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Email:
info@trusteenet.org.uk

Tip:

If you, as chair, line-manage the senior member of staff, think about having a non-chair contact trustee for that staff member to go to – someone for them to talk to in a more pastoral way and without the implications of talking to their line-manager.

chair focus has been made possible with funding from the Governance Hub



news and opinion from a chair's perspective

Leadership lessons for and from a chair

Trevor Gay, chair of Solihull Special Needs Active Partnership (SNAP) describes some lessons he's learned from a particularly challenging period at the charity following the loss of a contract. www.solihullsnap.org.uk

Three months after becoming Chair I found myself in the 'hot seat' as we stumbled into a real crisis in mid July 2007 that resulted in the Board making the decision to close the organisation from 31st December.

CTN quite correctly wants articles in its Newsletter to be supportive to other Chairs. My response to that is to state quite openly and honestly that this closure stuff is pretty scary if you are a Board member and especially if you are the Chair.

We continue to make mistakes, and if we think we have finally 'cracked it' I suspect we will be wrong. If we had thought for one moment we could have written a policy to deal with this sort of crisis and simply pull it out of a filing cabinet and implement it in a cold clinical way then we were wrong.

Here are a few lessons I've learned during this crisis;

- Always have a plan B even if you are very confident plan A is going to work.
- Ask the staff most directly affected what they think.
- The staff are usually 'ahead' of the Board.
- Don't listen to gossip – talk to people direct.
- Be aware there are political games going on at every level.
- Try to ensure there are no 'camps' even though there will be.
- Be open and up front about bad news.
- Tell people quickly and tell everyone affected at the same time.
- Walk away for a few hours and leave it – you need refreshing.
- Don't make assumptions and if you do ... change them.
- Be ready to be surprised with reactions.
- Admit you were wrong when you make a mistake – as you inevitably will.
- Just when you thought things were getting better they get worse and you have to keep going.
- Never give up.
- Have an understanding wife/husband/partner/family.
- Remember you have a life too.

As I write this article the world has moved on a lot and we have a good plan and effective processes set out to manage the closure.

Things are beginning to look much more 'stable' and we have moved from 'crisis mode' to a more measured pace with achievable targets set out and milestones in place.

Closure of any organisation is of course a negative outcome, but if

managed honestly and underpinned with open and effective communication it can also be a liberating experience for those managing the processes.

I would be fascinated to hear from colleague Chairs about this article. It's always great to have feedback. trevor.simplicity@gmail.com
To read more about Trevor's recent experience (as we don't have enough room to print it all here) go please see accompanying attachment

New resources for Chairs

In response to feedback from chairs over the last two years, the Governance Hub has been developing resources and piloting a mentoring programme for chairs. The new resources include a dedicated area of the website aimed at the needs of chairs, a guide to four different models of mentoring for chairs that have been tested, guides on recruiting and inducting a new chair and on networking for chairs. Later this month the Hub will be launching four case studies on the benefits of mentoring for chairs and a new website section for vice-chairs.

To find out more visit: www.governancehub.org.uk/support_chairs.html

There's more than one way to be a chair

Harry Mann, a new trustee at CTN, outlines how having co-chairs has worked for one charity.

Being chair sometimes can be a lonely business, even with a vice chair there. There are sometimes real benefits from having two chairs sharing the responsibility and raising the profile of a charity. I recently founded a community charity that helps put volunteers into chaplaincy positions from the Sikh faith. The model we decided to use was of having co-chairs, which gave us the ideal balance between experience and responsibility, and meant that the founding year became less stressful than if all the responsibility had just been on one person's shoulders.

The co-chair model works well when you are not able to take on all the responsibilities for all of the year, as both of you can share the load but still have the authority and guidance to lead the board forward. We decided to look at our respective strengths and then chose our priorities accordingly. I worked on the operational, structural and financial issues and the other chair worked on contacts, developing the board and recruitment of newer trustees. There was a 30 year age gap between the two of us, which worked well as I was able to work on recruiting younger volunteers and he was able to work on the older sections of the community. It also worked better than having a vice chair as when meeting external organisations we were always able to demonstrate our commitment by one of our chairs being able to attend.

It has worked so well that we still use the model. It means that we ensure our commitment to our work is always there and the rapport between us has meant we have been able to put forward a joint vision for the charity. In this case, two heads are almost certainly better than one.

In the hot seat

Questions put to Pauline Adenwalla, Chair of Time & Talents, a multi-purpose community centre founded in 1887 and based in Rotherhithe, SE London. www.timeandtalents.org.uk

What attracted you to becoming a chair? It was an opportunity to put to use the experience I had gained during my 17 years as director of a computer and management consultancy group.

Tip:

If you don't currently, why not send cards to your trustees, thanking them for their work/support during the past year, and looking forward to the year ahead?

KEEP YOUR DETAILS UP TO DATE

If you are no longer a chair or your details have changed, log in to www.trusteenet.org.uk to update your details.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS?

Do let us have your feedback on this e-newsletter by replying to this email. Let us know if we are getting it right or how we can improve this e-newsletter. Chair focus goes out bi-monthly, and we want as much content as possible to be from you - we would really welcome your ideas and submissions.

This newsletter is sent to you by CTN

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Which organisation(s) do you work with? I joined the Board of Time & Talents in 2003 and was elected as Chair in 2005, following the resignation of the incumbent chair. Time & Talents delivers a range of services and programmes that are tailored to meet the needs of local people and that achieve social benefit in terms of improvement in the health, well being and involvement of those individuals. The Old Mortuary, recently refurbished headquarters of Time & Talents, provides a local, accessible, high quality community building that is available to local groups and organisations.

Chair since 2004 of Canada Water Consultative Forum, a group which oversees the direction of development proposals for the Canada Water Area. Governor / Chair of Finance & Premises Committee (former Chair of Governors) Alfred Salter Primary School.

Is there anything that would make you an even more effective chair? More time to read, discuss and reflect upon the many issues that charities need to consider in the 21st century.

What's the biggest challenge you have faced in your role? Putting in place a structure to ensure that the Board is always in possession of comprehensive and up-to-date information that accurately reflects the position of the organisation in terms of its strategic objectives and financial forecasts.

What is the major area of work or issue that you are facing now as chair? The necessity for all plans to be flexible and drawn up in the context of the perpetual roller coaster cycle of submitting funding applications and awaiting outcomes, whilst at the same time maintaining the organisation's positive morale is a challenge for all charities - Time & Talents is no exception.

Also, recruitment, development and retention of Trustees, particularly a Treasurer.

What do you think is the ideal term of office that a chair should serve? 3 years

What tip would you give to a new chair? Learn the job. Celebrate good news.

As a Chair, do you welcome feedback from your staff and fellow trustees? Most definitely. I am in the process of drawing up a process for appraisal of the Chair. You are only as good as your team.

Is there any particular publication, course or resource that you have found helpful and would recommend to other chairs? I firmly believe that no knowledge is wasted and hence one needs to read extensively. For specific issues I have found ACEVO, Charity Commission, BASSAC and ACAS web sites and help lines are particularly useful. I participated in a CASS Chair co-mentoring pilot, which again I found useful and helped me get some of my issues into perspective.

Code of Conduct for trustees

Do you have a Code of Conduct for your trustees? CTN wants to gather examples of Codes of Conduct that boards are using, and we would be very grateful if you could email us the Code of Conduct that you use. If you don't have a Code of Conduct we would like to hear what alternative ways you use to ensure trustees behave as they should. Please email claire.f@trusteenet.org.uk

