

Addendum  
to the  
Doctoral Dissertation  
“Nonprofit Business League  
Chief Executive Officers’  
Perceptions of Their  
Board Chair Relationships  
and Organizational Impacts”

The following pages are  
visual representations of the  
narrative presented in this  
Doctoral Dissertation

~ INSPIRING ORGANIZATION & LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE ~



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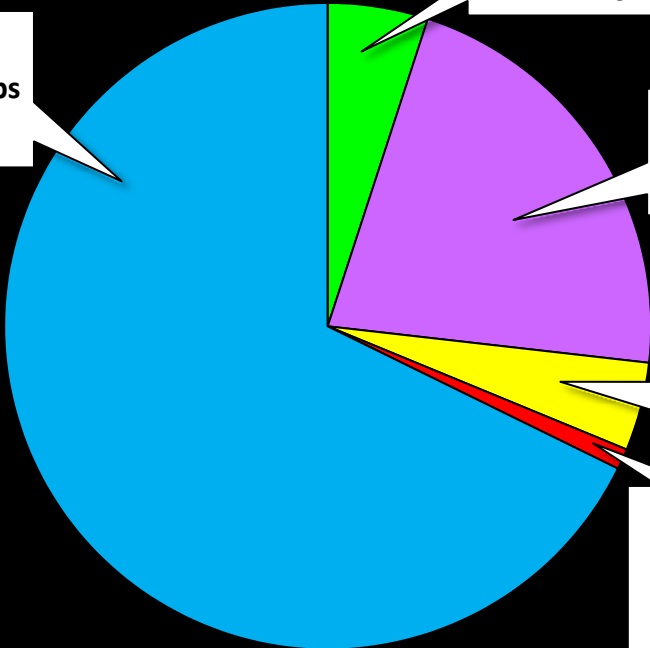
**Sole  
Proprietorships  
23 Million**

**C Corporations  
1.7 Million**

**S Corporations  
& Partnerships  
7.4 Million**

**All Other  
Nonprofits  
1.6 Million**

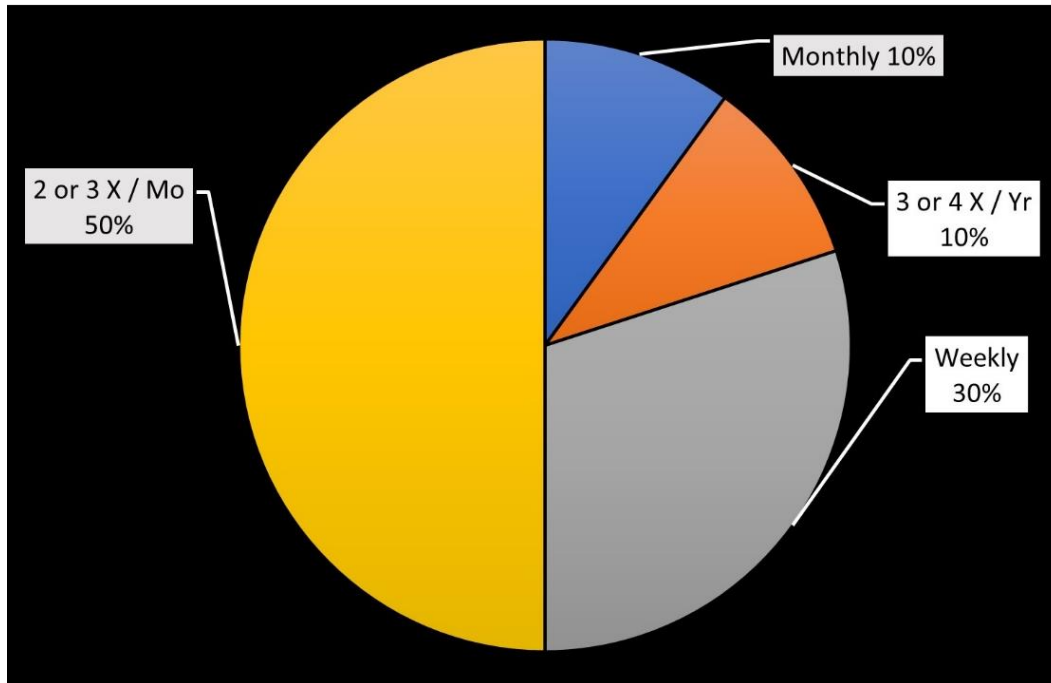
**501(c)(6)  
Business  
Leagues  
62,700**



QUESTION

1

How frequently do you meet with your board chair?

