



## THE PERKINS FIVE-FINGER PHILOSOPHY OF NONPROFIT BOARD COMPOSITION WORKSHEET

**PURPOSE:** This exercise will enable you to strategically and pragmatically assess the individuals serving on the board of directors of a nonprofit organization and their respective “fit” with the organization. For a nonprofit organization to maximize its potential, its leaders need to understand and apply the Perkins Five-Finger Philosophy when evaluating themselves, selecting leaders, and recruiting future leaders.

**THE FIVE FINGERS:** The basic concept of this philosophy is that everyone on your nonprofit board fits within one of five broad categories, each one resembling a finger on your hand.

- The Thumb:*** Reliable, cooperative, loyal, diligent, takes direction well, happiest and most effective in a supporting role. A great “Robin” to your organization’s “Batman.”
- The Index Finger:*** Creative, visionary, organized, charismatic, equally adept at delegating and doing whatever “grunt work” may be necessary to accomplish a goal. This person is a catalyst for getting things done; the “straw that stirs the juice” in your organization.
- The Middle Finger:*** No explanation needed. Suffice to say these people can negatively impact an organization in a variety of ways through poor attitudes, hidden agendas, ego trips, and overbearing personalities. Find a legitimate and diplomatic way of getting anyone who fits this category off your board as soon as possible.
- The Ring Finger:*** Sporadic contributor that shows potential as future leader, will take a leadership role on a discrete project or event, but other times opts not to contribute (perhaps due to lack of commitment or lack of engagement from leadership); an underutilized resource of the organization.
- The Pinky Finger:*** Inactive, lacks passion for your mission, rarely offers input at meetings or volunteers to lead a significant project. This person is not a disruptive force in your organization, just a non-factor in all meaningful respects. Like a pinky finger, this person could be viewed as a vestigial appendage to your board.

**HERE’S WHAT YOU DO:** First, rate yourself. Which category best matches you at this moment and why? Check the most appropriate box and add a few comments explaining your self-rating. If you serve on boards for different organizations, you may rate yourself differently for different organizations. If you aspire to move to a higher-functioning category, jot a few notes as to how you plan to accomplish that objective. Next, rate your colleagues, candidates for leadership positions, or prospective board members you would like to recruit to your organization. This is meant to be a confidential exercise (use initials or secret code words if you like), so be honest. These are your assessments. There are no right or wrong answers. By applying the Perkins Five-Finger Philosophy of Nonprofit Board Composition, you should soon see improvements in how your nonprofit organization operates, communicates, and fulfills its mission.

### PERKINS LAW, PLLC

Eric C. Perkins, Esq.

4870 Sadler Road, Suite 300 • Glen Allen, VA 23060 • P.O. Box 5545 • Glen Allen, VA 23058-5545

[eric@ericperkinslaw.com](mailto:eric@ericperkinslaw.com) • [www.ericperkinslaw.com](http://www.ericperkinslaw.com)

Office: (804) 205-5162 • Mobile: (804) 332-3648 • Fax: (804) 482-2835

