

## Managing the Board Discussion Notes

What are your ten big takeaways from this conversation about nonprofit board management?

### ChatGPT

Certainly! Based on the conversation about nonprofit board management, here are some key takeaways:

1. **Provide Board Orientation Materials:** Creating a board book or similar documentation that includes essential information about the organization, board members, bylaws, minutes, and acronyms can help new board members get up to speed quickly.
2. **Online Resources:** Making these orientation materials available online can also facilitate easy access and onboarding for new board members.
3. **Chapter-Level Information:** For organizations with chapters or regional divisions, it's crucial to ensure that board members have access to information about how these chapters operate, as decisions at the state or national level can affect them directly.
4. **Engaging Board Members:** Involving board members in activities like retreats and informal gatherings, such as barbecues, can help build relationships and engagement among the board members.
5. **Understanding Board Dynamics:** Recognize that board members who are deeply involved in the organization's daily operations may have a different perspective and understanding of its dynamics compared to those who are less involved.
6. **Communication Preferences:** Different board members may have varying preferences for communication, such as email, phone calls, or text messages. Tailoring communication methods to their preferences can be effective.
7. **Fundraising Strategy:** Understand each board member's comfort level with fundraising and their willingness to contribute in different ways. Creating a board covenant with clear expectations and support mechanisms can help guide fundraising efforts.
8. **Board Self-Evaluation:** Encourage board members to participate in self-evaluation to identify areas where they may need training or development. Use the results to guide board recruitment efforts.
9. **Recruitment Strategy:** Align board recruitment with the organization's strategic plan and goals. Identify skill sets and competencies needed to advance the plan and seek board members who possess these qualities.
10. **Term Limits:** Consider whether term limits are appropriate for your organization. Some boards have found success with term limits, while others prefer a more flexible approach, evaluating board members individually.
11. **Conflict Resolution:** Be prepared to address conflicts within the board, whether it involves differing perspectives, legal matters, or other issues. Seek solutions that align with the organization's best interests.
12. **Safety Measures:** In cases where conflicts or disputes become concerning for personal safety, take appropriate measures to protect board members and staff, such as booking accommodations away from the organization's location if necessary.

These takeaways reflect various aspects of managing a nonprofit board effectively, considering factors like recruitment, engagement, communication, and conflict resolution.

## Otter AI Conversation Transcript

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How can executive directors, CEOs, how can they best work with you and make your job as a board member easier?

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One thing that I've tried to do in organizations where I've put together something for the board, a board book, not not a, you know, 12 inches thick or anything, but just a simple notebook that includes, here's the organization. Here's the other board members, what you know, a little bit of bio on them, perhaps how long they've been in the board, the bylaws of the organization, maybe the last year's worth or two years worth of minutes, so that a new board member can just look through that and kind of get a sense of, okay, here's what's been going on, here's who's involved. Here's how it sort of works. Here's all the acronyms that I need to know. So that you're not walking in and going, I don't know anything. So I found that just having written stuff, and that's because I'm old school I like it written but perhaps it's something that could be done. You know, it's a version of a section of your website, thing you can go to just to help onboard those new board members.

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Excellent. And that is something that we do and I'll pass this around. This is this is my version from 2021. But we put in a number of different things and we have it that we get we send out to each board member and then we do an orientation meeting with them. And we walk them through it so that you know this doesn't show up in Marcy's inbox or snail mail box. And we also now have put it online so that they can find it. And at our last board meeting, we're like bring your board book. We've got a lot of things to update. So our strategic plan is in here. Any major decision that we've made as a board is you know, we try to put that in I keep a spreadsheet, the date the time and what what its impact was. So I'll pass this around. Proximity rule. So having a board vote, other thoughts from our performance

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but to piggyback on Marcy's point, it's also information in our case, because we have these chapters that we're responsible for understanding how they work. The three board members are for here. They're here today for friends, Georgia State Parks, have all been in leadership positions at a chapter but we also have board members that are not, you know, they're they're learning about how all this works, and having them have access to the information that the chapters have. If they want to dive into deep enough so that they can see not just how the state board works, but how the individual chapters work because a lot of the decisions that we made directly affect them. And so the more a board member knows about the internal workings, even at a fairly low level that we don't necessarily get into in our board meetings and things like that. I

think it's very important. As as people who've been on the board Fallout, pick up some of this boss mostly, but Damon and his staff, they've set up an enormous amount of information. Out on Google Drive, that if you want to you can eat you can learn a lot without having been in a

