

tip sheet #11

Tools for Trustees

TWELVE GOLDEN RULES FOR BOARD MEMBERS

The following tips are excerpted from The Public Library Start-Up Guide by Christine Lind Hage (chapter 3, page 21), available at www.ala-store.ala.org.

- 1) A Trustee must have an interest in the library. Does she or he believe enough in the educational, informational, and recreational role of the library to fight for the library as the church member fights for her or his church, the school person for her or his educational program, the doctor for her or his patient? It is a duty of the Trustee to do so.
- 2) A Trustee must have time to give to the library. Continuity of policy is almost impossible if a board member is absent two out of three meetings. No citizen should accept appointment as a library Trustee if she or he does not intend to come regularly to meetings. Likewise, a Trustee who finds new interests interfering with attendance should resign.
- 3) A Trustee must consider the position not a matter of prestige but an opportunity for courageous and forward-looking efforts to push the library ahead. An ideal trustee is a good businessperson, is interested in education, has few prejudices, and has good judgment, sound character, common sense, and public spirit. A Trustee should be chosen with these personal qualities in mind and not because of the church she or he attends, the section of town in which she or he lives, her or his political party affiliations, and so on.
- 4) A Trustee must know the law under which the library is organized.
- 5) A Trustee serves without compensation.
- 6) A Trustee carries a full share of responsibility as a board member, assuring that a few members do not have to do all the work or take all the blame or praise.
- 7) A Trustee does not voice her or his opposition or criticism, either publicly or privately, after a policy or rule is adopted by a majority vote of the board.
- 8) A Trustee is careful to keep confidential information confidential and does not give out information regarding future board actions or plans.

9) A Trustee treats the staff members and the librarian in a completely impersonal fashion. Under no circumstances does a Trustee listen to grievances of staff members or treat individual problems on her or his own. The librarian is in charge of the staff and has administrative control until a grievance is presented to the library board as a whole.

10) A Trustee should know the funding sources of the library and be familiar with the library budget.

11) A Trustee must know the needs of the library and community and be aware of trends and new procedures in the library field. The best and perhaps only way to do this is to read professional library publications, meet with Trustees of other libraries, visit other libraries, and attend the annual conferences and meetings of Trustees and librarians.

12) A Trustee knows that all powers are always vested in the library board and none at all in the individual board member. The individual has no power to act for the library in any way, unless authorized by the board itself; it is always the board as a unit that holds the responsibility and the powers.

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