

PEJE | Partnership for Excellence  
in Jewish Education

## Views from Josh Elkin

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### Transforming Your Board: The Value of the Experienced Trustee

I travel around the country and come in contact with many lay and professional leaders working conscientiously to strengthen their schools through a variety of initiatives: for example, independent school accreditation; strategic planning; professional development of leaders and faculty; increased outreach for recruitment; augmented fundraising; and convening an annual Board retreat to plan for the upcoming year's work and priorities.

I mention the Board retreat last because I want to focus on a significant trend observed anecdotally by PEJE staff and others - the fact that day schools are paying considerably more attention to their Boards than they were even a few years ago. This is a gratifying development, given how pivotally impactful Boards are to the health and vitality of each and every day school.

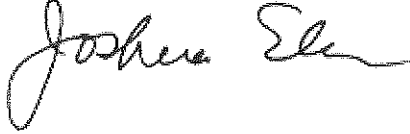
But how does one go about seriously upgrading the performance of a day school Board?

Often overlooked in the process is the positive influence that an experienced trustee can bring to bear on a day school. I define an experienced trustee as a lay leader who has served on the board of at least one other high-performing non-profit, either within or beyond the Jewish community. Such an individual brings insider knowledge of what good governance looks like. The experienced trustee knows first-hand about constructing agendas, starting and ending meetings on time, ensuring well-prepared committee reports, and clarifying the roles of Board and Head. What a blessing for a day school Board to have at least one, but hopefully a few, such veterans! They have been in the governance trenches and know what works and what doesn't. If chosen and nominated carefully, they can deliver invaluable wisdom at virtually every meeting.

I can recall one example from my personal experience as the head of a day school that was trying, after many years, to reach out to find new Board nominees with previous Board experience. They identified a woman who had served on the Board of the local Jewish Community Center. (Coincidentally, she happened to have children in the school, but that appeared to be a second consideration.) Within a year, this veteran from a high-performing JCC Board overhauled the way the school expressed appreciation for volunteers. By borrowing from her JCC experience, with the help of a sub-committee of Board members and non-Board members, she crafted a recognition program for all volunteers to the school, an appreciation ritual for Board members and officers stepping down, and a complete re-vamping of the school's Annual Meeting, which was transformed into the venue where these new practices and rituals were implemented. Much of what she started remains in place to this day. One can speculate that these changes, spearheaded by *one* previously experienced trustee, have played an important role in this school's efforts to attract quality leaders, to develop and retain them, and to ensure that all volunteers receive proper thanks for their significant efforts.

I urge your Committee on Trustees (formerly known as the Nominating Committee) to scour the broader community in search of seasoned lay leaders who are willing to devote at least two to three years of service to your day school, with strong encouragement to suggest practices and strategies that they have seen work previously. As you identify and cultivate these prospective Board members, be explicit about why you want their involvement in terms of upgrading your school's governance with the benefit of their experience. If you are a Board chair, join PEJE's Community of Practice for lay leaders, and share what you have done, are

doing, or are planning to do to bring experienced trustees into your day school's board room.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Josh Elkin". The signature is written in black ink and is contained within a rectangular box.