a committee chair.
6. Reporting to the Board: Determine how often and in what format committees should be reporting their work to the board. While minutes need to be kept of all meetings, reports can either be submitted in written form as part of the consent agenda or offered verbally.
7. Teamwork: Decide on the protocols for how committees carry out their work.

Taking the time to set up these procedures, and perhaps produce a committee handbook, will make your board committees run smoothly and productively. “Establishing a protocol is crucial to clarifying the common expectations for a committee’s work methodology and necessary outcomes (work product).”

There’s One on Every Board

Can you say d-i-f-f-i-c-u-l-t? It seems that every board has at least one difficult board member, someone who makes it hard for the board to be effective and productive. “It really only takes one difficult board member to establish a dynamic that leaves board members and executives demoralized and distracted,” writes Maureen K. Robinson (“The Difficult Few,” Contributions, November 2010).

To deal with a difficult member, the first step is realizing that the board shouldn’t sit politely watching, believing its only power lies with activity tied to the core mission. “[B]oards do have power and they need to use it intentionally for the benefit of the organization and, as important, for the benefit of the board itself.”

Next, you must determine if someone is challenging the status quo in a healthy way. “Inviting change into the room can disturb the atmosphere and make some feel less valued and secure.” Awareness of the board’s overall makeup is crucial to viewing each member’s role.

Another special case comes with founders or funders, who may require particular handling. Founders usually have a big support base that makes it difficult to unseat them, although they do become “toxic” sometimes. Funders make a board evaluate its dependence on dollar amounts, but board cohesion may ultimately be viewed as more important.

Finally, to solve the problem of a truly difficult board member, try these tips:
- Communicate Board Standards: A productive board has rules that may go unspoken. Now is the time to say them out loud. “If listening carefully, being constructive, and behaving with respect to everyone in the organization have been the secrets to past success, they are likely to be the secrets to future success.”
- Speak Up: Don’t leave it to the chair to handle the situation alone. “Every board member has a duty to discourage unseemly or unproductive behavior.”
- Act Together: Collective actions have power and may require some calling around outside of meetings. “What distinguishes these conversations from parking lot hubbub is a decision to take positive action to preserve the board’s integrity.”
- Bid Adieu: If attempts to change the derailing behavior don’t work, you may need to fire the board member. “It is critical…when all other reasonable efforts have failed…that the board act to protect itself.”
Your Library’s Future: A Page Turner by Mouse or Finger

The library may be one of the most sentimental strongholds of an analog age, particularly for board members who see a handsome row of beautifully bound books and equate the sight with unlimited knowledge and stimulating academics.

Alas, the digital age is here, and libraries will change, although the transition won’t be seamless, according to a meeting of library professionals (“Digital Future of Academic Libraries Focus of PPE Institute,” by Lory Hough, Harvard Education Letter, Aug. 11, 2010). “This is a time of extraordinary crisis in libraries with a lot of places doing two libraries,” said John Palfrey, professor and vice dean of library and information resources at the Harvard Law School.

The library discussion, during Harvard’s “Programs in Professional Education’s Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians” last summer, focused on the evolving meaning of what a library is today.

Although for hundreds of years, the library’s sense of place has been defined by a physical space with traditional books, today’s library is morphing into a “social and collaborative place to work.” Traditional books may still be part of a library’s collection, but they may end up stored elsewhere, especially given that many academic journals exist as online-only publications now.

Penn State’s health services library, for example, is 95 percent digital, and its director described her library as “a social space rather than…a book warehouse.”

Even though boards and the school community may lament the loss of the academic and institutional knowledge that may be occurring as longtime librarians are retiring and making way for digital library managers, one librarian noted that the change is unstoppable: “In some sense, it does not matter if libraries embrace digital or not. That is the way the market is headed,” said Jared Howland, electronic resources librarian at Brigham Young University. “If libraries want to continue providing access to the best information, they will be forced to embrace digital. Fighting the market is an exercise in futility.”

Majority of Americans Favor School Choice

The economic and social factors surrounding K-12 school choice will likely remain a topic of policy debate for years to come. But statistics are already showing where families stand on the issue: More than 50 percent of U.S. schoolchildren are currently enrolled in a K-12 school of choice, according to a recent analysis (“The New Marketplace of School Choice,” by Bruno V. Manno, Education Week, Dec. 1, 2010).

Overall Choice
100% = 57 million K-12 students in U.S.

- 35% magnet and alternative schools in traditional district public schools (20.1 million students)
- 48% enrolled in public schools (28.9 million students)
- 3.3% charter schools (1.7 million students)
- 11% private independent and religious schools (6.1 million students)
- 2.7% home schooling, including online (1.5 million)

Independent School Choice
100% = 29,000 private K-12 schools in U.S., enrolling 6.1 million students

- 25% nonsectarian
- 51% other religious-affiliated schools
- 24% Catholic
No Such Thing as Donor Fatigue

With many schools noticing that fundraising has flattened out, you may have been hearing about a strange disease making its way through school networks: “donor fatigue.” One fundraising consultant says there’s no such thing; rather, it’s a school’s own efforts to inspire donors that may be ailing.

