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Board meetings can be incredibly awkward when the CEO and one or more of the company's Board members don't see eye to eye.

When I see this happening, I frequently play the role of "peacekeeper" and start by reminding both parties of a well-known parable:



A man in a hot air balloon is lost. He sees a man on the ground and reduces height to speak to him.

"Excuse me, can you tell me where I am?"

"You're in a hot air balloon thirty feet above this field," comes the reply.

"You must a Board member," says the balloonist. "I am," says the man, "How did you know?"

"Well," says the balloonist, "Everything you told me is technically correct, but it doesn't help

me at all."

"You must be a struggling CEO," says the man on the ground. "I am," says the balloonist, "How did you know?"

"Well," says the man, "You don't know where you are, you don't know where you're going, but you expect me to be able to help. You're in the same position you were before we met, but now it's my fault."

I've seen this play out many times in Board meetings. It's not uncommon for a Board member to try to help solve a problem that's been brought up in a Board meeting (in real time) and their advice comes across as generic and offensive.

It's not uncommon for a CEO to be overly dismissive of the Board member's advice (in real time) which then serves as the foundation for a fight (in real time).

When problems arise, knowing who to engage, knowing when to engage and knowing how to engage is important. Problem solving in a Board meeting is a recipe for failure and will nearly 100% of the time frustrate everyone in the room.

If a Board member exclusively interacts with a company in the Board room then they're not close enough to know how a company actually works. This almost always means they will struggle to give relevant advice.

If a CEO doesn't take stock of the experiences and skills of his/her Board members and engage with them outside of Board meetings on topics that take advantage of their profiles, then the CEO is setting themselves up to receive generic advice in Board meetings.

My two cents: The best run companies push all the important input gathering, problem solving and decision making outside of the Board room. Great Board meetings are organized, holistic, topical, and great at level setting but not where the real decisions get made.

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