

# SINGLE QUESTION

# CAN A SINGLE QUESTION GET YOUR BOARD ON A PATH FOR CHANGE?

BY LORI R. STORM, CAMEX, CCAM

In our industry, we have seen boards that have done extraordinary things for their communities. We have also experienced way too many boards that refuse to take steps to make their communities better, more modern or improve the way they serve the members. What is the difference between these two types of boards? How can boards move farther from the stuck-in-the-mud types to the soaring-in-the-clouds type?

I would like you to consider making a minor change in your thought process. What if you changed the possible outcome of everything you do with one question? Are you ready? Here is the question:

## HOW WOULD THAT WORK?

To be honest, you have to ask that question with genuine curiosity. And this question has to replace statements and questions such as: “We don’t have that kind of money”, “What’s wrong with the way we do it now?” or “The owners would never agree to this.”

This question alone can open you up to possibilities you had never considered.

You have already experienced this in 2020 as you have had to navigate changes that you may never have considered otherwise. You had to continue to conduct board business without holding a meeting in your clubhouse with members in attendance. Whether you were aware of it or not, you had to ask, “How would that work?” You turned to your manager for guidance, you discussed the matter with your attorney and you may have tried more than one approach.

Maybe you started with a phone conference call but found that keeping your members quiet while you discussed an agenda item was impossible. Or maybe you found that not being able to see the board members’ faces made it harder to understand their intent or their mood. So you tried video conferencing and found that this platform facilitated your agenda in ways you hadn’t imagined. More members attend because they can do so from the comfort of their homes and aren’t stuck in those uncomfortable folding chairs for hours. They can turn up the volume all they want and aren’t sitting in the back because they arrived late.

The board president now finds that order is much better as he or she can mute everyone with a click of a mouse and the board focuses better and doesn’t wander off

topic as much as when they met in person. Many boards are considering keeping this format permanently as it provides a better experience for everyone.

So, let’s test out this question on something small – changing from monthly meetings to the quarterly meetings mandated by your bylaws. This would reduce the time burden on the board and save the board money on management. So, “How would that work?” If you ask your manager that question, he or she will have an entire game plan ready to lay out for you. Managers work with communities all the time who function perfectly with quarterly meetings. Boards delegate responsibilities to the manager, committees and individual board members between meetings. It doesn’t hurt to give this a try. You can always try something different if you don’t like the outcome.

Now let’s try this question with something much larger – expanding and upgrading your clubhouse and its facilities. That might sound pretty overwhelming. But let’s try that question. How would that work? Most boards do not contain the expertise to imagine all the ramifications of such a project or even know where to begin with something like this. Again, start with your manager. Managers are master facilitators. They can gather together subject matter experts that will answer a whole host of questions for you, and many of them already work for you. Bring in your banker, your insurance carrier, your reserve study specialist and your attorney. They can help you form the right questions to ask and guide you to where to find the answers.

Maybe you should form an Ad Hoc Committee to work with this expert team so the board can focus on the community as a whole. Your committee can bring in

reports, conduct town hall meetings to keep everyone informed of what they are learning and what they are thinking. Town halls can bring out experts you didn’t know were among your members. They can also bring up alternate ideas that hadn’t been considered. If you involve your members early and often, the chance that they will say yes when you ask the big questions is much higher.

All right. It is time to turn the attention on your community. What have members asked about that you may have rejected out of hand? What ideas has one board member brought up that were dismissed by the majority of the board? What would you secretly like to see happen in your community but have never brought to the table because you didn’t have the answer to how it would work. Our world is changing rapidly and boards have been challenged to make changes and decisions that they never imagined they would ultimately embrace.

**Seize this moment in time when everyone is rethinking what they do and how they do it. Bring this question to every meeting and see where it might lead. You might achieve more than you thought you could.**



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