

How to get the best from an Advisory Board meeting

1 An effective advisory board looks at the big picture.

You want your advisory board members to be asking questions such as: "How are we doing in meeting our milestones?" "Are we working on the most important tasks?" "How can we validate the market more accurately?" 'Who are potential investors for the company'

Design a session that encourages dialogue about an issue, not decision making. Make the issue something of substance and include a summary of the discussion with the next board minutes.

Frame the context of an issue by explaining a possible strategy, or identifying the questions the board should address.

Provide information ahead of time that will help board members think about issues that will be discussed at the meeting. For instance, assign an article to read and ask that each board member for their opinion on its value to the company.

2 A good board has a keen sense of priorities.

Always work from an agenda so that time is focused on the most important issues.

Use planning workshops and techniques such as brainstorming to encourage members to think creatively as well as practically about the challenges ahead.

3 A perceptive board provides growth and learning opportunities for the CEO.

An Advisory Board of experienced business people should take a mentoring interest in the CEO, providing the CEO with the means to develop professionally and personally.

Ask for help and advice – who could coach you in a subject?, who would be willing to practice a negotiation with you?, who could review a report you've written?

4 An astute board encourages open debate.

Promote an atmosphere where each board member feels free to raise concerns, voice criticisms, and express their ideas.

Encourage robust debate. When the CEO and board members disagree, facilitate the discussion so that each side understands the opposing side's position.

5 The outstanding board constantly evaluates itself and keeps improving.

Every few meetings ask board members how they think the meetings are going and any suggestions for ways in which it could improve its focus and discussions.

Occasionally bring in other experts or a facilitator to run a workshop on a particular topic.

6 Celebrate

Take time during every advisory board meeting to celebrate at least one major accomplishment. Celebration and focusing on the positive can have a contagious reaction that impacts on how everyone views the company.