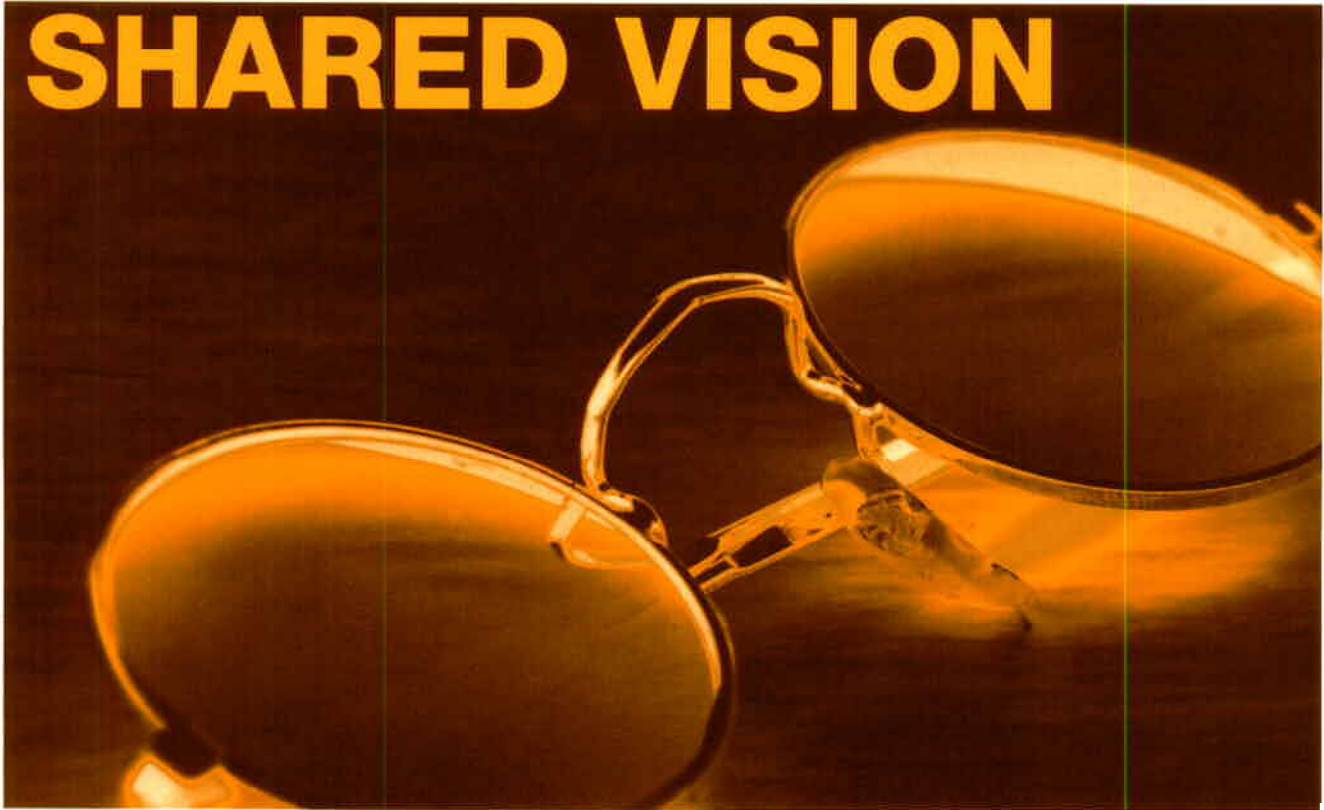


# SHARED VISION



## A Solution for Team Building within Common Interest Developments

*Contributed by Steven W Swafford, Leadership Outfitters, Inc*

Do you feel the Board of Directors meetings for the communities you manage consistently run too long? If so, it's likely because there is lack of a shared vision — which results in conflict, confusion and mismanagement of time. As blunt as it may sound, the absence of a shared vision is one of the biggest destroyers of effective teams.

A shared vision is paramount in so many aspects of our professional and personal lives, but we seldom take the time to establish that common vision with our boards. Several aspects

of running an effective meeting such as communication, conflict, and/or decision-making can be linked directly to sharing a common vision — or the lack thereof. While your Board may never benefit from 100 percent agreement, consensus in a time-managed environment is what will reduce the length and the level of tension in a meeting. (See article on Management with a COS on page 29.)