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jam. And that's a very good point. That's something I hadn't thought about. Like we have a chapter handbook but we don't share that with with our board of directors. One thing that we do do is whenever we have our retreat, we invite all the local chapter chairs to attend the retreat and be a part of we don't do a sit down dinner we have found that when we do a barbecue and board members are cooking together and it's very relaxed, that that's when they bond and then they can have that same interaction with friends groups, and understand what their challenges and what they're doing.

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It's hard to understand without having been there, right? Because there are a lot of dynamics that go on after par and with chapter that if you're on a state board it's all kind of philosophical and it's not necessarily as real to them, as it is to some of us.

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And I think you've touched on something else there is that as the executive director or the president or whatever label we have as a staff is we live it every day. And we sometimes forget that our board members are not living it every day. And we expect them to be where we are when we present them with an issue or a challenge or they come into a board meeting and sometimes we get frustrated because we're like, why don't they get this? Well, we're living it every day. They're not. So we just need to be to be wary, calm, cognizant of that. Bill, did you wanna share anything?

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I'm fairly new for me. No one's been there over the years. So I'm still trying to keep up with it. As far as I love the idea of handbook we've kind of got one chap over chapter three people and say, Okay, here's the way things work. The company new companies just don't understand what we do or how we do things in the back of that book. And they can go through and go, Oh, yeah, I see why we don't do this this way. So that is going to be those people that aren't chapter representatives don't live every day just making good sense of the world. So yes,

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thank you. And we have I brought with me one of our chapters. They put together a book and so what they do give to their board members.

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One side has tons of information that are available on Google and all these chapter books and all that sort of thing. One thing that came up with our board recently was we talked about succession planning

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which is kind of the hit by the bus plan.

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issue is that you know, so many of us are dealing with, we're the only people there. There's a small number of people running the organization. And my board said to me, if you get hit by a bus, what information do we need to know? And so, so I actually went through and it kind of helped me to this online link. So that word, share the Vice Chair, if something happens, here are the 20 things that you look at first and it's interesting because they were saying we're just overwhelmed. There's so many things, you know, all of our stuff is online now. 2728 years worth of history. They're in documents, and it was really helpful to get it down to 20 and then have that link to our current documents stays live.

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And that's a great idea. We're going to implement them see.

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In our office, we have hit by a bus cards. There's only three of the card and it's got to whatever or at least how to reset it. We don't have a if somebody's hit by a bus. Here's your step. First 10 steps, which I think is a great idea. But just to add to Tom we use Google drives a lot. And we have we have one for our staff, our team the Corporate Drive. We have one that all of our chapters share just the chapter drive and we've put all the forms and everything out there. And then each chapter also has a group and the chapters us everybody in the organization is encouraged to store minutes and the decisions they make any contracts any of that on the chapter drives because we have been hit by a bus problem that's chapter two, if with one of our chapters just unfolds, which has happened. We have no access to anything other than what they have in their closet. So we've asked them to serve some complied well, some a little bit slower but but each chapter has their own drive along with their condition as well. Just something to think about. That's a great idea. They haven't gotten that.

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And there's information out there that you want to apply for grant. Here's everything you need to know. Like there's nine nine we EIN, IRS determination letter, blah, blah, blah. That makes it really easy for the local chapters that choose to pursue some

