



CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION



LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT

gotham**Culture** Helps Board of Trustees Achieve Alignment

Responsible for the active management of a large public trust, the Board of Trustees (Board) seeks to promote the legacy of the organization's founders by funding education for impoverished youth.

The Need

Over the past decade, the Board had experienced various challenges related to the way it was spending money, distrust among board members, and several actions taken by Board members that sparked litigation. Additionally, the Board had seen almost 100% turnover prior to engaging gothamCulture.

Emerging from the turmoil, the new chair built an entirely new Board. Since he was formerly a member of the old Board, he had an excellent perspective on what needed to be done to create a productive governing body that made fast and firm decisions. Unfortunately, some of the same problems emerged after the Board's reconstruction. Distrust grew among members, there were lots of sidebar conversations, and several factions were advocating for their personal agenda instead of the interests of the Board.

These are common issues.

Boards of all types and sizes experience governance issues that detract from the board's effectiveness. There can be a clash of skills and personalities that interfere with the Board members' ability to balance their three solemn duties:

Duty of Care – Exercising reasonable care when making decisions as stewards of the organization.

Duty of Loyalty – Giving undivided allegiance when making decisions. Acting in the best interests of the organization.

Duty of Obedience – Staying true to the mission of the organization.

The Board engaged gothamCulture to design and facilitate a process with the Board to reach a range of outcomes, including:

1. to help develop a clear and compelling vision and mission for the collective organization,
2. to align the Board around a path forward, to help reorganize the organizational structure to best achieve the vision, and
3. to assess and align the organizational culture to help drive the strategy



The Intervention

In partnership with the chair and vice-chair of the Board, it was determined that the process should begin with the articulation of a vision and mission that guided the Board forward. gothamCulture designed and facilitated a data collection process whereby the input of a wide variety of stakeholders shared their perspectives on the organization's future.

Additionally, gothamCulture facilitated a series of sessions with the board to draft a vision and mission that honored the intent of the organization's founders.

Although the initial engagement was intended to focus on the vision for the Board and its culture while doing the work, gothamCulture discovered that the board members were incredibly misaligned regarding the vision of the organization, how the Board should be structured, and what issues the Board should focus on.

It was clear that moving forward without focusing on the Board's misalignment would not be productive and would not lead to a successful outcome.

In the spirit of its organizational core value of Unwavering Integrity, gothamCulture made the decision to share this feedback with the Board and to recommend a different course of action. The team proposed a pause in work on the vision and culture of the Board, and a reallocation of efforts in supporting the Board in gaining alignment.

It was at this inflection point that gothamCulture began focusing directly on the health of the board. Six months into the engagement, the Board added three new members to an existing group of eight. This changed the entire dynamic of the Board.



gothamCulture took advantage of this opportunity to start off fresh with the Board, to set up new foundations, new commitments, new processes, and new ways of working with fellow board members.

gothamCulture began a session by familiarizing board members with the history of the Board and getting the board members to learn more about each other – what they had in common, and how they were different.

During that session, gothamCulture conducted a survey that had members look at how decisions were being made. The survey showed that they don't make decisions quickly, and they don't feel they have all the information they need to make decisions. Also, once they decide something, they don't stick to it. They may gather additional information then change their decision at the next board meeting.

Over the next few sessions, gothamCulture worked to help the board members identify the behavioral commitments that they would make to one another. Once the commitments were identified and approved, gothamCulture conducted a session targeting supporting factors (what was needed now and, in the future, to support members) and

constraining factors (what is getting in the way of aligning behavior to the selected commitments).

gothamCulture also provided advisory services to the board to help them define the optimal organizational structure required to support their strategy moving forward. This process included defining the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders, restructuring, and developing job descriptions to aid in recruiting new leadership roles.

Next, gothamCulture conducted a 360 behavioral assessment that listed all the commitments then built an evaluation for the board. Each board member evaluated the other Board members.

After the evaluations, each board member received their individual report. gothamCulture delivered a summary report that showed where the board's collective strengths and areas of opportunity were. gothamCulture then met one-on-one with each Board member to examine their individual strengths and opportunities.

Seeing real progress, gothamCulture conducted a session that celebrated the Board members' commitments.



The Impact

Although there wasn't an opportunity to go back and address the vision and culture of the Board due to the COVID-19 outbreak, gothamCulture made a measurable impact on the Board. Even with the work paused, the Board has experienced the following outcomes:

1. Developed, socialized, and adopted a consent agenda rather than an agenda where members had to make decisions on the fly with information they were just getting.
2. Identified topics that do not need discussion at full Board meetings.
3. Revised agenda to identify time for discussion of strategic priorities as well as integrated breaks for continued relationship building.
4. Officially adopted the four commitments summarized here:
 - a. Mutual respect, candor, and care – We support board \colleagues with the understanding that we are all present and engaged in discussions in a respectful manner.
 - b. Positive intent – We operate by assuming the best intentions of each other and with members of our broader, extended team.
 - c. One voice – We work together in the boardroom with recognition of our fiduciary duties in a manner that presents a Board that speaks with one voice with the goal of a unified message.
 - d. Transparency – We create an environment in which all members are aware and aligned, leading to trust and positive reputational standing and relationships.
5. Empowered committee chairs to engage in the development of a consent agenda and identifying strategic initiatives that require discussion.

The work done by gothamCulture has supported significant organizational alignment and change at the Board and senior leadership levels. The clarity that has been achieved has aided in coordinating the efforts of members of the organization to chart a path forward and begin executing the plan. This work promises to continue the founder's philanthropic legacy in perpetuity by providing much-needed support to impoverished youth.



About gothamCulture

gothamCulture, a leadership and organizational development consulting firm, focuses on identifying the underlying causes of business obstacles and assisting leaders in developing and executing action plans at the right time to ensure that clear and measurable results are achieved. The team at gothamCulture is comprised of professionals from around the globe in the leadership and organizational development field whose education, training, and work experience assist clients with a variety of services including creating large scale culture transformation, improving leadership effectiveness, and managing team dynamics.