Managing Editorial Board Changes

Adapted from “Four Tips to Transition Your New Editor” by Bonnie Ponce with her kind permission, first published in EON https://doi.org/10.18243/eon/2019.12.11.3

Change within an editorial board is unavoidable but it can cause disruption for editors and journal performance. There is not a one-size-fits-all transition plan that works for every journal or every editor, but it is important to approach these changes with strong preparation and communication to ensure everyone is comfortable with their new role. Work to establish clear communication and a team mentality. You will be working together, and your goals are the same: to publish a quality journal and protect the reputation of your organization.

Making the Introduction
The first step in any working relationship is the introduction. New editors can be brimming with new ideas, vision, and creativity but are sometimes inexperienced in scholarly publishing. As the publishing professional with experience and knowledge of your organization and industry best practices, you are the main source of information for these incoming editors. In your first few conversations with your newly appointed/hired editor, you should focus on getting to know their personality and find out what experience they have with the publishing industry – as an author, an editor, a referee. This is the best time to figure out their preferred working style or method of communication, as this will be essential for your ongoing relationship.

Initial training
There will inevitably be a gap in the new editor’s knowledge of the scholarly publishing industry. Before they begin handling papers or leading the journal, it is crucial to give them the tools they need to be successful. Editor training can be as detailed or hands on as they need, and it is important to include any unusual or journal-specific quirks which may differ from what they have previously experienced. To map out the best practices and give your editor the tools they need to succeed, it is important to have a timeline with clear steps that will lead your editor through some basic training, to their start date and beyond. Our ISTME resources can be a great source of training materials to share with your editor. In particular, you may like to create a handbook for them using our template. Here are some of the basic points to cover in training before they can start editorial work:

Version 1, approved July 30th, 2020, by the ISMTE Professional Development Education & Standards Committee.
• Mission of the organization
• How the publication fits into that mission
• Expectations of the editor
• An overview of the publication and current status
• Transitional concerns between the current and new editor
• A clear timeline of next steps
• Additional duties the editor may have outside of editing
• Who they contact for support
• Best practices in scholarly publishing
• Ethical practices in scholarly publishing
• Training on submission management software

Best practices
As the publishing professional, it is important to establish yourself as the authority on scholarly publishing, ethical issues, and best practice. The early conversations and training sessions are a good opportunity to identify potential pitfalls or establish yourself as the best contact for queries.

Software training
Training the editor on using and understanding the journal’s chosen submission system is a crucial step. Editors can have varying degrees of experience or comfort with technology or submission sites and lack of knowledge can cause problems and confusion once they begin handling papers. It is important to take the time to train new editorial board members and give current editorial board members a refresher in your software when changes occur. Walking through the site on a video call or at an editorial board meeting is a good way to demonstrate how to search for submissions, search for people, search and invite reviewers, and turn in reviews.

In an emergency
You may face a situation in which you are onboarding an editor in a crisis where someone has had to step down unexpectedly or is no longer able to complete their tasks. As the publishing professional, you may have to lead the new editor through a fast-paced crash course in less than ideal circumstances. It is important to remain calm in this delicate situation and make
yourself available to answer questions or provide assistance to the new editor. It may be beneficial to reach out to experienced editorial board members to build a support system for this new editor.

**Ongoing support**

Once your new editor has been fully trained and embedded in the editorial board, it is important to remember that this is not the end of the process. It is critical to not set your editor free as they will need continued support and guidance during their tenure. You might want to plan regular check-in times, calls, or meetings when you can continue to remind them of expectations and best practices. It is inevitable that they will encounter unfamiliar situations or difficult problems, and they should feel comfortable with approaching you for help and guidance.