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great ideas. One of the things that we do is we have found that all of our board members like to communicate in different ways. So we do a survey of the board members like What's your preferred method of communication like you some people that we we email some people that we text, some people prefer to have a phone call. So we keep a spreadsheet of how do you prefer to have your communication and how do you prefer your calendar? You know, so we Pam did that because we have some of our some using Outlook. So I'm used Google Some don't keep a calendar, you know, some that that's, you know, they've been executives all their lives and had somebody doing that. And then you know, we've also learned that even though we put a date out there, you know, we remind a week in advance, we make sure that the Zoom meeting is listed on all the agendas. Were prepared on the day of the meeting for the call that says where's the Zoom link? So just making sure that we were communicating with people how they want to be communicated with and that made that has made a huge difference for us. We also from a fundraising perspective, know that everybody's on a different page. So we did not pass this around. We did a survey strike trying to find out what are you comfortable with? What are you willing to learn and what's a no go for you? And then that helps us you know, that way, we're not like banging our head against the wall trying to get somebody to do something that they're never going to do. And then we take that and we put it together into a board covenant and the covenant outlines. This is what our expectation of you is, and here's what you can expect from us. This is how we're going to support you as a board member. It gives a little background on P pff. It lists all of the committees because we expect all of our board members to serve on at least one committee. And then it says you know, here's the different ways that we're fundraising based on our fundraising plan. Here are ways that you can help sign up for at least one thing every month that you're willing to do. And it might just be making Thank you calls but we call our donors and you know, most of the time we don't get them. But when we do, they are so excited that somebody called so I'll pass this around as well.

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Another thing that we have done is we do we have had the board do their own self evaluation so that they could figure out where maybe they are weak or would like some training. But we also I do it at that at the state office and have get input from some of the board members is looking at all the board members that we have when we're looking to expand our board, look at the skill sets that we need to implement our strategic plan, create a grid and see where are we weak, and then we strategically recruit based on what our needs are. And I have three copies of one that I did a few years ago the grid with that was specific to us. And then I have some sample ones off the internet and I can send you this link. This is what we built our our form from based on our strategic plan and our goals. And we had a goal of making our board be reflective of the state of Pennsylvania. So we're also looking at you know, where do they live? You know, what is their ethnicity? What is their orientation? So we really have I feel like more successful we have a 15 person board. We have 1513 Very active board members, and two that rarely show

up but when they do they have a lot of really good input. And when we need them for something specific, we can reach out to them and they're always there to lend us a hand. And that's the other thing we found is that if we're very specific with what our needs are, as opposed to being general if I call Marcy and say Marcy, here's what I need from you. I need your assistance on this particular thing. That's so much better than putting it out like oh, we're thinking about this. What are your ideas? We get much better although I really want to try what we do with Mike in that brainstorming that some of our board members for some of the things that we're working on. The other thing, and this was one of chats ideas, is I used to write these long lists of emails to my board to keep them up to speed so they knew what we were doing. So, you know, they could live in inside my head a little bit and they weren't reading them. And so we do this little red. It's it's 12 boxes. The first three boxes are organizational accomplishments. The next three boxes are current staff priorities. The next three boxes are what I need from the board. And the last three boxes are things that are coming up that you need to know about. And I do this once a month. And I send it out. Maybe I do it twice a week, twice a month, on a Thursday and I send it out and I find that board members read it. They've grown to read it I used to hide things and they're like the first person that gets back to me, I'll buy a beer. And nobody did. But now I find people will say you know, they'll they'll reply to things or they'll email me independently and say, hey, you know, have you met this person? I think they would help you with that thing that's coming up. And that's been a really effective tool for us.

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So it's a grid to make it easier to scan exactly.

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You can just look down through it. Sometimes I'll add like an attachment to it of an article that was just out that we were involved in.

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The TLDR version.

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Exactly. It's exactly what it is. It's very short. It's usually a sentence or two in each box. And if it's something I really need them to focus on, I highlighted in red so that it catches their eye if they're just scanning, it'll pop out for them. So I'll leave these over here if you want to pick one of these up. And it was as I was saying, pulling these things together. I was also looking at my AFP. I am a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and they touch on some of these things in this publication. So if you're not with AFP, or you're not getting the Chronicle of Philanthropy those are very good tools. You know, when you could potentially even share a membership with someone because you can get some of the Chronicle of Philanthropy you can get it online as well. So you could share articles. So alright, so

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this is the general one that a specific one

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is, I can send it to you. Alright, any other thoughts on ways that you're carrying their feeding and aging your board or what you would like as a board member that would be helpful to you

