



# BEHIND THE SPOTLIGHT

## DINA RUIZ

### Bored? How About a Board?

Settling into this new year, do you ever wonder how to make life more interesting or meaningful? How about trading hours of being bored for a board—a nonprofit one—or signing up to volunteer? It

could be your most fulfilling experience of 2026.

Back in 1993, I was an inexperienced 27 year old and a new weeknight news anchor at KSBW. My boss wanted me to engage in community service. “How about you join a board?” she suggested, to which I thought, “A what?” “Yep. I had no clue what nonprofit boards did. I quickly found out. In a nutshell, they oversee and govern tax-exempt organizations and make sure money is being raised and spent according to the nonprofit’s mission. Board members also act as stewards of the organization.

Since then, I am honored to have served on seven nonprofit boards. When I started, I was intimidated: “They’re all so much

smarter and more accomplished than I am,” I’d think of my fellow members, sheepishly surveying them around large rectangular tables at midday meetings. I had to muster up the guts to ask questions about financial reports (which I still do, 33 years later) and felt like a grade

school student not wanting to raise her hand. I grew into realizing that my perspectives could be meaningful. I’ve stashed my insecurities, dug in, and had my life enriched in numerous ways.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that around 75-million Americans volunteer annually. Volunteering helps the community but, as a healthy side effect, it also strengthens how we feel about ourselves. “Volunteering reduces stress and increases positive, relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine,” The Mayo Clinic states. “By spending time in service to others, volunteers report feeling a sense of meaning and appreciation.” Other positive outcomes include sharing your valuable skills and nurturing new relationships. “Service to others over self!” my friend Jill says. Retired from a high-profile government job, she donates her time regularly. “While I definitely get some mental stimulation, I do it more for adding value and impact. I just love

helping others.” Another friend, Stephanie, calls it extremely gratifying, “The charity you serve is dear to your heart, and service means you are able to further contribute to [their] mission. Board members are counted on for their time, expertise and connection to communities. Nonprofits can’t survive without dedicated board members.”

Well over 1,000 nonprofits are registered in Monterey County, and almost 400 are registered in the Carmel area, alone. Choices range from A to almost Z: from Alliance on Aging to the Yellow Brick Road Benefit Shop. We have groups that focus on saving everything from condors to cats. Volunteers feed seniors and make sure infants have diapers. As Peace of Mind Dog Rescue (POMDR) Executive Director Carie Broecker says, the help is invaluable, “Volunteers are the heartbeat of every nonprofit. Our work simply wouldn’t be possible without people giving their time, compassion and skills to help. That’s true across the nonprofit sector—whether it’s animal welfare, human services or the arts, volunteers turn missions into impact and communities into caring networks.”

If you don’t have time for the “boots on the ground” type of volunteer hours, consider applying to join a board of directors, where commitments are usually contained to monthly or quarterly meetings, committee work and events. If you have a specialized skill or interest, find a related nonprofit and put yourself on its radar.

Currently, I serve on the boards of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), POMDR, and the California Museum, which runs the state Hall of Fame. I volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County, working with teenagers on public speaking. Talk about a dopamine hit! Plenty of feel-good hormones are at stake out there, so don’t miss out.

Recently, at a holiday mixer, I introduced myself to a professional as “one of your board members.” As the woman shook my hand, she scrunched her nose and asked, “What’s a board?” Apparently, I wasn’t the only one who’s had that question. And, it’s never too late to learn—or to volunteer!

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