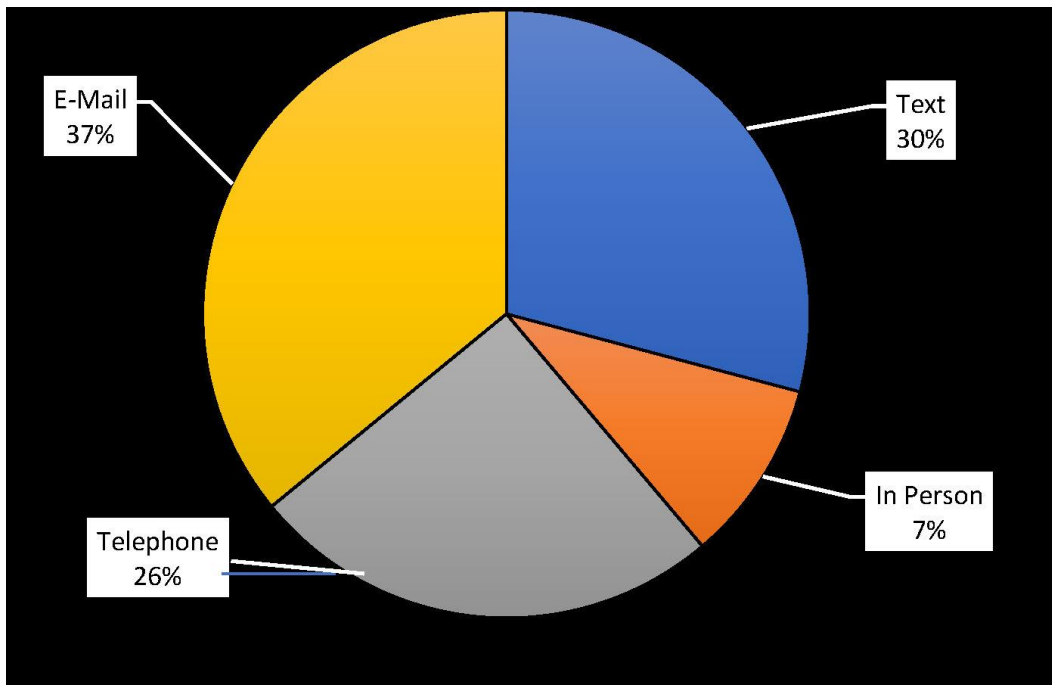


Frequency of in-person meetings between the CEO and board chair was largely driven by geographic distance separating the two individuals, and whether the scope of the nonprofit organization was national, statewide, or local.

QUESTION

2a

How do you communicate with your board chair?

