LEADERSHIP TRANSITION BARRIERS
IN SMALL NONPROFITS
Why it matters and what you can do about it!

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Common sense tells us that a Board that plans for leadership transition, on a regular basis, will be better prepared when such a transition occurs.....

Really?
Does this resonate with you?
Importance of this session

- Board chairs of nonprofits agree that hiring an executive director is the most important thing that they can do during their board service.
- Yet research shows nonprofit boards regularly avoid any discussion of leadership transition.
- When chairs are faced with a transition, they invariably express relief that the transition went well, as if luck played a part.
Today we will

- Better understand which barriers exert a stronger influence on board inaction with respect to the executive selection process
- In turn, suggest specific actions that boards and executive directors can take to mitigate the influence of these barriers
Do Boards care about Transition?

- Boards regularly report that hiring an executive director is their most important job.
- But Boards:
  - Underestimate the challenges of hiring an ED
  - Are typically unprepared for the process
- Board members routinely see themselves as serving an organization...not leading it
- When boards lack aligned organizational identity, transition planning becomes even more difficult
What barriers exist to transition planning? (Tactical)

- Lack of Board Training
  - Little provided
  - Focused on operations, not on board roles and responsibilities
- Informal versus formal processes
  - Reliance on informal creates uncertainty/doubt
- Human Resources anxiety
  - Fear that HR discussions will trigger ramifications
What barriers exist to transition planning? (Strategic)

- Poor understanding of organization’s mission
  - Multiple interpretations from different board members
- Board diversity is neither planned for nor leveraged
  - Board recruitment is based on self-selected interest, not on strategic analysis of board needs
Agree? Disagree? Why?

- Do you experience these findings in your organization?
- Do you agree with the findings?
- Which one surprised you the most?
Implications for Leaders

- Awareness of barriers creates opportunity to:
  - Minimize anxiety by discussing and creating processes for the board to follow on leadership transition planning
  - Formalize processes that build on board history and provide context for future board deliberations
  - Create formal training/handbook for board members
  - Educate members on board roles and responsibilities as linked to organizational mission
Summary

- Leadership Transition Planning creates the context for:
  - Board analysis of future direction
  - Assessment of leadership strength
  - Board engagement in the organization
- Board engagement strengthens potential for positive leadership transitions
- Barriers are relatively easily rectified