



10 Ways to Prevent and Cure HOA Board Member Burnout

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All too often, the 80–20 percent rule applies at HOAs: 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. So if one of your valued board members is showing signs of burnout or saying it's time to step back, it may not be easy to replace that gem. Here, we offer 10 ways to prevent burnout and recharge burned-out board members' batteries.

1. Remember that prevention is the cure. "To prevent board burnout, establish a protocol for the board that'll prevent it from happening," says Debra A. Warren, vice president of client relations at the Dallas-based Associa®, a community association management company with offices throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. "Make sure board members understand their role is to set policy and as much as they can—and I know it's difficult with smaller associations—avoid micromanaging and volunteering to do the micro-operations themselves. Try to resist that temptation so you can focus on the big-picture issues and spend your time where it's most important for the association."

2. Train your replacement from day one. "I tell board members that from the time they get on the board, they should start grooming their successor," says Harry Styron, a community association attorney at Styron & Shilling in Branson, Mo. "That's best done by finding interested owners and asking them to serve on committees that make reports to the board, whether those are standing or ad hoc committees. The idea is to find people who can become board members later and introduce them to the board's responsibilities and how the board needs information assembled, essentially grooming them for leadership."

3. Recognize you're one of many. "I give a talk to new board members, so I have the opportunity to warn them of burnout and the problems of trying to act alone even though it's sometimes hard to find volunteers," says Styron. "Board members shouldn't identify too closely with their board role and forget that they're *members* of a board. They don't personally have any special board power and should remember that board responsibilities are always shared."

4. Know your limitations. "For boards at smaller associations, it's important to be realistic about what you can accomplish," advises Warren. "Even though a board may say there are 10 things it has to do right now, be realistic by starting with the top three. And don't try to tackle 40 things in a meeting because then people get meeting burnout."

5. Step back when you're fried. "When they get burned out, there's a risk board members will say things they wish they hadn't," say Styron. "They need to figure out a way to control what they say in person and in emails. We have one president who's receiving complaints about way the HOA's maintenance function has been exercised, and he tends to create a flame war with the person who's lodging the complaint. He's taking the complaints personally and attacking in response. The person making the complaint is already angry and frustrated because he believes he made a request or pointed out a safety problem that hasn't been responded to."

6. Take on a different role. "Simply switch positions," suggests Ben Solomon, an attorney and founder of the Association Law Group in Miami Beach, Fla., who advises more than 500 associations and also represents developers through his second law firm, Solomon & Furshman LLP. "If you're the president of the board, you'll be burdened by more day-to-day responsibilities. If you're feeling overwhelmed, you can reduce your obligations by dropping down to being just a board member."

7. Delegate! "Maybe you can be delegating more," adds Solomon. "Some board members do everything on their own, and others delegate everything to their property management team. Ask yourself what you can

delegate to your property manager, lawyer, or accountant. People in those professions can be helpful in minimizing board members' burdens. Also consider what you can delegate to other board members."

8. Focus on what you're good at or enjoy. Get involved in projects that fit your strengths or positive projects suited to your personality, suggests Kellie Sambrano, a business unit leader at Merit Management, a community association management company in Aliso Viejo, Calif. "Find a project that appeals to that board member's particular passion; maybe it's highlighting a reserve study item that's due for replacement. Sometimes seeing a project to completion can motivate a board member to stay on for another term. Positive projects suited to a board member's personality could include newsletter creation or planning a community or spirit-building event or such activities as a holiday decorating or best-yard contest. Participation in uplifting activities with neighbors provides a positive atmosphere in which many residents express their gratitude for the board's hard work."

9. Step back to avoid worsening a situation, or take a sabbatical. Styron's client's problem raises another issue, which is when to ask a burned-out board member to stop acting as a point person on any or all issues. "It triggers the question of whether the board's president needs to be responding to issues or whether they could be assigned to another board member or directed to an email address set up to receive complaints," he explains. "The email could be something like maintenance@xhoa.com, and responses could be automatically given to the maintenance person or whatever board member is taking responsibility for oversight. Even that responsibility could be rotated, or there could be a committee created of some nonboard members who'd take a turn at responding to maintenance complaints."

Along the same lines, consider taking a sabbatical, advises **Adam Leitman Bailey**, a real estate attorney who represents condos and co-ops in New York City. The best tactic is often taking time off from the board while still remaining active in one area or on a significant issue.

10. Honor dedicated board members. Help recharge burned-out board members' batteries by showing them that others recognize and appreciate their hard work, suggests **Bailey**. How? Throw a party in honor of a board member's great contributions.