

Areas That Some Trustees Feel May Need Improvement
Tornillo ISD Board Training – Bill Rutherford
April 15, 2009

We have anticipated that I will get a call from Mr. Rutherford asking, “What areas do you want me to cover in this training?” With this in mind I asked each Trustee to contribute some areas where that individual thought improvement was needed. This list below is a compilation of the responses that I received. They are in no particular order other than I included a few items which I marked as mine and placed at the end. The commentary is my best attempt to recreate the position of whichever Trustee(s) brought up the topic. If I have “missed the point,” please feel free to correct or clarify at the training.

We can get Team Building credit for this training if ALL SEVEN attend the meeting!

Attendance at meetings: For several months we have had good Trustee attendance at meetings. But, it was pointed out that we have had poor attendance in the past on the part of some – and often for poor reasons to miss. Board service is important enough for any Trustee to give one night per month to the task.

Promptness to meetings: Everyone needs to be on time for our meetings except in unusual circumstances. Constantly coming late, when the meeting dates are known well in advance, is disrespectful to the Board and looks foolish to the audience.

Attentiveness during meetings: At times it has appeared that some Trustees are physically at the meeting, but not there mentally. This gives the impression that Board service, the items and issues being discussed, and the opinions of other Trustees are not important.

Cell phone usage/texting during meetings: This behavior is viewed as rude by some who responded. The suggestion was to not bring the phones, or turn them off. *PV's note: Let me offer a suggestion on this that I thought of during this weekend. We have had emergencies come up a time or two, and they were important. As such, Trustees could give out Estela's cell number as an emergency contact during meetings so she could alert us in those special times.*

Uniform appearance at meetings: There was a suggestion that we should agree to wear one of our shirts to each meeting to be uniform in appearance.

Lack of public presence – Chat/event attendance: Some Trustees are never seen in the community at games, Chats, etc. This limits the advocacy effectiveness of the Trustee and weakens the Board's ability to influence public opinion.

Lack of interaction with faculty: Many of our Trustees never visit our schools or attend faculty meetings, etc. The staff needs to know we support them.

Public statements inconsistent with meeting positions: There is a concern by some Trustees that others on the Board are taking one position at our meetings and then taking another with their friends/relatives in public. A Board cannot lead if the members are weak and easily bullied by those in the community who are prone to be negative.

Trustee knowledge of Special Education: The laws/requirements of Special Education, and the programs offered by Tornillo ISD, are really very interesting. Few of our Trustees know about these programs. We need to be more knowledgeable about this field.

Define micromanagement: Trustees are sometimes accused of micromanagement. What is micromanagement? *PV's note: in my opinion, the Tornillo Board is exceptionally good in this area. Micromanagement has not been a problem on this Board since 2004.*

Encourage more Community Input usage by public: It was suggested that the Board should encourage community members to attend our meetings and voice their complaints during our "Community Input" section of the meeting. *PV's note: on this matter, I think we all need to talk about what is the purpose of a Board meeting and for what purpose do we do Parent Chats. Let's make sure we are all on "the same page" in regard to these issues.*

Correction of Trustees only outside of meetings: It was pointed out that PV's theories include the premise that Trustees should only be "corrected/reprimanded" at a time other than a Board meeting – or at least not in the public session segment. It was also pointed out that there have been corrective comments made in open session. Except for extreme cases, such as a vote to request a resignation of a Trustee, I do prefer that corrections be handled away from meetings; or at trainings such as tonight's event.

Trustees' friendship with employees problematic: Some Trustees get, or already are, "close" to one or more of our employees. This can result in problems with that employee's performance as he/she perceives that his/her "inside track" with a Trustee entitles the employee to special privileges. In such cases, it always causes problems for the supervisor, usually results in the employee's departure from employment, and weakens the Board's credibility with the public.

>PV's items

>Lack of recruitment of future Trustees: You have heard me complain about this before and I will again. As a Board, you do not nurture community members for potential future Board service. As a Board, you are always reacting to election issues or replacement appointments – you have no pool of quality people who could step in and serve on the Board. The last candidate to run (and win) without my encouragement was Rachel Avila in May of 2005; four years ago.

>More improvement ideas from Board: The Board is generally happy with the advancements made by the district and I thank you for your confidence and support. I do feel that you too often take the position, "Paul will think of something." When I first got to Tornillo, that original Board had a huge list of things they wanted to see improved. As these issues have been addressed, there have not been enough Board contributions to new and innovative ideas.

>Stronger skills/commitment as a Trustee: As I see it, some of you need to work harder at being a Board member – it is as simple as that. One cannot be a great Trustee by merely coming to a meeting (sometimes unprepared and uninformed – or your packet not read), not paying attention to the discussion, and only the only sign of life is when you vote. A great Trustee communicates with the superintendent often enough so that they arrive at the meeting already knowing the factual background of the issues. A great Trustee will have public presence – whether it is at ball games, Parent Chats, going on our TAKS trips, etc. I could go on and on about this but if you are feeling guilty or angry/defensive while you are reading this, then you might need to make some changes. If you think I am wrong please share with me how low performance is “good enough for you,” but somehow we are supposed to expect high performance from our employees and students. A Board sets the tone for a school district; you will not get high performance from others unless you expect high performance of yourself.