

# Make better board decisions:

## *6 Essential tips for association alignment*

Alignment is one of the biggest challenges for board members, whether you're part of a successful organization or one that's falling short. Without board alignment on decisions, critical projects and policies fall by the wayside (at worst) or are less effective (at best). But when your board is aligned on strategic decisions and united on what is best for the community, you can create a more successful, cohesive and desirable association, which boosts your resident experience and property values.

How can you improve board alignment and make better decisions? Follow these 6 tips.

Hear what real board members  
have to say about alignment.

Watch the video here:

<https://bit.ly/AZ-Align-Video>







TIP #1:

## Remember your “why.”

Why did you decide to be on your association’s board of directors? When you have the right motivation for being on the board (to protect and enhance your community or building), it’s easier to be aligned, because your choices always come back to what’s best for the community.

Remember: Not everyone comes to an HOA board with the right intention or motivation. But it’s not your job to worry about fellow board members. Set an example and focus on your purpose.

*“If you go into the process understanding that you’re a board member because you want to serve the community and you have the community at the very heart of what you do, then it makes it [decision making] easier. If you go into the process of being a board member as something that you want to do for yourself, that doesn’t work.”*

- Gigi Martin, Treasurer

Trilogy La Quinta Maintenance Association



TIP #2:

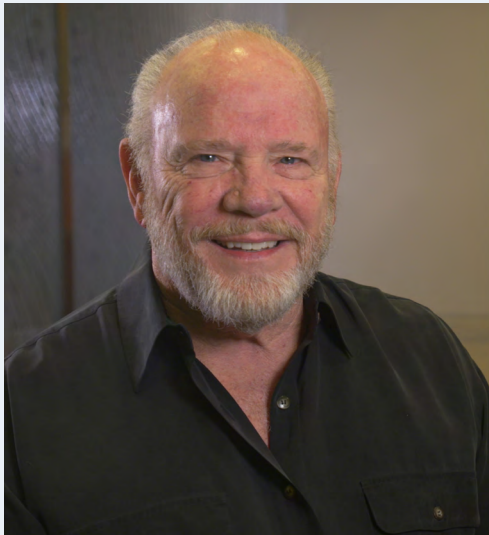
## Take time to disagree.

If you thought making better decisions and true alignment meant you had to agree on everything, think again. As long as you're keeping the community's best interest at heart, it's important to share differing opinions during the decision-making process.

When you see an issue from a different perspective than yours (anything from deciding on a capital improvement to selecting a new security provider), you may come up with a compromise or a more effective solution.

"Previous research has shown that dissent leads to a number of benefits such as increased creativity and improved problem solving."<sup>1</sup>

- American Psychological Association



*"We don't agree on everything all the time because there are 5 different people here. That's a good thing, because then we talk about things and someone can very easily bring up something that I've never thought of and change my mind."*

- Michael Nagle, Board President  
The Mark High-Rise Association







TIP #3:

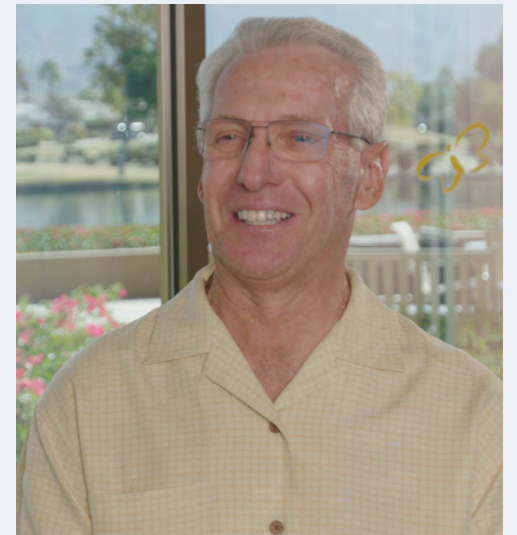
## Stick to your association's mission and strategic plan.

How can you make better decisions (while surviving changes in the board of directors and opposing views)? Start with a mission and strategic plan. A strategic plan gives you a concrete plan for the future, which serves as the foundation for board decisions (and outlasts changes in the board).

Don't have a strategic plan? Partner with your manager and management company to design a mission and strategy that's customized to your community's particular needs.