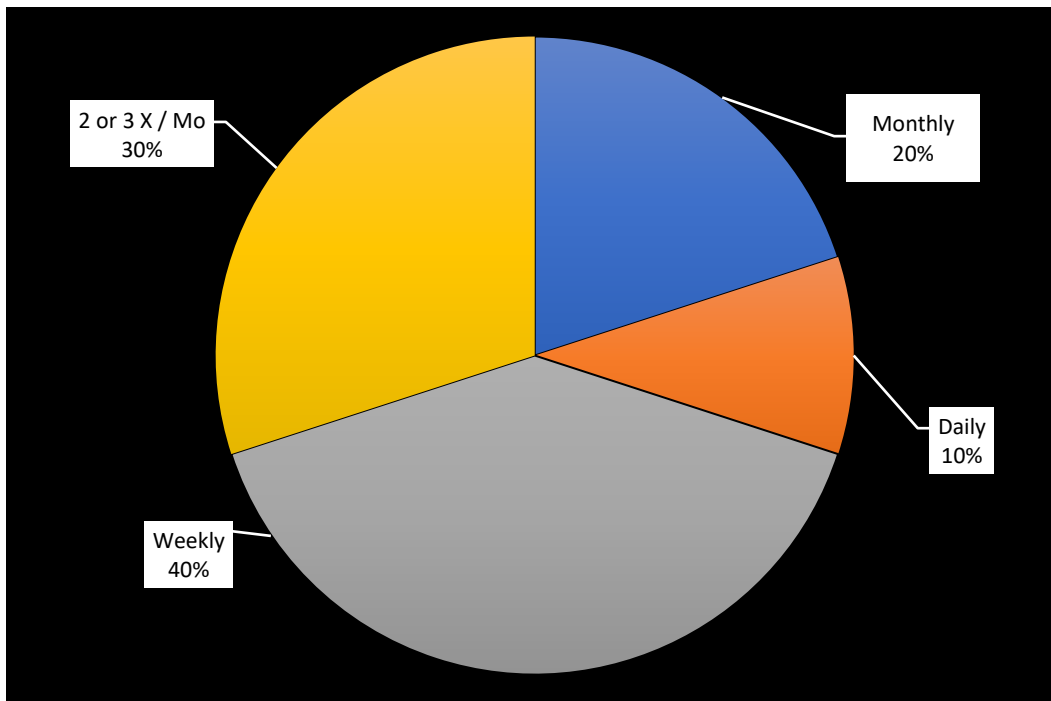


CEOs preferred written forms when communicating with their board chairs. CEOs used e-mail and text messaging over two-thirds (67%) as frequently as they used telephonic or in-person communication to stay in contact with their board chairs.

QUESTION

2<sub>b</sub>

How frequently do you communicate with your board chair?

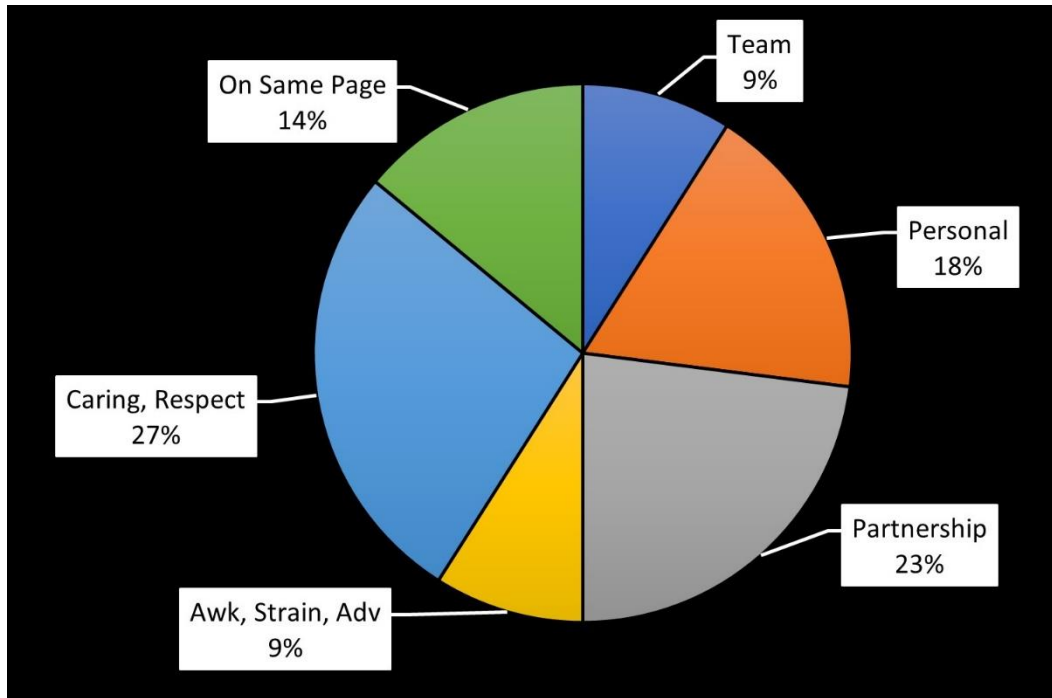


The majority of CEOs indicated frequency of communication with their board chairs to be at least weekly or 2 – 3 times each month although some reported communicating with their board chairs monthly or even on a daily basis.

## QUESTION

# 3

What kind of working relationship do you have with your board chair?

