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Organising an away day involving your trustees?

Ensure it:

- Has clear and meaningful objectives
- Enables all trustees to take part and share their views
- Allows for feedback and for actions to be taken forward
- Is fun.

news and opinion from a Chair's perspective

Getting things done

It can be really frustrating when trustees are allocated things to do in one meeting, but by the next meeting things haven't been done. Susan Hayter, Chair of Tourettes Action, passed on their way of dealing with this.

Tourettes Action has put in place a Work In Progress (WIP) spreadsheet which makes it clear what has to be done, when and by whom.

Susan started by going through a whole year's minutes and including all tasks outstanding or unresolved. It took a while but it was worth it, and some trustees were shocked to see their name by so many outstanding items. Things have improved hugely in this regard, and now any work, whether at a meeting or between meetings, is included, including the Chief Executive's work in relation to the board. It has helped to have a broad view of what is going on and for the trustees to be kept in the picture. It has also been a great motivator as no-one wants to see their name by an entry that has clearly gone past the date required.

The WIP is an item on the agenda at every trustee meeting now, and in good time before each meeting the Chair goes through it and chases up any items that haven't been dealt with.

A skeleton format for the WIP with a few notes to help is available at www.trusteenet.org.uk/resources/chair-focus-issue-9-work-progress-spreadsheet-sample. Another great advantage is that the detail of the work is not lost when it is completed but is hidden, so only outstanding work is visible. This proves helpful when historical information is required.

Tourettes Action is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with Tourette Syndrome and their families. More information about the charity can be found at www.tourettes-action.org.uk

What are local area agreements?

'What are local area agreements?' is an information leaflet explaining how local area agreements (LAAs) work and why and how third sector organisations should engage with them. You can download it for free from the NAVCA website www.navca.org.uk/publications/laas.

In the Hot Seat

Michael Jacobs, chair of Child Welfare Scheme (CWS) shares his views and experiences of being a chair. More information about CWS is available at www.cwsuk.org.

1. What attracted you to becoming a chair? I wanted to become a trustee of an international children's organisation following my retirement as Head of Tax from a City law firm. I specialised in advising wealthy people and, in particular, on setting up and running charities, but had felt

Tip:

Every so often provide the trustees with a bit more information about the charity, whether that is press clippings, a new leaflet, a video, or a copy of a successful funding bid. It will keep them up to date and help them understand more about how the charity works.

precluded from being a charity trustee by the dangers of conflicts of interest. Now I wanted to give something back. Somewhat to my surprise, I was invited to take over the chair of Child Welfare Scheme at my first board meeting. I thought it through and decided that this was a challenge I was ready to take on.

2. What particularly attracted you to Child Welfare Scheme? I wanted to be involved with a children's charity working internationally and I had fallen in love with Nepal and the Nepalese people when my wife and I trekked there in 1999. CWS bases all of its operational team in Nepal working with local charities. It is helping so many children and in such innovative ways, that it really captured my heart. This year we expect to help over 25,000 street and other disadvantaged children in Pokhara and the villages and towns of Western Nepal.

3. Is there anything that would make you an even more effective Chair? The wisdom of Solomon, the business generation ability of Bill Gates, the management skills of Alfred P Sloan Jr, the investment skills of Warren Buffet and the vision and temperament of Mahatma Ghandi.

4. What's the biggest challenge you have faced in your role as Chair? Developing a strategy for the organisation. This involves achieving the optimum balance between many personalities, visions and forces: between the visionaries and pragmatists, the delivery team and the fundraisers, the altruists and commercial types and the perfectionists and the ones who want to achieve the maximum benefit for the largest number of beneficiaries.

5. What is the major area of work or issue that you are facing now as Chair? Turning what was until recently a family run charity helping children in one remote city and its environs into a professionally run international aid organisation working in several countries without losing the magical qualities that attracted me to this charity in the first place. No problem there then! The Trustees are all fully committed to a vision which encompasses major expansion over the medium to long term. However, major steps have to be taken from time to time, as well as consolidating all that we are doing now, and all of this has to be done against a changing and challenging political background in Nepal.

6. What do you consider the most satisfying aspect of your role as Chair? Seeing the look on the faces of the children (and their parents) when we deliver what they need.

7. What do you think is the ideal term of office that a Chair should serve? Charities vary and so should the term of office that suits each. That said, I think that 3 years renewable for another two, would suit most charities. The term should not be too long in case the individual is not really suitable or the needs of the charity change. At the same time, a chair needs to grow into the job and losing one every three years might be considered wasteful.

8. What tip would you give to a new Chair? Start with a clean sheet and make sure you know what your objectives for the charity are. Make sure that you and the rest of the Board are aligned with the professional managers and sort out any problems as they arise. They will not go away, and, left to fester, usually get worse! Don't carry passengers on the board. Draw up a matrix of the skills the charity needs from its trustees and make sure that you get them.

9. Does your trustee board have any methods in place for appraising its own performance? Not yet. This is the project I want to get on to after I have trekked to Everest Base Camp to raise money for

CWS in November.

10. Is there any particular publication, course or resource that you have found helpful and would recommend to other chairs? It may sound prosaic, but I would strongly recommend the Charity Commission's published guidance, which I feel is too often overlooked. Whilst I do not always agree with it in detail, it is generally clear, concise and focused on real life problems and solutions.

Apart from that, I would recommend Edward de Bono's "5 Day Course in Thinking". This is the little volume which introduced me to the concept of lateral thought. Pretty well everyone can think along straight lines. To me, one of the key roles of a chairman is to see what is missing or not happening and also to connect the dots in ways that others don't.

If you'd like to sponsor Michael's trek to Everest Base Camp go to www.justgiving.com/michaelandruthjacobs

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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Getting a fair deal from contracts

A 3 day introductory programme run by the Directory of Social Change, to equip managers and trustees with the essential knowledge skills and attitude to negotiate fairer contracts with public sector agencies.

Southampton - free, requiring only a £55 refundable deposit
www.trusteenet.org.uk/events/getting-fair-deal-contracts-day-1-southampton

Birmingham - £40 (non-refundable)
www.trusteenet.org.uk/events/getting-fair-deal-out-contracts-day-1-birmingham

And in case you haven't seen the wide range of useful training course that DSC runs here's a selection of their September courses. For their full brochure, calendar and many more topics visit: www.dsc.org.uk/Training

Course title

Introduction to Health and Safety Management
Managing New Projects
Minute Taking Skills
Duties of the Company Secretary
Practical Project Management
Campaigning and Lobbying
Effective Fundraising I
The Skills of Chairing Meetings

Date

8-9 Sep
11-12 Sep
12 Sep
17 Sep
18-19 Sep
22 Sep
24-25 Sep
29 Sep

Future Issues of Chair Focus

We'd like to cover some specific topics in future issues. So if you have any tips, ideas or experiences to share about the following, please get in touch with Claire Farmer claire.f@trusteenet.org.uk.

- Recruiting, appraising or working with a Chief Executive
- Team building (with trustees and/or staff)
- Appraising a trustee board
- Different governance structures and different styles of meetings
- How to deal with difficult situations on the board.