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Getting trustees' hands dirty

Do your trustees have experience of what the charity actually does? If not, why not get them to do a few hours of volunteering to help them really understand the charity's work.

news and opinion from a Chair's perspective

Keeping right on to the end of the road? - Chapter 2

The second report from Ray Collett MBE, Chair of Bolton CVS.

I hope you will recall the article I placed in the previous edition of this newsletter, where I began the process of preparing for my succession as Chair of Bolton CVS.

Since that article, I invited existing Board members who wished to do so to declare an interest in becoming our next Chair. One application was made, incidentally from my Senior Vice Chair, and it was agreed at the following Board meeting that he became a Chair Designate with immediate effect until the first Board meeting following my resignation in October 2009.

It certainly makes things much more manageable that he already sits on various Partnership Boards in Bolton representing our Third Sector Forum, which means that there will be less change in the number of commitments and meetings attended once he becomes Chair (assuming he is elected in late 2009, of course).

We are already having a number of informal meetings, which we could call induction meetings, and he is slowly becoming aware of the CVS commitments I have. Fingers crossed, but there have been few difficulties in handing over these commitments at the right time.

So, so far, so good! I will update more in the next edition.

Advice to chairs responsible for recruiting a chief executive

Rosey Foster shares her experience of recruiting a new chief executive for Contact a Family, www.cafamily.org.uk.

- The chair may not be the best person to lead on the recruitment of a chief executive. There is no reason why it shouldn't be another experienced trustee, so long as the chair is involved in decisions and everyone agrees to this.
- If there is an interregnum, try not to become chief executive yourself but be readily available to senior staff to support and agree decisions.
- Make yourself available to shortlisted candidates at a set time so they can call and ask any questions they have. It might be helpful if a senior manager does the same thing.
- Ideally the chair should keep up to date with HR policies and practices so you can make sure things are done properly. This is particularly the case if you are not using a recruitment agency or do not have a member of staff with HR responsibilities.

- Make sure there is a thought through and planned induction ready in advance of the appointment. The selected candidate should be given some reading before starting work, including the charity's strategy, latest review documents and latest minutes of relevant meetings.
- Objectives should be agreed quite early in the appointment, eg in 3 months x will have been achieved, and in 6 months y will have been achieved.
- Make yourself available as much as possible to the new Chief Executive to answer the many questions that they will have.
- Have one-to-ones monthly with the new Chief Executive (and more frequently during the early phase of their appointment).
- At the 6 month review the chair should be able to feed back to the Chief executive constructively on what they've achieved and areas where they need some more work.
- Recognise that things take time. In the case of Contact a Family the new chief executive has been visiting offices around the country, parent groups and external stakeholders, all of which is time consuming.

In the Hot Seat by Malcolm John

Malcolm is vice-chair of NACRO www.nacro.org.uk and Chair of Path National www.pathuk.co.uk

- 1. What attracted you to becoming a chair and vice-chair?** My inability to resist the urge to contribute from a position of greater influence my own ideas on the direction of my charitable organizations and feed in my idiosyncratic personality to the strategic approach of the Board.
- 2. How did you become vice- chair of Nacro and Chair of Path National?** For Nacro, I had seemingly done enough over my six year membership on the Board to date to convince the then current Chair and retiring Vice-Chair that I was competent and enthusiastic enough to take on the vice-chair role and hadn't fallen out with any of the other Board members enough for them to offer any objections. For PATH National, all other eyes were staring hard at their papers when the Chair vacancy came up suddenly at a Board meeting, I wasn't alert enough!
- 3. Is there anything that would make you an even more effective chair?** Somehow finding more time to get to know both organizations better in ever changing climates, talking more frequently to managers and staff and to Board members in between Board meetings
- 4. What's the biggest challenge you have faced in your role?** The biggest challenge is always the one you're facing at any given time. But I guess that making sure the organisation maximizes the skills, expertise and knowledge of all trustees to help meet its agreed strategic and operational goals is among my biggest and ever-continuing.
- 5. What is the major area of work or issue that you are facing now as chair/vice-chair?** Helping to lead Nacro through the third phase of a major restructuring exercise in order to position it as a market leader able to bid efficiently and competitively to win and deliver contracts in an increasingly competitive marketplace.
- 6. What do you consider the most satisfying aspect of your role as chair/vice-chair?** Being able to achieve key organizational objectives through personal influence and through listening to and working effectively with Executive Directors and fellow Board members

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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7. What do you think is the ideal term of office that a chair/vice-chair should serve? I don't believe there's an ideal term. It should be down to a rigorous 360% objective appraisal process that assesses the contribution, energy and enthusiasm that a chair/vice-chair continues to bring to the organization.

8. What tip would you give to a new chair? No sacred cows. Review and consult widely on all existing processes and ways of doing things, and bring new ideas and approaches to the table.

9. If you weren't a chair, what would you do with that time? Spend more time with my partner and on the squash and tennis court in no specific order!

10. Does your trustee board have any methods in place for appraising its own performance? It has recently circulated a self-assessment proforma on Board and individual members' performance, but now needs to ensure it develops and embed this within its regular processes.

11. Is there any particular publication, course or resource that you have found helpful and would recommend to other chairs? The recent CTN event held in London on Effective Meetings was very useful and timely for me. It has had an immediate impact in terms of engagement and involvement on the last two meetings I chaired.

And finally, for those of you who live within reach.....

We would love to invite you to a free seminar and drinks reception at our new offices in Guildford. The event from 4pm to 7pm on 12 February will be held at The Guildford Institute, Ward Street, Guildford, GU1 4LH and will not only celebrate our recent move, but also launch our new resources room and a Guildford based face to face network.

The hour long seminar, "**What makes an effective trustee board?**" will look at how a board can be as effective as possible and will be followed by a drinks reception where there will be lots of resources available to take away, a chance to say what you would like from a local network and the opportunity to meet other local trustees.

The event is to be hosted by CTN, The Guildford Institute and Voluntary Action South West Surrey (VASWS)

Places will be limited so if you would like to reserve yours or would like more information please contact Dawn Whyndham, Membership and Events Coordinator on 01483 230282 or dawn.w@trusteenet.org.uk
Please note Dawn works from 8.45 to 12.15 Monday to Friday.