

10 Things Terrible Trustees Do and Brilliant Trustees Don't

Terry the Terrible Trustee

1 Doesn't make effective use of meetings

- Wastes precious Board time focussing on the past and not on the future
- Doesn't remind himself of what happened at the last meeting so time is wasted repeating things
- Uses electronics during the meeting so people assume he's doing other work
- Bad time keeping

Beryl the Brilliant Board Member

- Reads the paperwork well before the meeting to remind herself what happened last time
- Remembers that Trustees get together for on average 8-12 hours a year – and uses that time wisely and strategically.
- During the meeting switches off phones and other electronics and focusses on the discussions

2 Forgets the line between governance and executive.

- Interferes in operational details.
- Forgets about the purpose of the charity
- Sidesteps the Chief Executive to direct staff inappropriately

- Remembers that getting involved in details blurs the line between governance and executive.
- Confines herself to setting or reminding the Executive Team of the vision/direction and allows them freedom to deliver
- Gets involved in subcommittees or specific projects if needed

3 Doesn't handle crisis well

- When faced with crisis demands more paperwork/meetings.
- Assumes someone did something wrong
- Seeks to blame
- Focusses on what happened rather than what can be done

- Realises that more paperwork doesn't help. If the organisation is sufficiently well structured whether things are going well or badly shouldn't necessitate the need for more time – just different conversations
- Doesn't seek to blame
- Focusses on what next

Terry the Terrible Trustee

4 Hi-jacks the meetings

- Or allows them to be hi-jacked by fellow trustees
- Points out spelling or grammatical mistakes during the meeting
- Goes into questioning about details
- Raises critical issues at the very end of the meeting

5 Thinks that the work of the trustee is done at the meetings

- Doesn't engage with the charity between meetings
- Fails to respond to emails
- Has to be chased

6 Acts as prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner

- Tendency to attack the executive, or assume that something hasn't been done or hasn't been done well
- Questions aggressively as if he's trying to catch someone out

7 Focuses on the wrong things –

- Thinks that the main measure of success is the revenue/reserves
- Forgets to keep things in perspective
- Doesn't focus on the beneficiary
- Forgets that it's a Board and majority rule

8 Thinks he's the expert

- Doesn't listen
- Puts the executive on the defensive
- Thinks he could do a better job

Beryl the Brilliant Board Member

- Only points out any grammatical or spelling mistakes in the paperwork if it's material to decision making or image and does so in advance of the meeting or afterwards
- If she has any detailed questions asks them in advance of the meeting to maximise time during the meeting
- If she has anything additional to contribute – raises it in advance of the meeting so it can go on the agenda or at the very beginning so the Chair can decide how to handle it

- Engages with the charity between meetings – offers support and expertise when needed
- Responds to emails promptly
- Reads communications and responds appropriately – even if just to say 'thanks and well done'.

- Realises that the Board and the Executive are a team that needs to work together to achieve the charitable objects and goals of the charity
- Asks questions that help to move things forward

- Remembers that revenue is simply one of the resources needed to help to achieve the charitable objects
- Remembers that good times come and go and that it's rarely someone's failure or fault
- If the Board out-votes her lets it go and moves on

- Assumes that the executive is working hard and doing the right things and asks questions that are supportive and further the work
- Recognises that the experts in the charity are the charity staff and dedicated volunteers not the Board
- Treats the Executive as paid professional experts whose job is to advise the Board when decisions need to be taken

Terry the Terrible Trustee

9 Doesn't act like part of a team

- Lets personal interests and opinions get in the way of group decisions
- Fosters cliques within the board
- Obsessed with own agenda at the expense of group coherence
- Seeks remuneration for service
- Inappropriate relationships with staff

10 Never praises

- Tries to catch people doing something wrong

Beryl the Brilliant Board Member

- Fosters positive relationships with all other board members and the executive team
- Helps ensure all trustees have the chance to contribute
- Appropriately engages with staff
- Works for the interest of the group, not self-interest
- Contributes voluntarily

- Looks for opportunities to praise success and motivate staff

5 Useful Things to Know About Your Executive Team

- 1 **They don't care about you** – they care about the beneficiaries – that's how it should be – their job is to focus on delivering the charitable objects for the purpose of beneficiaries. And actually, so is yours. Your job is to make it as easy as possible for them to do theirs.
- 2 **They won't tell you if you're not a good trustee or a good Board** – for obvious reasons – so it is down to you to regularly assess your individual and collective contribution – always assume you could do better.
- 3 **Preparing for Board meetings takes a huge amount of time** – every 'quick' paper you ask for because you're interested in something is often hours of work behind the scenes. And often it's not really that important in the context of delivering against the charity's objects. Be sure that what you're asking for really is strategically and operationally critical. And ask your executive team if they think that what you're asking for is really needed. And where you can use existing information or paperwork – don't ask for the extra.
- 4 **They already work long hours and over their contracted time.** Having to attend Board meetings out of hours or at a weekend can put even further pressure on them. Try to keep meetings to within working hours.
- 5 **They often hate Board meetings** because too often they feel they're being judged negatively or attacked. A good Board meeting is when your Executive team come out feeling motivated, supported and with a clear sense of direction.