

BOARD MEMBER ROLES

A board is only as strong as its members. Board members normally play one of three roles: builders, maintainers, or blockers. Every board needs builders and maintainers, and unfortunately some boards have at least one blocker. What is your role on your board?

Builder: These board members are interested in the work of the board and focus their energies on the successful completion of the board's tasks.

Builders:

- Ask questions about the issues under discussion
- Contribute suggestions and ideas
- Give their opinions in an open and friendly way
- Stimulate discussions
- Summarize multiple points of view
- Identify objective criteria to be used to evaluate ideas and actions
- Stay focused on the task at hand

Maintainer: These board members are more interested in maintaining relationships than in the work of the board. They often try to be the bridge between the Builders and the Blockers.

Maintainers:

- Mediate differences between board members
- Encourage fellow board members to compromise
- Facilitate communication among board members
- Go along with the majority of the board members in a dispute
- Encourage everyone to talk
- Praise the ideas of other board members
- Stay focused on the feelings of the other board members

Blocker: These board members get in the way of the work of the board by behaving in ways that block progress.**

Blockers:

- Insist on winning every disagreement with other board members
- Verbally attack board members with whom they disagree
- Refuse to compromise or look for consensus
- Base decisions on feelings and past experience rather than facts
- Like to be the center of attention
- Manipulate other board members, particularly maintainers
- Stay focused on their own feelings and beliefs

** See "Problem Behaviors in Meetings" for more information about blockers and suggestions for dealing with these counter-productive behaviors.