

## Boards 2.0 Feature Article - April 2007

This month we are excited to have our first “View from the Corner Office” where we ask a local nonprofit leader to reflect on a topic of interest to them. Ron Carpenter is CEO of Children’s Bureau, one of Indiana’s most historic and diverse child serving organizations ([www.ChildrensBureau.org](http://www.ChildrensBureau.org)). Ron is also a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee for Boards 2.0. We welcome submissions, up to two pages in length, from other nonprofit staff and board leaders.

Ron’s thoughts have been posted on the Indy Board Blog ([www.indyboardblog.blogspot.com](http://www.indyboardblog.blogspot.com)) and we encourage you to add your response to his comments.

### **The Most Important Partnership**

In my career as the Chief Executive of several human service nonprofits, I have been fortunate to enjoy great relationships with my board chairs. Consequently, in the organizations where I have served on boards and have been selected to serve as a board chair, I have utilized what I have learned from those relationships to be more effective. In serving in both roles and based on my experiences, I conjecture that it is this key relationship, ***this partnership between the CEO and board chair that impacts the nonprofit agency’s community connectivity success the most.*** There is no ideal “model” for these partnerships, but I would like to advance a few elements of what I have found important. It is rare that an organization with a strong CEO and a weak board, or a weak CEO with a strong board (with the chair representative of such) maximizes its potential—balance and mutual reliance is required for healthy functionality.

One of the CEO’s primary responsibilities is board development. Mutually, the board’s chief responsibility is the selection, development and support of the CEO. The board chair and CEO in turn lead the process of shared governance. Both enter this partnership by choice. Both need to invest in its success. The CEO will need to be flexible as board chairs will successively change in a robust organization over his/her tenure. It is imperative that the relationship enjoys *good communication, clear understanding of each other’s roles, mutually agreed upon goals* for the term of the chair in context to the long term advancement of the organizational mission, and perhaps most importantly, mutual trust.

I have found that trust develops between an incumbent CEO and future chairs as soon as an eventual chair joins a board. Their passion for the cause, devotion to the organizational integrity and investment of time, not just money, self identifies them and exemplifies their commitment and potential as a board leader.

Kathy Minx, with BSA LifeStructures, is my current board chair at Children’s Bureau. When I asked her about her perspective on this issue, she stated that the board chair, along with board members, is accountable for overall governance of the organization which includes: *1) Board oversight, 2) financial oversight, and, 3) mission oversight.* She further stated that the board chair and CEO should have a close relationship. We have developed such a relationship of mutual respect and trust. If our nonprofit is to successfully navigate and respond to both foreseen and unforeseen challenges and opportunities; this is a necessity.

Building social capital is paramount to achieve mission fulfillment in the nonprofit's arena of service in today's competitive environment. Social capital is built over time through effectively connecting the broader community to organizational vision. The starting point of building sound partnerships begins with the relationship between the board chair and the CEO. **It takes time. It takes some risk and commitment on behalf of both parties. It creates results.**

Ron Carpenter  
President & CEO  
Children's Bureau, Inc.

Keep Learning...

**The Most Important Partnership - *Maximizing the CEO/Board Chair Relationship*** will be the topic of the Fridays 2.0 interactive educational gathering on **Friday, May 11**, from 8:30-10:30 at TLD, 303 N. Alabama Street, Suite 230. Our panel will include local nonprofit CEOs with past and current Board Chairs. RSVP to [Amanda@tld.org](mailto:Amanda@tld.org) or register on-line at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=663443757571>. A fee of \$5 will be collected at the door for handouts and refreshments. Bring both a board leader and staff leader for the greatest learning opportunity.