

The use and misuse of emotion. Section 5: the creative use of emotion.

5.6d

The emotional board

For this project Ken Burnett asked Tesse Akpeki of specialist charity lawyers Bates Wells Braithwaite to suggest some practical ways to emotionally engage a charity trustee board. Here Tesse explores how the emotional board reaches its highest potential. At the end Ken has added three more quick ideas of his own.

High performing boards look at relationships in a particular way and take responsibility for improving them. The behaviours that shape the culture that an individual board member acts out is what others see. The emotional board is mindful of values, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and behaviours. Such a board defines what behaviours and values matter to the organisation and how it supports a culture that sustains and enriches the organisation in the board members it recruits. Board membership is more a enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience with board members partnering more productively with staff. Both the board and the leadership team commit to a new leadership mindset with the resources underpinning a journey that is different. These leaders are open to challenge, advancement, innovation and change. They allow themselves to make mistakes and learn from them. They are vulnerable and embrace a 'we' rather than an 'I' spirit. There is sensitivity to the voluntary nature of trusteeship, but an organisation may succeed or fall on the values and culture it espouses. Daniel Goleman's work is helping boards to manage emotions, develop empathy and build relationships. Goleman highlights the impact of patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that reflect the tendency to respond in certain ways in certain circumstances.

- What behaviours are ingrained in the organisation? What behaviours are acceptable? What attitudes are unacceptable?

- What does the board need to start doing differently? What do board members need to do less (or more off). The board will need to embrace the discipline and commitment to make the right adjustments.

- What recommendations should be included for moving forward and making advances?
- What is the culture of the organisation. What is unique about the board. How do you do operate Are you fit for purpose?
- What is the quality of the relationship between management and governance. Is there trust, confidence and competence. Is there appropriate boundary management?
- At least 2-3 years review your performance. Consider renewing yourself periodically, achieving the balance between experience leadership and fostering new blood. Are there healthy levels of transparency and accountability?

As the context of our society change over time, the relevance of our culture, values and beliefs need to be revisited for relevance and content.

Realistically the approach for emotional boards involves:

Fostering a culture of accountability -

Making things clear - clarity of expectations and of the roles of board and staff

Setting goals - tracking performance against your agenda - evaluating progress, spelling out accountabilities, being specific about what needs to be done to evaluate progress and align with its strategy.

Certainty and consistency - in an uncertain environment increasing the changes of success; Consistently seeing what can be done, even if it means doing these incrementally

Cooperation and collaboration - the board and staff feel empowered, engaged and are part of the decision making process

Confidence - the board is engaged and feel it can explore choices, be in control and make effective and informed decision.

Curating board content - pulling together what is relevant for the board. This includes information, stories, articles, blogs from different sources, the content from board retreats and visioning days.

Communication - board members feel they have a voice and that their voice is heard. They are able to share opinions, show empathy, feel a sense of belonging and

connection and have robust conversations.

Continuous improvement - able to celebrate success, and not complacent. Creating and maintaining a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Adopting new behaviours - exploring how the board can meet expectations more successfully by adopting and adapting new behaviours while demonstrating behaviours that have an impact.

Making it happen (review, evaluate, close and debrief)

As part of the leadership development plan, the board on a collective basis agrees the behaviour it wants to start, stop, continue and fine tune. Individual board members sign up to their contribution to make it work. A written plan cements intentions and can be referred to periodically. Part of this plan includes undertaking a board assessment process that provides feedback to improve relationships and performance. It also identifies open (or live) issues and defines next steps.

The emotional board taps into the **motivations** of board members.

Extrinsic motivators -can be manifested visibly (status, title, acknowledgement, reward)

Intrinsic motivators - motivate us internally (such as passion for the mission, connection, a sense of belonging, intellectual stimulation and close relationships.

With the help of mentors and coaches board members develop confidence and self-awareness to gravitate toward paths that fit their passions and skills. They develop competencies and good habits for honing their skills, making the most of their capabilities and climbing to the next mountain.

How can board members engage better with the mission?

1. Identify board priorities year on year.
2. Induct your board members into the role and continue with board development after they have been recruited.
3. Introduce a trustee good quality induction. Board members are informed of the charity's mission, services, emerging trends, policies and programmes become productive board members as quickly as possible.

4. Visiting services are twinned with induction to increase understanding of the services. Slide share provides an excellent way of sharing information.
5. Service on committee or task and finish groups. Google hangout, Facebook Live, Periscope and online video conferencing provide platforms to meet efficiently and effectively.
6. Be an engaged board member. Prepare for board and committee meetings. Review materials prior to board meetings. Listen to your fellow participants at the meeting and make your own contribution to the discussion.
7. Celebrate achievements and milestones. Recognise outstanding work

Share your good news

There is nothing like empowering the board than by sharing something you have done as a trustee for the organisation. I came across a board member who raised £100,000 by running marathons for the charity. He had originally set out to raise £15,000.00 and did so much better. This is inspiring the rest of the board to become donors.

Tell the story from the board?

- ✓ Compile 'the best of' moments of the organisation.
- ✓ Share ups and downs of the board.
- ✓ Show up and be present at board meetings.
- ✓ Attend special events and functions
- ✓ Craft an elevator speech that delivers a short answer about the vision and mission of the charity.
- ✓ Become board ambassadors
- ✓ Develop a board brand

Make use of social media

Social media present platforms to connect with others and to raise awareness of what your charity does. The emotional board is all about connection and nurturing relationships. The board utilises digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest. Board members mention their membership on their LinkedIn profile, the website shows board members profiles with their pictures. Photographs of organisational activities appear on the website, LinkedIn and Twitter keep board members informed. A board selfie sends the message 'we are working together'. Digital strategies encourage smarter working as the board explore ways to collaborate, cooperate and share information.