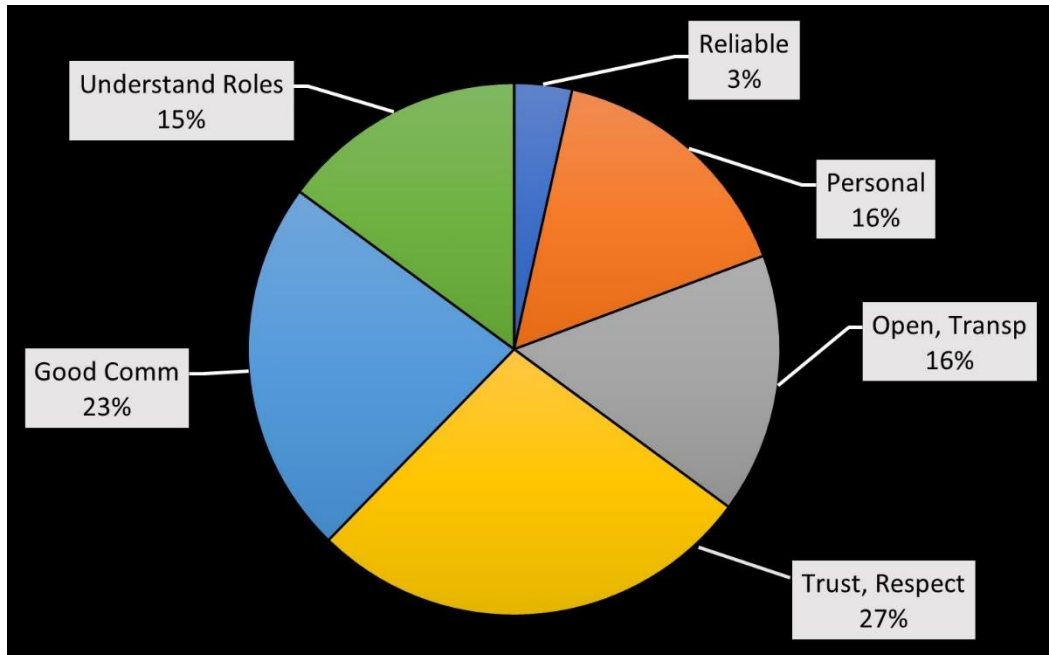


Most CEOs described their working relationships with their board chairs as positive and complementary. Caring, respectful, and partnership/team of equals were terms CEOs used. In a minority of cases, some CEO-board chair working relationships were characterized as awkward, strained, and adversarial.

## QUESTION

# 4

What factors do you think lead to a positive relationship between the CEO and the board chair?



CEOs felt that trust and respect, along with good communication, understanding roles, openness, and transparency lead to a positive relationship with their board chairs:

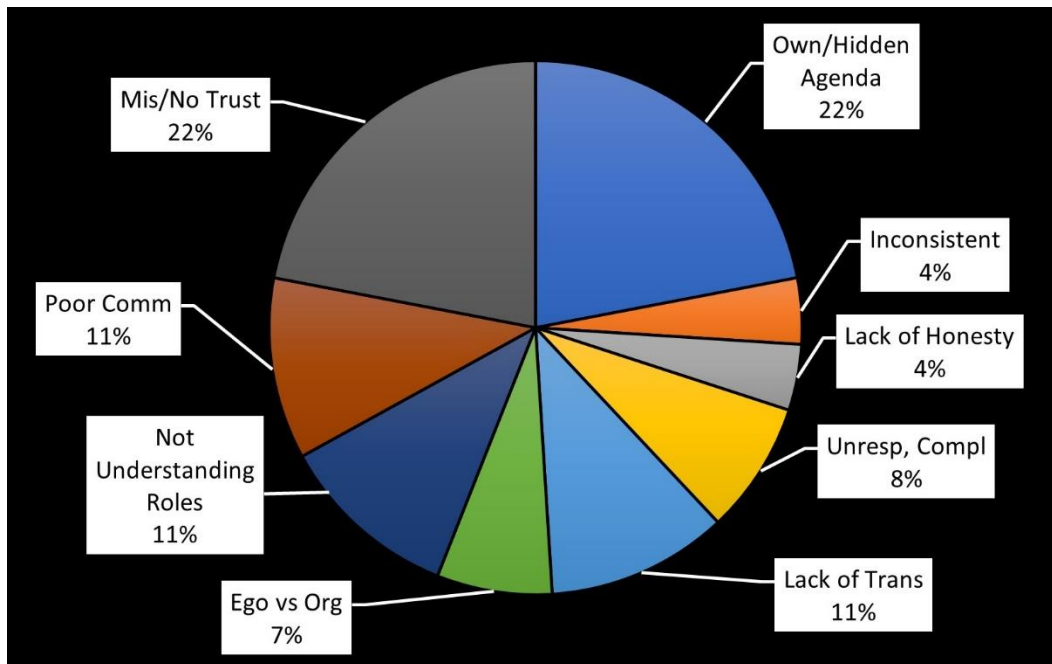
"I always want to avoid any surprises. I think that builds a very proactive way of maneuvering through troubling times together."

