

Creating A Strong Partnership With Your CEO Through Goal Setting

Don Parker, Board Chair, Gilda's Club South Jersey

The rules that govern the relationship between a board and its CEO include many of those required to make a good marriage work: Trust, candor, two-way honest communication, and mutual respect. Our current board relationship with our CEO included all of these characteristics and more. But like Jim Collins' book we were "good but not great" on all aspects. Often "good is the enemy of great" and makes you comfortable enough not to "mess with your success." Undeterred by our success in meeting oftentimes daunting programming and fundraising challenges, we embarked on a journey of self evaluation and improvement.

We started with Gilda's Club Worldwide self assessment and continued with a four-session strategic planning initiative. We concluded our process with an all-day retreat with Jonathan Schick working through the steps in his "Goal Project." We are now busy implementing six principles from Jonathan's process with full endorsement from the board. We renewed our trust in our CEO by solidifying our focus on governance of Gilda's Club, not management.

We have pared down our meeting schedule and eliminated executive committee meetings to allow our CEO to focus on running Gilda's Club, not serving the Board. We've clarified our relationship with our CEO with a commitment to the board having one employee: The CEO. And the CEO having one employer: The Board as a whole. We've clarified the board's purpose and reorganized our committees to accomplish it. The board has appointed a committee to establish a strategic appraisal agreement for the CEO and to conduct a semi-annual evaluation of her progress toward goals. The final component of Jonathan's plan is the Board's self appraisal.

Ironically, we began our renewal process with a self appraisal and now will institutionalize the process. The clarity of vision, purpose and accountability that has been generated during this journey has resulted in a heightened sense of purpose and an elevated energy level among our board members.

In the end, the process felt like a "Renewal of Marriage Vows" characterized by the trust, candor and respect necessary to sustain us well into the future.