“Donor fatigue is not a real disease; it is a misdiagnosis of another significant problem. That problem: the inability of organizations to keep donors excited and engaged in their missions, accomplishments and goals,” writes David H. King, president of Alexander Haas, an Atlanta-based firm (“The Only Cure for Donor Fatigue,” Rise, November 2010).

Arguing that donors are passionate about giving if a project, program, or appeal excites them, King encourages organizations to examine their fundraising strategies.

“What donors get tired of is being taken for granted. They get tired of the assumption that a hastily crafted annual fund appeal, to maintain the status quo, is all that is required for their continued generous support.”

The assertion that donor fatigue is a myth is based on King’s frequent interaction with donors, in the course of fundraising consulting work. “One donor recently told us, “There is no shortage of philanthropic funds; what is in short supply is good, well-conceived and exciting projects to fund.”

Instead of blaming donor fatigue, King suggests some action to avoid flat results:

- Look at your communications with donors to see when the message was last updated: It may have been longer than you think.
- Think about the excitement factor: Is there enough of it in your appeal—what things are you and the school really excited about?
- Is there a chance your message is really tiring your donors out?

“Donors do not get tired of supporting organizations that do good work, communicate their successes, have a vision for the future and communicate that vision in a clear and inspiring way.”

One-on-One Events for Students & Alums

Zip-lining and spelunking may not sound like traditional student-alum activities—and they are not!—but they have become popular recently as part of a new program at Johns Hopkins University, according to a story in CASE Currents (“A Taste for Adventure,” November-December 2010).

Called “Take a Student to Events” (TASTE), the program is coordinated by the university’s alumni office, and consists of alumni hosting students at unique outings, which are often recreational outdoor activities. “We really want to be more casual about it and help them connect,” says Justin Fincher, JHU’s associate director for student and young alumni programs.

When starting the program last year, the office informed alumni and students of the idea via email, and had 200 students and 70 alumni respond to the first email blast.

Besides zip-lining and spelunking, events have also included professionally-driven fare, such as group dinners and job shadowing. The alumni office gets feedback from the alum hosts after each event, and has found that some alumni are willing to plan several outings each semester.

As for the students, the outdoors activities seem particularly popular. “Students are more interested in fun activities and not necessarily a lecture or event where they have to wear a suit and tie,” said Fincher. [Page 6 - January / February 2011 - The Trustee’s Letter]
The TrusTe e's LeT Te r - Ja n u a r y / Fe b r u a r y 2011 - Pa g e 7

HUTCHISON SCHOOL (MEMPHIS, TN), a girls’ day school enrolling 894 students in grades PK-12, recently received an undisclosed seven-figure gift described as the third largest in the school’s 102-year history. Abbie Ware Williams, a 1989 graduate of Hutchison and a current Board of Trustees member, made the gift with her husband, Duncan, president of an investment banking firm.

The gift will fund Hutchison Leads, a leadership development program that will enable Hutchison students and other Memphis public-school students to participate in after-school, weekend, and summer programs that foster leadership training. In particular, Hutchison Leads will help girls secure internships throughout Memphis, in public agencies as well as private businesses. “We wanted to create a program where girls could develop the skills needed to emerge as Memphis’ next generation of business and civic leaders,” said Abbe Ware Williams.

The importance of getting students involved in philanthropy was the focus of a story in the November 2010 issue of our sister publication, The Head’s Letter (“Educating for Philanthropy,” by Catherine A. Raaflaub).

Leadership Gift and Philanthropic Video

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AT PORTER-GAUD (CHARLESTON, SC), a coed day school enrolling 921 students in grades 1-12, year-end gifts to the annual fund tripled in 2010, and the involvement of students is credited with making the difference, according to a recent article in The Chronicle of Philanthropy (“Spelling Out Philanthropy for Donors Spurs Them to Write Checks to a Private School,” Dec. 2, 2010). Check out the school’s video (http://www.supportportergaud.com/philanthropy-videos.php), which features young Porter-Gaud students in their attempts to spell and define “philanthropy.” As of early December, the school had received 28 $10,000-plus gifts worth $310,000 versus 8 such gifts in 2009 totaling less than $100,000.

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Board Chair Mentoring: The Conversation Begins

Continued from page 8

intellectual and managerial development. The board and school will benefit from a healthy give-and-take between board chair and head of school.

**TTL:** What dangers do you see in “personality-driven” leadership on the board and how might this affect board leadership succession?

**NINA:** It is important for trustees to have respect and confidence in the strengths of the board chair. While personality-driven chairs can be dynamic, they can also be hard to replace. The board chair needs to constantly develop candidates for succession, by providing opportunities for trustees to broaden their range of leadership experiences.

