



MARKKULA CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS

What Makes a Good Board Meeting?

Running time, 6:43 minutes

Summary

Varian Medical Systems Board Chair Richard Levy argues that a good board meeting has three characteristics:

1. It focuses on what the company needs, not on routine matters.
2. It "keeps it simple" through open-ended discussions rather than formal presentations.
3. It focuses on the big picture not specific technologies or tactics.

When to Use This Video

- to introduce how a board actually operates
- to introduce major mistakes many boards make
- to give specific characteristics of a good board meeting

How to Introduce the Video

- Varian Medical Systems Chair Richard Levy is a veteran of many boards and hundreds of board meetings. He has been chair of some of Silicon Valley's major boards. He knows a good board meeting from a bad one.
- As you watch the video, pay attention to the specific criteria Levy proposes for a good board meeting. Also, pay particular attention to his last point about one-on-one relationships between board members and company managers.

Questions to Ask After Viewing the Video

1. What are the characteristics of some bad meetings you've attended?
2. How does a bad meeting prevent the directors from doing their proper job?
3. How would you structure a meeting to encourage open-ended discussion?
4. How much contact should there be between board members and company managers?

Concluding Comments Instructors May Wish to Make

- Bad meetings get in the way of good decision making and good governance of all of our institutions. Every leader needs to know how to design a good meeting.
- It is often a deliberate strategy by management to fill a meeting with formal presentations so board members don't have time to ask questions. Often, board members have to push back against this tactic.