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If you don't ask...

Many charities say that it feels like trustees don't do as much as they could.

However, trustees often don't do things simply because they haven't been asked. Or, if they have been asked they haven't been given clear instructions and deadlines.

Try asking nicely, you never know, it might work. And if you don't ask...

news and opinion from a Chair's perspective

More than enough to be getting on with

Following on from our last two issues, in which one chair shared her experience of recruiting a chief executive, Sarah Morland talks about her experience of recruiting a director using in-house skills and experience.

Do you ever get the feeling that the charity you chair is taking over your life? When I agreed to become Chair of Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) more than two years ago, I agreed to give half a day a week- that is reasonable in the normal course of events.

But life is not normal at the moment!! The current Director of RVA, Mike, is retiring after many years and we are recruiting for his replacement. We did consider using a recruitment agency but decided we had plenty of expertise within the Board to design and undertake the process ourselves.

A working group of four Trustees produced a timeline, working back from Mike's final working day in the summer. Aiming for a four week handover period and assuming that candidates might have to give three months notice, that meant starting before Christmas and advertising by the end of January.

Thankfully, we had recently revised and evaluated the Director's job description as part of his annual appraisal. We just (!) had the person specification, terms and conditions, etc. to draft and agree and an assessment process to design.

Applications were very slow to come in (very nail-biting) but I'm relieved that we have a strong shortlist for first interviews. We have a rigorous process for those who demonstrate sufficient capability at first interview, including:

- a presentation to public/voluntary sector stakeholders who will feedback on specific criteria
- an in-tray exercise of various tasks that might fall to the Director
- an interview with a panel of Trustees and a senior Borough Council officer

There is some important learning for me:

- Try to have someone with HR expertise for your Board to keep the process in-house
- Keep job descriptions up to date and evaluated
- Set up a working group with a mix of skills and experience, and TIME.
- Involve Trustees and other stakeholders as much as possible in the process

And the amount of time this is taking me, coordinating the process?? More like two days a week recently and that's not counting colleagues'

New Resources

The Charity Commission has published two new research reports.

Going Green: Charities and Environmental Responsibility (RS17)

And

A Balancing Act: New perspectives on the charity/beneficiary relationship (RS18)

Both are available free from <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/ccpubs3.asp>

time. But if it results in a successful appointment, it will all be worthwhile.

More information about RVA can be found at <http://www.r-v-a.org/home.asp?id=1>

Making sure you've got the right skills

Having the right skills in your senior staff team and board has never been more important, particularly during the downturn. ACEVO, the membership organisation for charity Chief Executives, is offering free seminars for chairs and their senior staff member to increase knowledge of the skills needed in top teams and the best methods of personal development.

Following ACEVO's research into skill needs of third sector leaders, these seminars will bring together influential speakers, chairs and chief executives to discuss the sector's leadership challenges, how they can be met and share experience and best practice.

A Train to Gain Leadership and Management advisor will attend, allowing you to access applicable personal training funding. Events will run throughout England in April from 11:00 – 14:00 including lunch and networking.

Locations and dates: Bristol 15th April, London 20th April, Newcastle 23rd April, Leeds 27th April, Birmingham 29th April

For more information go to the relevant date at - www.trusteenet.org.uk/events

Keeping right on to the end of the road? – Chapter 3

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

Doesn't time fly? The first thing I would say is that I am so pleased that Bolton CVS decided to adopt this procedure for managing the succession of its Chair. It has enabled the Chair Designate, the Chief Officer and I to concentrate on matters in an organised way so that the changeover can be as smooth as possible.

Meetings have been arranged and diaries booked at regular 4-weekly intervals between us to discuss ongoing issues normally only discussed between the Chief Officer and me. This gives the Chair Designate a good idea of the way that we work together, even if he decides to change things when he takes over in October.

We have now also pencilled in diary dates for supervisions with my Chief Officer for the remainder of my time, ensuring that the Chair Designate can also attend our final supervision in order to ensure smooth continuity.

Bolton's Local Strategic Partnership has also been informed of the proposed change of CVS representation after our AGM in October, which in turn will mean an election for Third Sector Forum representation on the LSP. This will probably take place in September.

I'll let you know how things are progressing next time.

Research into difficult chair-chief executive relationships

James Barrett is currently researching Chair – Chief Executive relationships that have fundamentally broken down. He is keen to interview chairs who dismissed their Chief Executives by using

compromise agreements or other procedures that bypassed their organisation's usual disciplinary or appraisal systems.

This is part of a wider study on maintaining and restoring effective working relations.

He would appreciate hearing what went wrong, and what it might have taken to restore working relations. He can guarantee anonymity, and promises a constructive exploration of your experiences.

Please Contact - James Barrett: 07956 308 324 or james@jbconsulting.co.uk.

Defining boundaries between trustees and staff

The importance of agreeing the boundaries between trustee and staff activities cannot be overemphasised. Where boundaries are ill-defined, there is risk of staff and trustees tripping over each other in attempting to do the same work, leading at best to an unnecessary duplication of effort and at worst to resentment, missed messages and the appearance of managerial incompetence. At the other extreme, whole aspects of activity risk being lost in a no man's land between trustee and staff roles.

A useful starting point is for trustees to identify those areas of their responsibility over which they want to retain complete control and those which they are prepared to delegate. In this context trustee and staff job descriptions have value as they provide documentary evidence of the boundaries. This can be further supported by including discussion of boundaries within the induction programme for new staff and trustees. Similarly, the business plan and other planning tools can be used to determine the work plans of both staff and trustees.

Circumstances will, however, inevitably arise which fall outside anybody's job description or work plan and both trustees and staff will often need to be flexible in determining responsibility for areas that are beyond the usual parameters. In order for such dilemmas to be negotiated appropriately, it is crucial that there is mutual respect between the trustees and the staff. This means that staff must acknowledge the overarching responsibilities of trustees and their need to retain control, whilst trustees must respect the fact that staff are paid to do a job and have been appointed because they have the skills and experience necessary to do the job properly.

Any problems that do arise should be discussed through appropriate procedures, i.e. line management, supervision and appraisal. The usual management structure in charities is for the most senior employee to report to the chair of the board of trustees, and for that employee to then manage any other staff or the senior management layer of staff.

This extract from is taken from the *ICSA Charity Trustee's Guide*, 2nd edition. For full details or to order see www.icsabookshop.co.uk.

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.

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