*"Without that [a strategic plan], the community would not progress in a logical manner. The community's priorities could change from one board to the next. This plan gives the entire community a roadmap to where we'll be in future years."*

- Gary Turner, Board President  
Trilogy La Quinta Maintenance Association



TIP #4:

## Actively (and respectfully) listen to others on the board.

Each member of your board has been elected to serve, which means their input is valuable – whether they've been on the board for 3 years or 3 months. Remember that when you're discussing important decisions.

There is one caveat. By taking every opinion and comment into account, you may end up stalling decisions. That's why it's important to have access to tools that will help you make thoughtful and informed choices as a group (e.g., checklists, discussion guides and access to industry experts). Your management company should provide these resources. For example, FirstService Residential offers a guide to help boards create an investment policy (which can help improve their reserve fund returns). Download it here: <https://bit.ly/Investment-AZ>

*“While there are many elements of a strong board culture, one of the most important goals is to establish what BoardSource calls a “culture of inquiry.” This means that a board fully enlists differences of opinion, unique vantage points and areas of expertise, and deep, informed questions to cultivate strong collective wisdom.”<sup>2</sup>*

- BoardSource







TIP #5:

## Leave your ego at the door.

There's absolutely no room for ego if you want to have an effective and high-performing association. When you're on a board, the motivation should shift to the community or building rather than your own personal agenda or initiatives.

This comes back to understanding your "why" and starting with the right foundation. Ask yourself, why am I on the board, and what do I hope to accomplish in the community? More importantly, what's in the best interest of the community? Remember – at the end of the day, you are only accountable for your own motivation (not anyone else's on the board), so make sure it's in the right place.

*"We've been successful as a board because we leave our egos at the door. You have to recognize that what you're doing as a board needs to be based on what's best for the community, not based on your personal opinion and preferences."*

- Debora Stacker, Treasurer  
EastLake II Community Association

TIP #6:

## Be united on the final decision.

Aligning on the final decision is more important than how you come to that decision. Healthy disagreements are one thing (see tip #2), but crossing your arms and not giving in when the majority has ruled can lead to disunity on your board.

This disunity can carry over into how the association is perceived by the greater community. By reaching a final decision together, it will be easier to communicate the benefits (and the why) to residents, which will help elevate your reputation and lead to an improved association image in your own community and those around you.

*“The board has to present a united front to the community. And while the board may not agree entirely on every single element of what we’re trying to present to the community, it’s important that the whole board accept and be united on the outcome.”*

- Gary Turner, Board President  
Trilogy La Quinta Maintenance Association





## Start here

Making better association decisions starts with a more unified and aligned board. Sit down with your board and manager and use these tips to help guide your next conversation. Board alignment doesn't happen overnight, but going through these tips will give you a great foundation to make unified and strategic decisions that will take your community or high-rise to the next level.

### Watch the video

Hear what real board members say is the secret to true alignment.

Watch the video here:

<https://bit.ly/AZ-Align-Video>



### Bibliography

1. Garner, J. T., & Ragland, J. P. (2019). Tabling, Discussing, and Giving In: Dissent in Workgroups. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 23(1), 57–74. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000098>. [Accessed 1 Sep. 2020].
2. BoardSource. (n.d.). Culture and Dynamics. [online] Available at: <https://boardsource.org/fundamental-topics-of-nonprofit-board-service/culture-dynamics/> [Accessed 1 Sep. 2020].



## About FirstService Residential

FirstService Residential is simplifying property management. Its hospitality-minded teams serve residential communities across the United States and Canada. The organization partners with boards, owners, and developers to enhance the value of every property and the life of every resident.

Leveraging unique expertise and scale, FirstService serves its clients with proven solutions and a service-first philosophy. Residents can count on 24/7 customer care and tailored lifestyle programming, amenity activation, and technology for their community's specific needs. Market-leading programs with FirstService Financial and FirstService Energy deliver additional levels of support.

Boards and developers select FirstService Residential to realize their vision and drive positive change in the communities in their trusted care.

FirstService Residential is a subsidiary of FirstService Corporation (NASDAQ and TSX: FSV), a North American leader in providing essential property services to a wide range of residential and commercial clients.

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