**MARK:** Sometimes we find boards, and schools, with leaders who are so dominant that the school runs the risk of not developing a deep institutional bench. Everyone is willing to let the charismatic leader lead, but what happens when the charismatic leader leaves? Often, there is a leadership vacuum that can cause the school to stumble. This is true not only at the board and head level, but often within the various parent-run organizations.

**TTL:** What is the role of the board chair and board in keeping the head of school engaged and excited about the institution throughout their headship?

**MARK:** This is a very important question. How many boards and board chairs think of this question? How many then actively work on keeping the head of school engaged and excited about the institution? It is the rare institution that thinks in these terms. Often the board does not recognize that its only employee is the head of school and that the care and feeding of that one employee is important to the success of the school. How many boards remember their head at the holidays? Birthdays? Successful boards work hard to understand where the head is in her or his career and in the life of the institution. The start up head or school is very different than the 200-year-old school and the head in her or his 20th year. Each situation is different and each situation therefore requires a different approach.

**NINA:** The head of school position involves being both an academic leader and a managerial leader. For the school to function with integrity, the chair has an obligation to the board to review the head’s performance. Understanding that there are stages in a head of school’s personal and intellectual growth is essential to the school’s organizational progress.

*Look for Part II in the March/April 2011 issue of TTL.*
NOTA BENE

Board Chair Mentoring: The Conversation Begins

From our work with hundreds of schools and school leaders, we know that governance is a learned skill. For board chairs particularly, who are charged with leading a diverse group of individuals, we see a need for a mentoring network. To explore board chair mentoring, we talked with two experts whose depth of experience literally spans the globe. Part I of our conversation appears in this issue; next issue, you’ll see Part II.

TTL: How has the role of the board chair evolved over the last decade or so?

MARK LAURIA: Perhaps the most significant change for the board chair parallels the change that has occurred for the heads: the increasing range of responsibilities for school leadership as schools lay out ambitious programs for fund-raising, facilities enhancements, and the internationalization of our student population, not to mention the challenges on the state and national regulatory landscape. These changes on the operational side have redefined not only the role of the head but also the role of the board chair and governing body.

NINA KÖPRÜLÜ: The board chair role has expanded. In addition to running meetings, chairs are expected to be conversant on every aspect of the school’s operations. The expectation is that board chairs today be more hands on than they would have been a generation ago.

TTL: In what ways are boards and heads of school different today from the past?

NINA: Effective board members have become active participants as problem solvers, strategic planners, and vision creators, increasingly seeking input from all constituents in the community, not just the administration. Also, effective leadership requires reflection so board chairs and heads of school are embracing evaluations of their performance that are followed up with development plans and benchmarks. Neither one should be “lonely at the top.”

MARK: The era of the “teaching head” has almost vanished. While there might have been a time when the head relied heavily on his or her knowledge of the academic side of the institution, the modern head must be able to seamlessly shift from curriculum design to institutional advancement, interpersonal relationships to long-term investments. The complexity in the job responsibilities for heads forces boards to be increasingly diligent in the way they recruit, hire, nurture, and retain educational leaders.

TTL: How does the culture of the board play out in the board room?

MARK: There is such a difference between boards that are primarily “parent dominated” and those that have a healthy balance between current parents, alumni parents, assorted community leaders, and educators. The composition of the board often determines, or should determine, the way the board chair leads the board. A board chair needs a different set of skills and approaches when he or she is working with a young, inexperienced board as opposed to a more seasoned board. In both cases, the most successful board chairs are those who understand the important role that they have in shaping, and educating, the board through each phase of a board’s life.

NINA: If trustees are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas in board meetings, they become more engaged in the enterprise. Collaboration is a vital feature of successful boards. Every board has governance traditions that should be discussed and kept relevant to the school’s needs.

TTL: How does the relationship between the board chair and the head of school affect the functioning of the board?

MARK: This is one of the most important, yet least-reflected upon, relationships in an independent school. Organizational tone at the governance and operational levels are set by the board chair and head of school, respectively. The board chair has the important responsibility of leading the board in the policy and fiscal arenas while ensuring that all board members are working for the strategic goals of the school. When schools go off the rail, it is often because the board chair was unable, or unwilling, to clearly focus the board on policy in order to leave the day-to-day administration to the head of school. Schools function well when the board chair and head of school are in sync with each other. When they are not in sync, the school runs the risk of losing focus.

NINA: As leaders of the institution, both have a responsibility to serve as role models for honesty, collegiality, flexibility and accessibility to the entire community. The relationship needs to be actively developed. It is important for both to understand each other’s skill sets and to support ongoing

Continued on page 7

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Dr. Mark W. Lauria is the executive director for the New York State Association of Independent Schools. A former public school assistant superintendent and independent school headmaster, he also has served as a board chair for a California independent school as well as the board chair for the California Association of Independent Schools.

Nina J. Köprülü currently chairs three boards of independent schools: Robert College in Istanbul, American Community School in Beirut, and the Nightingale-Bamford School in New York City. She is also president of the philanthropic Joukowsky Family Foundation.