

Building a healthy board – useful resources for effective Chief Executive/Chair Partnerships

9 things Chief Executives and Chairs need for a successful partnership

1. **Clearly defined roles** on both sides – clear goals, role descriptions, person specifications
2. **A shared vision** (a shared sense of purpose)
3. **Basic behaviour guidelines** – clear set guidelines, such as a code of conduct on ways to behave that support partnership working
4. **A policy framework** – a sound framework of written organisational policy for both parties to work with
5. **Good communication systems** – establishing good communication practices and considering ‘what can help all parties to work at the top of their game?’
6. **Development opportunities** – encouraging good practices and collaborating on devising development for the board and the Chair. Chairs should take up opportunities for induction, training, mentoring and coaching. If no such programmes exist, the Chair should use his or her position to establish them.
7. **Ways of working** – determining working styles and preferred styles of working. Build structure into how both parties work. Effective delegation is key to sharing the load. Utilising the range of skills and abilities in leadership roles, provided situations are handled well, can be a boon to the strategic partnership.
8. **Manage performance** (and address underperformance). The board has the role of hiring, supporting the Chief Executive and determining his/her remuneration. The board has the role of assessing the Chief Executive’s performance, offering feedback, and taking action in response to performance results.
9. **A way to get help:** Have procedures for dealing with complaints and grievances. Get support for the partnership through services such as facilitation, arbitration and mediation.

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Active engagement between the board and staff: routes to building a healthy, welcoming and warm relationship

1. Chief Executive taking a leading role in framing issues and bring largescale organisational change such as a governance overhaul
2. Helping the Chief Executive to present issues and convey information effectively
3. Sharing the burden of bad news or hard times with the Chief Executive. Host 'what is keeping the Chief Executive Awake' sessions.
4. Agree how the board and staff can promote the organisation and influence the delivery of the mission
5. Develop awareness of the present climate and potential future risks for the organisation
6. Connecting to the larger voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and networks of Chairs, charity leaders, trustees, and other collaborators and influencers
7. Seeking out new ideas and innovative techniques that can strengthen the organisation
8. Working with the Chief Executive to find practical ways to improve the performance of the trustee board and of the organisation

Takeaways: # 5 top tips

1. **Establishing the partnership.** Lay the groundwork for an effective partnership and making the partnership a priority. By demonstrating good will and developing a candid, challenging but supportive working relationship, the Chair can form an effective alliance between the board and the Chief Executive. The balance is achieving a constructive critical friendship and building a strategic partnership.
2. **Join forces for greater effectiveness.** The Chair acts as strategic partner to the Chief Executive, guiding the board as it develops strategic ability and uses governance practices to support strategic aims. When a problem arises with the Chief Executive, the board should act to determine the course of action to be taken in the best interest of the organisation.
3. **The right attitude.** Attitude is everything when it comes to leadership. The Chief Executive is a partner, not an adversary. A needlessly aggressive Chair destroys the possibility of a real partnership with the Chief Executive. A Chief Executive who constantly surprises his board may end up losing trust and confidence. Both the Chief Executive and the board should role model leadership.
4. **How can you get answers to questions?** Have an honest chat. Honesty in a relationship is like language in a society. Be respectful and build trust and confidence. Practice the doctrine of 'No Surprises'.

5. **Is it is going wrong?** Face up to the problem rather than pretending it is all ok. Avoid coming to blows over misunderstandings. Do you feel hopeful about possibilities of change within the relationship?

Additional resources

- **Association of Chairs:** Supporting charity and non-profit chairs. Providing much needed advice and information (www.associationofchairs.org.uk)
- **Governing with intent:** An enquiry into trustee board effectiveness (www.on-board.org)
- **The Good Trustee Guide** (www.ncvo.org.uk)
- **ACEVO** (acevo.org.uk)
- **Not-For-Profits Programme** (www.lawworks.org.uk)
- **A Marriage Made in Heaven?** The relationship between Chairs and Chief Executives in Charities (Penelope Gibbs, Clore Social Leadership Programme)

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