"They (board chairs) are the chief volunteer. And the more they understand their roles and responsibilities and the expectations of their roles, the better off they are. The more they understand that the CEO is their partner, the better off they are. And the more that they -- from the beginning -- assume that the CEO has the board's best interests -- as everybody does -- if we all go into that with the understanding that the organization is the most important thing, we'll be fine."

## QUESTION

# 5

What factors do you think lead to a negative relationship between the CEO and the board chair?



CEOs commented:

"Many board chairs fail to understand that being chair of the board is not about them. It's about the organization. Unfortunately, a lot of board chairs really feel like it has to be about them: their idea, their plan, their vision of the future, their vision of the organization, their ideas about what should happen next. And so they put their desires ahead of the organization."

"Having a personal agenda creates a negative relationship because things are not out in the open. Or transparent."

"I've experienced it, I know many others who have experienced it. This is that there is a board chair with an agenda that's extremely well hidden. And that is more about themselves than about the organization."

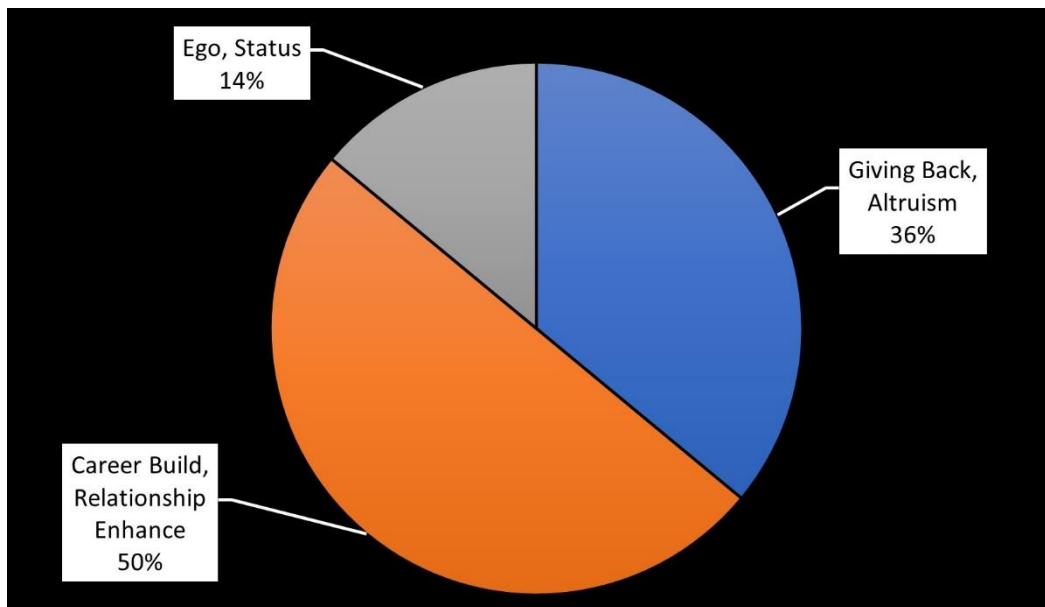
"Not being responsive or timely. Being dismissive. There's a number of negative behaviors and posturing that could end your relationship or trust."



## QUESTION

# 6

Why do you think your board chair invests (or exchanges) time with (or on behalf of) your organization?



Career building and relationship enhancement were the descriptors CEOs used most to explain why their board chairs invested or exchanged time on behalf of their organizations. Altruism and giving back were also mentioned as motivators and, to a lesser extent, ego and professional status:

“Board chairs talk about the value of the relationships they’ve formed within the organization and the board, about the value the organization has provided to them professionally either through certification, or education, or engagement. And they all talk about wanting to see the organization become more than it has been in the past. More robust, more relevant.”

“There’s sort of an implicit quid pro quo there; I guess the more you are involved in, you can shape the agenda.”