It is no secret that there are board members who choose to run for the Board because of a special interest or agenda. For good or bad, that is

why they get involved with the community. We all do that in our own respective ways. It's why we go to a certain restaurant or volunteer for a certain organization. There is a commodity the restaurant or organization possesses and we are willing to give our resources (money or time) in exchange for what they can offer.

Researchers Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner set out to learn what it takes to become an effective team leader, thus resulting in effective teams. They wanted to discover the common practices of ordi-

nary men and women when they were at their leadership best— and what techniques these leaders used to take people or organizations to new heights. After nearly ten years of research and thousands of surveys of nonprofits, corporations and military branches, Kouzes and Posner's research resulted in what they called "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership."

These practices include:

- 1) Challenge the Process;
- 2) Inspire a Shared Vision;

- 3) Enable Others to Act;
- 4) Model the Way; and
- 5) Encourage the Heart

These five practices apply both to individuals as well as organizations.

Kouzes and Posner's research culminated in a book, "The Leadership Challenge" which expands on these five areas in more depth. Once again a "shared vision" is linked to effective leaders that make up effective boards. The question now is "how" to establish or refine your vision with your community association board because the last thing you want to do is ADD another meeting to your already packed calendar.

The solution may be quite simple: If your community has 12 meetings a year; hold one of those meetings off-site and designate this meeting to be a "vision" setting meeting that focuses on your priorities for the year. Ideally this would be held shortly after the new board members have been elected. There is great value in having a meeting like this off-site — as a new environment can be a catalyst for new ideas. This "offsite" meeting could be anywhere such as another community, hotel, or private club facility. In addition to doing the normal board business, set aside at least half of the agenda to set priorities for the upcoming year.

If your Board is not already using a "timed agenda" or "consent agenda," this would be a good time to introduce these two wonderful meeting management tools. You're probably already familiar with the technique

of using a timed agenda - where a certain amount of time is budgeted for each action item or topic. If the allotted time expires on a defined area then you have a tool to use to push the meeting along. Also, when a timed-agenda meeting starts you have already established a defined priority - based on how much time the Board will invest on any one area.

A consent agenda is a tool that requires a bit more advance work, but is very effective in reducing the amount of redundancy in a board meeting. This requires the manager to distribute any background material in advance of a board meeting (normally 10-14 days) for the board to review. When the meeting arrives, then the items are not discussed but voted on as a group. If there is a particularly sensitive issue, it can be removed from the consent agenda and discussed separately in executive session.

Once a vision is cast or refined by the group, then the valuable resource of time can be better managed in certain key directions. This one "vision-setting" meeting will continue to add value throughout the year. As new ideas or suggestions emerge you can evaluate it based on the vision that was already set by your board.

Remember that as the board continues to make progress toward this vision, it's important to celebrate along the way. The time some board members invest into the community is many times significant and should be recognized by you and/or their peers. While we all like to be recognized, our

type of recognition is very different. There are some individuals that like to be recognized on a stage or in front of their peers, but others like to be recognized with a simple thank you card. In working with a variety of non-profit and corporate boards we have found there are nine key desires for staying involved with their organization. (See boxed item below)

If you don't have a formal or informal recognition program, consider putting one together. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but it does have to be sincere. Here are four key guidelines to recognizing and motivating your volunteers serving on the board.

- 1) Be spontaneous/timely;
- 2) Reward the right things;
- 3) Match the reward to the individual; and

- 4) Match the reward to the achievement.

We've taken a brief look at two of the five characteristics of effective leaders and organizations according to Kouzes and Posner's "The Leadership Challenge." As you consider your board, do they have a vision for the community and their role in the community? As a manager, do you have a board recognition/motivation program in place? With your next board meeting on the horizon, would you consider implementing some new meeting tools that will help productively manage the process?

Any step you take will be a step that has not been taken before in building your board leadership.

Congratulations on taking the step and being willing to challenge the process.

## Top Nine Catalysts for Volunteers

Involvement—to be engaged, stimulated

Ownership—to be a part of the plan

Empowerment—the freedom to make decisions

Relationship—social contact or part of a group

Competence—continually learn and improve

Accomplishment—to succeed

Significance—to make a difference

Safety—to be themselves

Recognition—to be appreciated and rewarded

