

The Wristwatch and the Table Clock:

Policy Governance® is a Precision Model of Governance

May 2021, by Dr. Sam Barfell, Associate, Senior Consultant

I have never met Dr. John Carver personally or sat directly under his teaching. However, I believe I have read a large majority of his body of work regarding Policy Governance (PG). When asked the question regarding using the PG model fully or "picking and choosing" some of the components of the model, Dr. Carver used a fascinating analogy to answer that question. He said, *"Using parts of a system can result in inadequate or even undesirable performance. It is rather like removing a few components from a clock yet expecting it still to keep accurate time."* (Carver 1997) He went on to articulate his point by describing two time-keeping devices, one a wristwatch, the other a table clock. Upon first observation, both are designed to keep time, and both appear to be a time-keeping device. However, upon closer examination, we discover someone removed a part or two from the inside of the table clock. It is now completely incapable of keeping accurate time, the purpose for which it was designed and created. Just because that table clock looks like a clock, and those around believe it is a clock, or that clock itself claims to be a clock, does not in fact make it a clock.

I have worked in Christian schools now for over 38 years and the past 25 years in some leadership capacity. I have encountered many Christian school heads, or board members who tell me their board is a PG board. Yet upon closer examination, it becomes very apparent that in fact that board only has a vague idea about PG, or worse, claim to be a PG board but has chosen to disregard one or more components of the model. Carver also stated, *"Unlike the traditional practices to which boards have become accustomed, the Policy Governance model introduces an integrated system of governance."* (1997) Policy Governance is indeed a fully **integrated system**, or better, the term I prefer, a **precision model** of governance.

Please allow me to provide 3 self-evaluative questions for you to answer regarding your board and its performance. I offer these as a way to begin a discussion, and not as a comprehensive consideration.

Do we have a clear understanding of the Board's role and responsibility?

For any organization to be effective there must be clarity in both the purpose (Ends) as well as the role and responsibility of each part of the organization. So, what is the Board's role? What is the head of school's role? Is there any ambiguity in the separation of these specific roles and responsibilities? A PG board will have clarity on the Ends or ultimate objectives of the organization. What are we seeking to accomplish? What good do we seek to provide to our community or the world? Dr. Carver said, "*The board exists to be accountable that the organization is effective at accomplishing its stated purpose.*" Once the organizational Ends are established, all authority resides with the board until some is given (delegated) away. A PG board will then delegate to the head of school or CEO the authority to pursue the Ends within appropriate boundaries or executive limitations.

Do we invest in selecting and training those who can govern well?

As a head of school for many years, hiring a teacher to influence young hearts and minds was a priority. We intentionally looked for teachers who were professionally prepared and competent, loved children, were a Christ-like role model who understands their responsibility to disciple students in Christ. The hiring process was purposeful and tedious to ensure we hired the best Christian educator. Should there be any less intentionality in recruiting and selecting effective board members? Of course not. To do less would be a disservice to the organization. Dr. Carver outlined the qualifications of a good PG board member. 1) Commitment to the ownership. 2) Propensity for thinking in terms of systems and context. 3) Ability and eagerness to deal with values, vision, and the long-term. 4) Ability to participate assertively in deliberation. And 5) Willingness to delegate, to allow others to make a decision. (Boards that Make a Difference, John Carver, 2006) In a Christian school or organization spiritual qualifications come first. A Christian school I know, declared in policy "board members must meet the biblical qualifications for deacons/elders with the exception of gender". Once a

qualified candidate is selected or elected, training in PG principles is important enough to be a mandatory step rather than an optional exercise. A good practice is that a new board member complete PG training prior to voting on any issue. Failure to train new board members in PG is almost always a recipe for a slow drift from the integrated, precise model of Policy Governance or becoming a "table clock" with a few parts missing!

Is the board thoroughly trained and committed to the 10 Principles of Policy Governance?

Perhaps the most succinct overview of this *fully integrated system* and *precise model* of governance is found in the **10 Principles of Policy Governance**. Could you name the 10 principles, or at least the concept of each principle? How many of your board members could identify the 10 principles? Could you pass a quiz on the 10 Principles? If you feel a little "foggy" about the 10 Principles, I suspect you need a refresher or a review. Go to www.graybeal.org under complimentary resources and access the article entitled Principles of Policy Governance: IPGA Source Document to refresh your memory. Perhaps you caught my point! On-going training and development of current board members is just as critical as for new board members. Does your board conduct an annual board development weekend, or board training evening? A strong PG board will be committed to its ongoing training and development.

The Graybeal & Associates, LLC team has helped countless boards across the country and across the world. We stand ready and available to assist you with new member training or annual board training for boards who seek to be effective. Please contact us today to schedule a training session at your school, church, or Christian ministry.

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