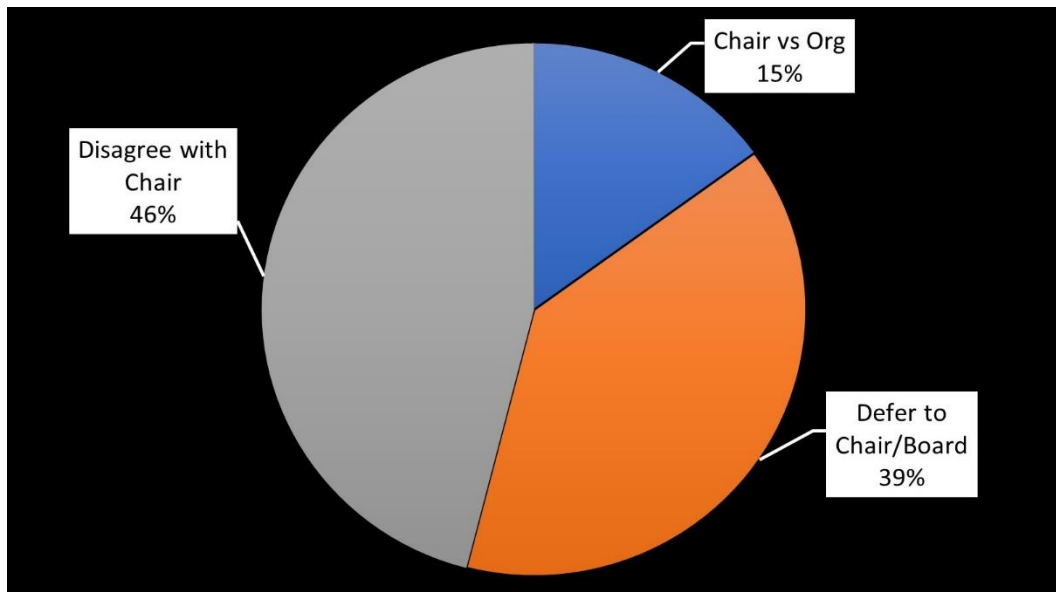
“I think to some extent there’s a motive of recognition, and prestige...”

“They (board chairs) invest time because they see value in what they’ve gained and they want to make sure they pay back that which they received and leave the organization in a better place.”

## QUESTION

# 7

Can you describe any disagreement you have had with your board chair?



Almost half (46%) of CEOs reported they had disagreements with their board chairs. Those disagreements were primarily on approaches to address particular issues or how to deal with specific situations:

"It's usually more on tactics than overall direction."

"It was a conflict of what was in the best interest for the chair versus the best interest of the organization."

"The board chair has the final say."

"If it's a minor issue I would just defer to the board chair. If it was a major issue, then I'd discuss it with the board chair, and I'd talk to others on the board."

"The board chair has the final say."

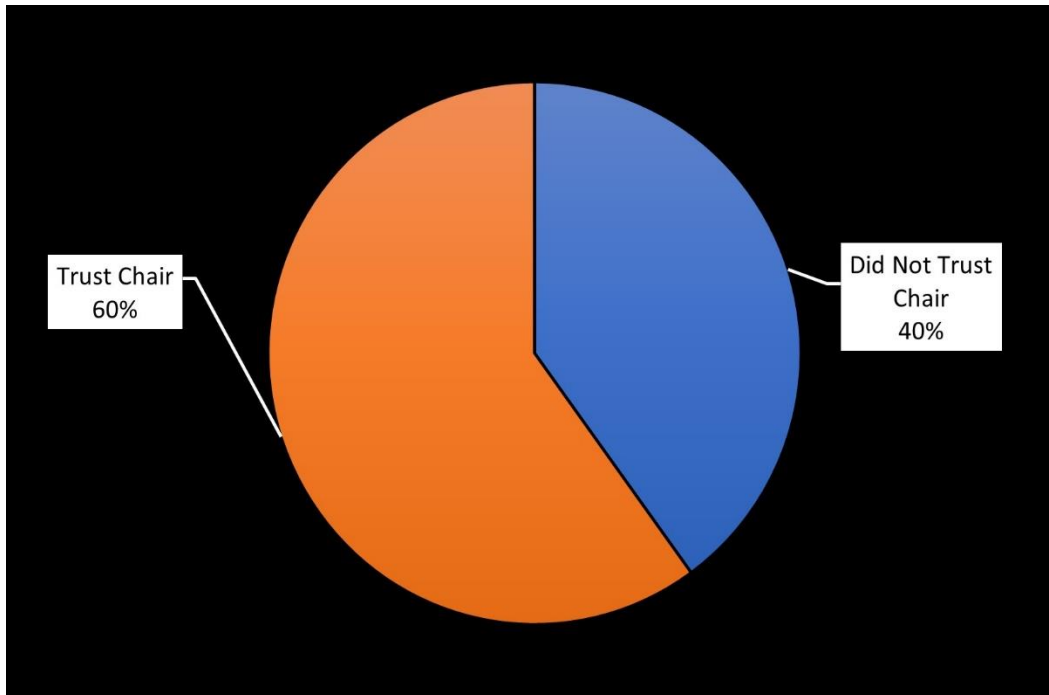
"What's most important is to identify time to be able to sit down and talk about those differences of opinions."

