



Could YOU be a Charity Trustee?

Trusteeship can help chemical engineers advance their careers and give to a cause they love, says Fiona McAuslan

WHAT'S the best way to advance your career? Focus on your personal development or learn on the job? How about a way that combines both and helps you volunteer for a cause you care about?

WHAT IS A CHARITY TRUSTEE?

Charity trustees are the group of people with overall responsibility for a charity: they're where the buck stops. They are often called the board or governing body. At the Institution of Chemical Engineers, for example, they are called trustees. They make key decisions about the direction the charity will take and how it fulfils its purpose. They also make sure the charity has the resources and policies it needs to do this well and to comply with legal requirements.

SURELY SUCH A RESPONSIBLE ROLE IS THE PRESERVE OF THOSE WHO ARE ADVANCED IN THEIR CAREERS OR ALREADY HAVE BOARD LEVEL EXPERIENCE?

Actually, no. Anyone can be a trustee if they're over the age of 18 (and, in some cases, 16 depending on the structure of the charity). Having experience in the voluntary sector and being an expert in charity governance is not a prerequisite for being a trustee. At Getting on Board we've helped hundreds of people to become trustees.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST?

There are some 400,000 charities in the UK and charities often struggle to find trustees, particularly ones who reflect the communities they serve. Underrepresented groups on boards

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include young people, women, people of colour, the LGBT+ community, disabled people, and the working class. Today, an increasing number of charities are alert to the challenges that a lack of board diversity brings and are looking for new trustees beyond their established circles.

This means that if you're considering your first trusteeship, the breadth of opportunity is huge. Individual charities will have a checklist of the knowledge, skills and experience they need on their board. However, there are some essential attributes to being a trustee and happily, there's a brilliant synergy with chemical engineers.

WHAT YOU NEED TO BE A CHARITY TRUSTEE

CURIOSITY

The old adage of “no such thing as a stupid question” is never truer than in a boardroom. So much of what happens on boards is because “we've always done it that way”. Sometimes just asking “why?” is the best way to usher in new thinking.

DEDICATION

Trusteeship is a volunteer role, but it's still work. Approach it with the same level of commitment as you would a paid job, not an occasional hobby. People are depending on you bringing your A-game, so choose a cause or a purpose you're passionate about.

HUMILITY

There's no place for an inflated self-opinion in a boardroom. Disagreement is sometimes necessary to get the best result in a

discussion, but when trustees approach it with humility rather than ego, the charity reaps the benefit.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Analysis and solution-finding are so much a part of chemical engineers' innate skill set that you may take it for granted. Don't underestimate yourself. Being able to bring problem-solving to a range of complex strategic challenges is highly valuable to a charity and not as common as you may think.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Charity trusteeship may be a voluntary role, but it's not without its benefits. Leading a charity is a brilliant opportunity to learn by doing, and to gain the myriad transferable skills and mindsets needed to tackle today's leadership issues and advance your career.

Organisational governance, decision-making, conflict management, and negotiation are just some of the skills trustees can develop. In short, it's as useful as undergoing continuing professional development (CPD) with a key added benefit: 84% of trustees asked in Getting on Board's most recent survey said being a trustee made them happier. And who can resist that? ■

Fiona McAuslan is Getting on Board's communication director. Getting on Board is a charity dedicated to accessible and inclusive trusteeship. If you'd like to find out more, then come to Getting on Board's online session “An Introduction to the Joys of Charity Trusteeship” exclusively for IChemE members on Wednesday 11 October (08:00–08:45 BST)