Carol Weisman, President of Board Builders in the USA, offers the following advice. At the beginning of the year, when new board members go through induction or during a retreat, ask trustees to share a question in writing that they have always wanted to know, but never have. Have the board chair or a facilitator share the questions and break down into groups to discuss the issues

- Ask board members if they would be willing to share their experience with your cause.
- Focus on the mission, listening to where other people are coming from, rebounding from mistakes.
- Move forward together.
- Resolve tricky and sticky issues should they emerge.

Building and strengthening connections and sustainability

Board members and those who feel emotionally connected to the cause can leave a legacy. Hear Carol's story.

Carol was fortunate enough to work with the senior leaders of Girl Scouts. 'I told them I didn't eat Girl Scout Cookies because of my celiac disease. They sent me a bunch of gluten-free cookies. I ate them. They are fabulous. I went into a shame spiral. Back to steamed veggies and the treadmill, and I am losing again. Certainly a bad combination: Good intentions and my pathetic lack of discipline. Gluten free Girl Scout cookies really are terrific. I am leaving the cookies at an arm's length and the Girl Scouts in my will.'

Being intentional and mindful has an impact

Mindfulness demonstrates the importance, in fact the necessity of slowing down to speed up. Nancy Kline's work, aptly called '*Time to think*', provides a valuable framework to create a thinking environment.

10 components of a thinking environment

1. **Attention:** Listening with respect, interest and without interruption.
2. **Equality:** Treating each other as thinking peers. Keeping to agreements and setting boundaries
3. **Ease:** Offering ease to create the space for innovation and creativity.
4. **Appreciation:** Offering genuine acknowledgement of a person's qualities. Practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism.
5. **Encouragement:** Giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas
6. **Feelings:** Allowing sufficient emotional release to restore healthy levels of thinking.
7. **Information:** Supplying the facts . Information is not withheld.
8. **Diversity:** Welcoming and honouring divergent thinking.
9. **Incisive questions:** Removing assumptions that limit ability.
10. **Place:** Creating a physical environment that says to people '*You matter*'. The setting for meetings is conducive to sharing.

When these components are built into a Code of Conduct they become the way business is done at every level of the organisation. The Chair fulfils a strategic role in facilitating board bonding and decision making. Board members, staff and volunteers as members of a team, play different roles, and complementary roles feel affirmed and nurtured. Contributions and expectations are clear. Encouragement keeps things going even when things get challenging. Internal systems are effective and efficient.

Top tips for the emotional board

- ✓ The board practises new behaviours and stops destructive mindsets.
- ✓ The board is aware of when it needs to be bolder or softer and where it needs to challenge more or less.
- ✓ The board members are supportive of each other and of staff and volunteers.
- ✓ Difficult questions can be asked. Board members must ask questions. They have the confidence to admit they don't understand. Robust dialogue and conversations are encouraged.
- ✓ The board is creative, strategic, collaborative, innovative, experiments and has fun
- ✓ Board members feel they make a difference, they add value and are great ambassadors for the charity.

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A consultant, coach, facilitator, trainer and relationship development advisor, Tesse works internationally, nationally and regionally.

Three more initiatives for the emotional board

Ken Burnett was chairman of the board of trustees at ActionAid from 1998 to 2003.

At ActionAid we introduced some ideas that I am sure helped hugely to engage and inspire our board of trustees, to get them to look forward to our meetings. The four that follow can be easily adapted for any organisation.

Start each meeting with an emotional story from the field

We would try to start each meeting with an emotional, mission-related story, or to include an emotional story at least once in each meeting. These were so popular that over time emotional storytelling became a standard part of all meetings.

Each meeting should have an empty chair, or three

At one strategy planning meeting in Ethiopia our African regional director made a passionate plea. He said, 'We should never forget that just outside this room, literally outside these doors, there are thousands of poor people all hugely interested in what we are discussing here, whose livelihoods and well-being are intricately linked to and affected by what goes on here, in this room today. So we created an imaginary empty seat at the board table as a symbolic way of reminding trustees constantly of the many millions of people that ActionAid exists to serve. We allocated a chair, space at the table, a glass, pencil and pad, as if for an absent guest.

Everyone thought it a great idea. Then someone suggested we should have a similar empty seat at the table to represent donors, who fuel our work and deserve our consideration and concern no less than beneficiaries. So we created another empty place. Then someone suggested we add a third empty chair, for our thousands of staff around the world, who each also care hugely about what the board discusses, and equally deserve to be held closely in the minds and hearts of the board. Soon three empty chairs became a little impractical for our popular meetings, which were always pressed for space, so we prepared a photograph that we framed and hung prominently on the charity's boardroom wall.

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Our absent guests...



In these ways the board became less detached from the mission, less absorbed in their usual day-to-day business and more emotionally engaged with the cause. At each meeting these simple devices reminded trustees of their reasons for being there and how the board must constantly add value to the charity's mission.

Use your walls. And maybe even your floors and ceilings

Over the years I've visited many charity boardrooms and I'm often surprised by how little is made of the space - particularly the large canvas provided by the four walls but even ceilings and floors - that the board occupies. Your boardroom environment is important and should be a great asset in reminding its occupants of why they are there and what matters most to beneficiaries and donors alike.

A simple photographic display on the walls can work wonders and set the mood for the meeting. Start in reception. Use all your walls as a display space.

First hand is best

Field visits are essential for all trustee boards. Also useful is specialist training, for example in storytelling, so that when they come back they can tell the truth passionately and well. This can be even more effective when board members announce they have become donors to the cause themselves and even that they have left a legacy in their will.

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