"For the board chair, they realize they're only in there for a year. So, they don't want to -- nobody wants to -- have an ugly relationship for very long."

## QUESTION

# 8

Because the CEO and board chair are expected to work closely together, trust—or lack of trust—may affect their relationship either positively or negatively. Given the premise that, in general, some level of trust already exists, please share an example or an instance when you did not trust your board chair.



The majority of CEOs described their board chair relationships as trusting. There were some instances when circumstances or events led CEOs to not trust their board chairs. CEOs commented:

"I always want to be in a relationship where we trust each other... but it doesn't always happen."

"The board chair was so uncommunicative. Even on a regular scheduled phone call it was hard to get information."

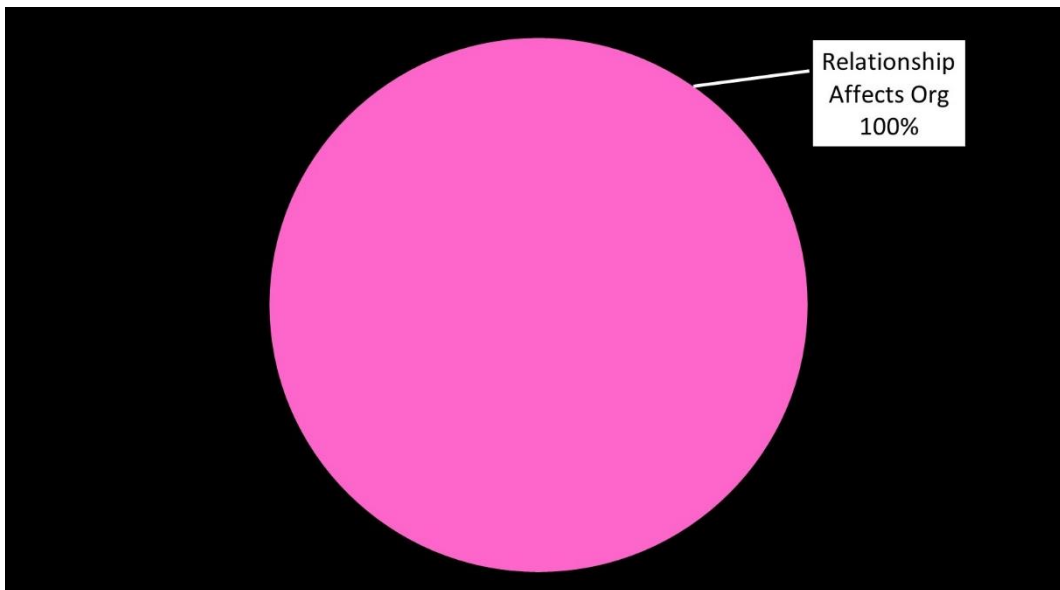
"The board chair was inclined at times to obligate the organization outside the scope of authority."

"I've never had a board chair that I didn't really trust or get along with. So, I'm pretty fortunate in that regard. I have great admiration for my board chairs; but the industry is selective to put in very high integrity and trustworthy people."

## QUESTION

# 9

Does the CEO – board chair relationship affect the organization?



The CEOs were in unanimous agreement that the CEO-board chair relationship affects their organizations. CEOs acknowledged that some board chairs had their own personal agendas, or became frustrated when they did not understand their roles, the role of the CEO, or the role of the organization's staff. Conversely, when the CEO-board chair relationship works well, it can be felt in the board of directors and throughout the entire organization. CEOs commented:

"Absolutely, yes. I think the CEO-board chair relationship is so important because it's the pulse of the organization."

"For sure it does because the relationship between the CEO and the board chair sets the tone for relationships between the committee chairs and their staff liaisons, and between the CEO and the rest of the board."

"If trust is not there, then the organization misses the opportunity to engage in discussions about new initiatives or different approaches that open communication and a positive relationship would allow for."

