

## **Notes on the VHA Board Self Evaluation, November 11, 2020**

**By Don Lester and Bob Nygren, SCORE Facilitators (11/14/20)**

Let us begin by thanking the Board for allowing us to be a part of your self- evaluation exercise. Bob and I really appreciate the willingness to participate and the potential by the Board members who attended to take on the challenges before them.

We have tallied the self-evaluation scale that everyone completed. The results are below.

### **The Individual Member Self Evaluation survey results.**

90% support and understand the mission of the VHA

90% indicated they are knowledgeable about the organization's programs and services

50% follow trends and important developments related to the VHA

50% responded that they assist with fund raising and/or give a significant annual gift

90% read and understand the VHA's financial statements

70% have a good working relationship with the President

60% indicated they do not recommend individuals for service on the Board

100% prepare for and participate in board meetings

100% act as goodwill ambassadors for the VHA

90% find serving on the board to be a satisfying and rewarding experience

These results point to a narrow perception by almost half of the members as to what being a Board member entails. In particular, lack of interest in external trends and threats are not followed and no effort is made toward fundraising by these individual board members.

There is strong support for the VHA's programs and services and support in general for the organization. Everyone indicated they show up for meetings and participate, which we witnessed in the meeting on Wednesday.

Thirty percent of the respondents indicated they did not have a good working relationship with the President. Part of that problem could be not having been on the board for very long.

The other result that is worth noting is that 60% of the board members do not recommend others to serve.

## **TAKEAWAYS FROM THE BOARD SELF EVALUATION OF THE VHA**

There appear to be three main areas of concern that emerged from the meeting on November 11, 2020.

1. **PEOPLE** – This issue is overarching, involving the ability of people in key positions, lack of training throughout the organization, and succession planning and execution. The problems begin with the Vice Presidents and trickle down. It was also noted that some VPs take on other roles outside the VHA which hinders their ability to perform their VHA duties. Succession planning appears to not exist. Simply put, the people problems are recruiting, development, and training.

Possible solutions: Encourage each manager or officer to find a back-up and train that person to do their job. Counsel those whose attentions are diverted to other organizations and explain how the lack of attention to VHA issues is hurting the organization. As the VHA has grown over the years, job descriptions and responsibilities may have become muddled.

2. **MARKETING** – Several marketing problems were discussed. The VHA appears to be losing impact in the community partly due to an identity crisis that has resulted in a loss of relevance. The Villages as a community has undergone significant changes since the founding of the VHA, but the VHA has not pivoted to serve the changing landscape. In particular, the growth of the community below highway 466A and state road 44 have been substantial and the percentage of new residents joining the VHA has diminished. It was noted that once a person joins the VHA they never hear from them again. As with any organization, the VHA would benefit from a more personal marketing approach.

Possible solutions: Recruiting materials need to be upgraded and an elevator speech extolling the benefits of the VHA to the community should be developed. This could be provided to all members as an easy way to encourage their neighbors to take a fresh look at the VHA. Marketing and sales expertise will be required for this to work.

The Board might also consider a project of trying to drill down and identify the root cause of this lack of relevance and determine a new thrust or strategic direction that can be introduced to the community, sort of a new VHA.

One outcome of the meeting that was pretty obvious to us is that the organization needs marketing research to identify what the new residents, and old residents, would like to see in a homeowners' advocacy group.

3. **STRUCTURE** – The third major problem category is structure. As an organization grows, structure is needed to provide control and coordination. It defines reporting relationships and establishes the concept of governance. Corporate Governance specifically refers to the Board of Directors of an organization and any institutional investors. Since The VHA is nonprofit, its Board constitutes its corporate governance structure. Its focus should be on three things: One, monitoring the activities of the organizations; two, selecting and evaluating top managers; and three, establishing the broad strategic direction of the organization. There are a few hindrances to this charge. For example, the three individual entities, Helping Hand, Community Foundation, and the VHA, seemed to be a source of confusion for some on the Board. Individual organizations are told to operate separately yet they are under the governance arm of the Board of the VHA. The Board also noted yesterday that regular reports from each VHA program do not always come before them, isolating those programs.

Possible solutions: Some Board members suggested doing away with the three separate, independent entity structure due to its uncertainty and lack of governance. Another suggestion was regular monthly reports from program directors to the Board.

Two other ideas come to mind. One, elect a Chair of the Board who is not an officer. Two, bring in one or two outside directors to the Board who are not VHA members. Perhaps the outside directors could have expertise in areas such as law or accounting that could provide needed advice during Board meetings and bring a fresh, outside perspective to the meetings.

Whatever actions are taken, the Board needs to establish an accountability system that will drive action and execution of the goals of the VHA. Those goals should be set by the Board.

There is no doubt the pandemic has had a dramatic effect on the VHA, as on many other organizations. Those that have survived during this difficult time have found ways to offer their services in different formats, such as take out and not dine in, or curbside service at Wal-Mart when ordering ahead online, and of course purchasing products without ever leaving the house. The services and programs of the VHA have been hindered by limitations on gatherings, restrictions on meeting places, quarantines, and so forth. In particular, the inability to host New Resident Night has impacted the enlistment of new members.

With the extent of the duration of the pandemic unknown at this time, serious consideration needs to be given to a new way of doing business. The VHA must find a way to brand itself to the community in a fashion that encourages membership through stepped up marketing and a more personal touch to recruiting new members and volunteers to serve.