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as a new new organization, we had the thought, I mean from our agency that we need very high level wealthy individuals for our founding board and we've had a few, we have a view. And I guess the question is like, what what is the right balance between those people, those types of people versus people who aren't of financial means and high level and but can give in other ways because we have found that people who are at high levels in their careers or you know, whatever, they own their own businesses. They don't have the time to get to the board so they have a lot of meetings, but they do have the benefit of giving chi, you know, financial dollars. And they have the potential of influencing others we think, but we've yet to see that, you know, manifest

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when the when PP FF was founded, it was founded with all very prominent names in Pennsylvania, Campbell's tastykake We thought the same thing that they were going to connect us to a lot of donors and they were going to raise a lot of money and that never happened. And we don't see them anymore. We have been found that if somebody has a passion for cause that's more important than their title, or or their wealth. Yeah, and that's that's kind of where we've we've

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experienced I

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know, I know, most organizations are decades old. So you may not have been around for when the foundation board members Yeah.

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So when the branch Georgia State Parks got started in their current version, which is 20 something years ago. The people that were on the board then were were pretty much hand and pick by the arch commissioner and the Director Burke is here today. They had an affinity for parks. They love the parks. One was an architect that designed this building that we're in. But when they set up the bylaws, they made a requirement that some number and I don't know what that number is, but it's three or five of the people on the board. had to come from the state bar. So that initially set up a mix. Yeah. Over time, it's evolved to where the bulk of the people in the most active or members are from a chapter Yeah. We have others there that contribute and are interested and have certain skills. But we've we've never had success, much fundraising or leveraging the board for fundraising. And in fact, the Department of Natural Resources tells us that they want us to focus on building up the volunteers and things that happened in the chapters. So, so it kind of depends on what your focus is. If we've only really had two projects where we tried to raise money, and it was really hard. It was quite a challenge. So you know, it really depends on what your mission is. Depends on who you're reaching out to. And but that's how we evolve. Okay, and you we're about to do a strategic plan. Again, things might change.

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Okay, I like that idea of putting it into five making it into the bylaws. It's very helpful, and how that maps

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that's been very helpful. For making sure that people aren't bored. I think Chad mentioned the two little bit are not disconnected from the cause. We do have some that that I would say they love parks, but yeah, they're they're kind of disconnected from what we do. I don't mean that in a negative way. It's like the three board members here that chose to come to this are all from our chapters, and one that was very disappointed he couldn't make it is our fourth. So it just it really echoes you know some of the stuff that you're saying. But Marcia, the fact that you said that your board kind of went away from that big money people. I just wonder I feel like that that style of board is either very traditionalist and and is fading or is just not what we have in our types of organizations.

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I mean, I see all the different states that we've talked to, you're very similar.

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Yeah. And what we've found is, is we have some of the high rollers as our advisory board where they're there if we need to reach out to them, or we try to involve them in committees where there's the demand is less, but we we just you know, really found that the passion is the more important thing than the wealth. And even with with we require all our board members to give a donation but we don't set the amount because we know that what's significant for one of our



board members is insignificant for another because they have more means right. Okay, great. Thank you. Okay.

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Marcy, you mentioned is I see on this grid, you've got recruitment priority. There's so many things, skills and competencies that you before board member, how do you establish that priority? Getting consensus among the board about what the next board members should look like?

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We have a strategic plan, and we actually as a staff report to the board based on how we're advancing the strategic plan, but every board meeting, so we're looking at the strategic plan and the tasks that we have to complete and we say do we have the skill sets on our board to help us move forward on that strategic plan? And so that's how we approach those skill sets the responsibilities is really about you know, if one of our goals is to engage with thought leaders, we have any thought leaders on the board that can connect us with these thought leaders and one of our goals is to try this but all of our goals are and how we're looking at you know, increase our marketing and our footprint. So we made sure we had somebody with a marketing background on our board of directors. We have a ton of legal questions that come up on a regular basis, you know, as we're trying to, you know, navigate all the things that we navigate so we have two lawyers on our board that helped us kind of navigate some of those questions,

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or attorneys were helpful, help us in a legal sense, specific projects because of their previous restrictions. So it's more of a network that we'll use because it's although it's a competency, it's right on the board there. They're reluctant to

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hear things that they can do. I mean, there's there are some ethical things, but they can look at something and say, Marcy, here is something you need to think about this as you're reviewing that contract or, you know, yes, you don't want to go that route because the liability is going to be too bad. Or we had somebody that claimed that their Ada, while they were there was an ADA violation. They had a was a friends group that was offering yoga and the woman didn't like how the yoga teacher was doing the meditation at the end and she filed it was going to file an ADA suit. So they were there for me to have conversations with. So I'm curious

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why your attorney can't help

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because they are not an attorney. But several of our attorneys on the board is that they are unable to provide legal advice to our organization because they're sitting on the board. And I don't know what the rule is, but I've heard it several times, to know that I need to move elsewhere.