QUESTION

10

If you could give CEOs one piece of advice about their relationship with their board chair, what would that advice be?

CEOs advised their contemporaries to make an effort to get to know and understand their board chairs and what motivates them:

"You, as the CEO, have to be somewhat chameleon-like in that you are the one that has to understand the board chair and you are the one that has to change your leadership style to meet and to fit in with the board chair.

"The responsibility is on you to get to know your board chair, get to know their triggers, get to know their priorities, and to be able to balance making the organization successful while the chair is successful as well."

"Understand what is at the root of the decision making of your board chair."

"Make sure you understand their objective for being on the board and their objective for being board chair. Try to get inside their head to understand their agenda. And make sure your goals and objectives are clearly delineated and do what you can to prevent over-reach."

"Recognize that we all don't have all the answers and that the board chair and the board are amazing resources to the CEO's success."

"Be patient even if your board chair is an experienced board member. When they step into that board chair position it brings in a different weight of responsibility."

"You've got to build that trust. That doesn't happen overnight. You've got to be patient, and you've got to keep those lines of communication open."

"Spend as much time as possible cultivating the current and future board."

## QUESTION

# 11

If you could give board chairs one piece of advice about their relationship with their CEO, what would that advice be?

CEOs advised board chairs to understand the difference in the roles of the board chair and of the CEO, and to avoid the temptation to micro-manage. Instead, form a working partnership with the CEO. Understand the objectives of the organization and work toward the established goals:

“View your working relationship with the CEO as a partnership. To be a successful board chair, be sure that the organization moves forward during the year. And leave a trail after you that shows you are a good steward of the organization -- and sets a good pathway for those that will come after you.”

“Have a clear understanding of what the objectives are -- what the board and CEO hope to accomplish during your board chair term.”

“Your CEO is not ever going to embarrass you. It's in no one's best interest for you as the board chair to look surprised, embarrassed, or ill equipped. Your CEO is your partner in managing the board. It's the board chair's secret job - their real job -- to manage the board.”

“Don't jump to conclusions on things. Stay open, be inquiring, don't be judgmental.”

“Listen to the whys and why nots. Take part in the organization. Listen to feedback.”

“It doesn't really matter the work style that a CEO may have as long as he or she is meeting the bigger picture goals. And remember that the worst thing a board chair can do is get into the middle of the micromanagement of the day-to-day operations.”

“If you don't have trust in your CEO, then choose another one.”

## QUESTION

# 12

Describe the ideal board chair.

The CEOs described the ideal board chair as someone they can trust, be open with, share similar values with, and rely on. The ideal board chair would have a clear understanding of the roles of the board chair and the CEO as well as the distinctions between them.

“Somebody who is involved in the organization and wants to learn as much about the organization as they can before they become board chair.”

“Someone who shares the same values and has the same motivation and passion for the organization that the CEO does.”

“Just be open and honest and reliable. And trust in me as CEO when I'm making decisions.”

“The ideal board chair is somebody who supports the CEO in their role through set and clear expectations. The ideal board chair is an individual who will allow the CEO to grow.”

“Elevate the view above the day-to-day minutia.”

“The ideal board chair is hard to come by, because managing a board is actually hard.”

QUESTION

13

Describe the ideal CEO-board chair relationship.

In describing the ideal CEO – board chair relationship, the CEOs emphasized the importance of working together, being open and transparent with each other, and communicating with each other:

“The best CEO-board chair relationship is based on honesty and trust, with a recognition that we’re working in an environment that can shift at any time. Through good communication and by being accessible, I think will ultimately help the organization, will help the board chair, and will help the CEO be successful in their individual roles. Also to be able to provide stability for the complete board, and the organization staff, and the members that they serve. I think it’s a very global perspective.”

“It probably sounds a bit trite but mutual respect for what each one brings. Not title related, but personal skills, knowledge, and experience. And then specific to the role that each plays in assuring the well-being of the organization; that the mission is being accomplished, that’s the vision we’ve set for where we want the organization to go.”

“I’ve seen all of a lot of board chairs in the past that would never admit to a weakness because they don’t want to be seen by the group as having that weakness.”

“Trust, communication, knowing each other’s experience level and what that brings to the table -- the level of expertise -- and where you can help each other out and fill in the gaps.”

“Reliability, trust, openness, and passion. The willingness to try things.”