



Executive Director Qualifications

Organizational Leadership Briefs for RDO Executive Directors

This brief is part of the seven-part series *On the Road to Success: Organizational Leadership Briefs for Executive Directors*.

These briefs cover a wide range of issues important to RDO senior leadership, including:

- Creating Relevance in Your Region
- Building and Nurturing Relationships
- Developing Revenue Strategies
- Doing More with Less
- Executive Director Qualifications
- Financial Reporting
- Preparing for Effective Board Meetings

The full set is available online at: www.nado.org/leadershipbriefs

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Desiring to become the director of a regional development organization is an admirable trait. However, preparing to take the reins of such an organization requires a unique combination of skills, abilities, and attributes.

Below are essential traits that will enhance a person's ability to excel in their role as a regional organization director.

As you read this list, reflect on these traits to see if you really have what it takes to lead a regional organization; and if not, identify ways to address any shortcomings and develop the skills necessary to become an effective and impactful director.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

- You need to be a high octane, high energy, self-starter. It requires a lot of energy to successfully lead a regional organization.
- You need to be a great communicator, both one-on-one and in group settings.
- You need to be a creative entrepreneur who thinks outside the box, but is also a calculated risk taker. Your entrepreneurial spirit should benefit your organization, your region, and your constituents, not yourself.
- You need to be a visionary. You need the ability to see and understand micro and macro perspectives of issues, and you need to see what is possible and then manage and direct resources accordingly.
- You need to be a consensus builder and a motivator. It is one thing to get people to agree, it is another to get them to act in concert.

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- You need to be open-minded. You should consider and value the opinions of others. You should be willing to accept constructive criticism, and be willing to transfer ownership, credit, and praise to the collective effort instead of yourself.
- You need to be results-oriented, someone who delivers, does what says will be done, follows through on large and small issues, and sees things through to completion.
- You must be a decision maker, someone who is capable of taking all the information and opinions you receive and reach a rational conclusion. You must be willing to offer recommendations for decisions.
- You must be trustworthy. You must wrap all the previously listed traits with personal integrity and trustworthiness.

So how do you measure up?

Look at those qualifications that you may be lacking and work fervently to improve your leadership skills.

The good news is that leadership skills can be developed and improved. As a director or potential director of a regional development organization, constantly work on improving your leadership skills. These are traits that will help your organization succeed now and in the future.

LEADERSHIP SHORTCOMINGS

There are a few commonalities that exist in the leadership skills of “mediocre” regional leaders. They may be running good organizations but are they really *leading*? Below is a summary of common missteps among regional leaders:

- Lack of a “big picture” focus. The current focus is primarily on the known environment, and the director doesn’t look at the possibilities or the true potential of the region or organization.
- Too detailed and process oriented. This means a director is too busy looking down at

the paperwork, process, or situation and not enough effort is spent looking forward.

- Failure to recognize that your number one product is *intellect*. People are willing to pay for intellect, whereas process has limited value.
- Complacency. Being content with the status quo and not motivated or compelled to grow or change.

LEADERSHIP KEYS

The following are a few keys to leadership that can guide you in becoming a more impactful director:

- Allow innovation to fuel the organization. Innovation is the counterbalance to the mundane and bureaucracy that can engulf you and your organization.
- Offer fresh perspectives to chronic challenges.
- Delegate to trusted and qualified staff. You can’t and shouldn’t do it all yourself. Leading can mean delegating and holding others accountable for action.
- Avoid getting pulled into the mire of projects and politics. Lead projects and stay neutral.
- Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.
- Find a mentor in someone you respect, who understands what you do, what you are dealing with, and can provide you with wise counsel.
- Lead with humility and recognize the difference between humility and meekness. Meekness is being submissive. Humility is taking a modest view of one’s own importance (even though you may have every right and qualification to be arrogant!). Remember that nobody likes a headline grabber. People love being part of an effort that is more about *we* than *me*.
- Running and growing an agency requires high levels of energy and ambition. Find it

and recognize your need to re-energize through down time, peer exchange, and professional development opportunities.

- Don't forget to plan for your own organization, set goals, and identify measures for success. Often, directors are busy planning for others and ignore the need to plan for their own organization.
- You are paid to make recommendations and to lead. Do not avoid this responsibility by focusing only on the administrative elements of the position.
- Don't forget to set goals for yourself and pursue them.