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So we have a pro bono arrangement with law firm that we have for 27 years, that every year they have a certain amount of money the firm gives us as a as a donation. And they also say you can reach out and get legal support for us. And as always, they always have a place somebody on our board from one of the partners each year

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and maybe some arrangement,

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maybe twice this day,

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even if it's something out there so I sat next to a lawyer but not always sit on a nonprofit board at a bank. And the lawyer sitting next to me is like your your lawyers on the board should not be giving you advice that I'm like, you know they're not doing you know, they're giving us advice, but we're not like in a legal contract, because it's a guess it's considered a conflict of interest for them to sit on your board and then to be advising you as well.

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I guess so I've not thought it through. But I just hear it said a lot.

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But to your point, yes. In a very general sense. They had to say, you know, that's that's something you are you should need to look at that.

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In a lawsuit. Yeah, exactly. There's a difference, but they're sharing their expertise. And we track that, you know, we keep a track of all of our volunteers and we've it's a professional we know are but the billable hour for our lawyers. And we're like, oh, that's because that's a great match for us. You know, what they're doing any of our board members when they're sharing their expertise,

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you get to when you're recruiting new board members that you've recruited candidates coming from both the board and the staff.

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Yes or No, we just had a woman who was a quadruple amputee that was on our board. She had strep throat and that sepsis and lost her limbs and but she started having additional health issues. And so we wanted to make sure that we had the community represented and so she reached out among a community of wheelchair users and people that she was working with it with is able and she found us somebody else so we're trying to more and more and engage our board and replacing themselves when they're leaving the board and helping having the board more engaged in that process. And we have an ongoing nominating committee as well.

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And you have term limits.

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We got rid of them. We had them. And when the board said this is what are they serving, and we have one board members that is that has been there in my entire time. But for the most part, you know, we're seeing we see some turnover and we have asked board members to to leave, we've moved them into other positions. And then I actually, you know, got into a real battle with one of the board members and he left and but I stood my ground because he was asking us to do something that on the outside seemed like it made sense to do but on the inside it made it actually impossible to manage the finances. And the and I'm the one that's responsible as well as them and I needed to protect everybody else. And so it was a pretty rough time. But while I might get fired but you know, I need to stand my ground on this because I can't manage our finances with this system he wants us to put into place

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locally for the local volunteers. Do they have the time limits being involved? Or do you even have your local leadership? We do all

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of our chapters have to have a board of directors. We say you know you're on the board for life.

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We're trying not

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to mainly because like when we have a conflict between a volunteer and a park. Nine times out of nine. It's somebody who's been with us for

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10 years. Yes, they take on more ownership than they probably should have

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their park and not bad. Yeah,

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yeah. And those cases we help to kind of move them out or move them to something else. How do you do that?

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What is what is the what is not? That's a whole day

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to facilitate the DTI. So but we can talk about that another time we can do a zoom on that. We have we have we have actually we shot a check down that you know that they were doing some things that in our audit got us mentioned and you know got some negative mentions in our management letter and we're like, you know, we've been telling talking to you for years, you're not willing to change and we're gonna have to close you down. And it was ugly for like two years. So they went out and they were, you know, making a big scene and I keep thinking you know, we probably do that as you're arrested and you're making this big scene. But we're slowly moving away from that, that, that they're antagonizing them. They were death threats to me was

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ugly. I have I've booked a hotel several exits from the park.

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Yes. Vehicle it's not branded.

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So moving that day very quickly drove out made sure I wasn't.

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In this position, you should not feel frightened but sometimes that you have to be careful

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mercy you mentioned

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