

Lead from the Front



What should a third CEO do in these uncertain times? **David Fielding**, Director at attenti highlights key activities a leader should focus on to create a positive organisational mood.

It was the cast of High School Musical that sang “We are all in this together” long before the Prime Minister, David Cameron, adopted this as a message in an attempt to enthuse the British public to pull together to overcome the adversity ahead. A cynical bit of Churchillian rhetoric or totally appropriate and necessary as a leader? You decide.

As a chief executive, you don't need me to tell you that you and your organisation have some very difficult years ahead and what you do and how you do it will be under enormous scrutiny from a vast array of stakeholders (trustees, management, staff, volunteers, funders, commissioners and beneficiaries). Will they be open to everything you say, trust your judgment and more to the point believe what you say without a hint of cynicism?

Daily reminders about the fragility of our economy are having a major impact on attitudes across all sectors. Not all charities are closing projects, considering mergers, reducing spending or making staff redundant but enough of them are for us all to know someone personally affected. This makes those not directly affected 'survivors'. The term 'survival syndrome' is often used to describe the impact on the

attitudes and resulting behaviours of staff that remain in organisations where reductions in the workforce have recently occurred. It refers to the psychological response to a combination of job cuts and high associated stress – stress which differs from 'normal' stress in that it is the result of events beyond the organisation or its employees' control.

As a resourcing consultancy, Tribal has relationships with literally hundreds of different kinds of third sector organisations. We are seeing this kind of mentality creeping in, even in organisations that have yet to be affected directly. The fear of job losses and perceptions of helplessness are starting to take hold. Unsurprisingly employees become preoccupied with their future security and informal communications are dominated by this subject. Put another way, employees turn their focus inwardly and devote far less energy to their day jobs at just the time when their workloads are increasing and their efforts are required more than ever.

On the upside of all of this, we are also seeing some chief executives counter this type of activity completely. Alice Maynard and Richard Hawkes, the Chair and Chief Executive at SCOPE are classic examples of what's possible. Their strategic thinking, clear communications, enthusiasm

and energy for tackling the challenges ahead are simply irresistible and infectious. Their belief in their mission and their drive to capitalise on the opportunities continue to permeate to staff and service users alike.

So beyond the obvious strategic, financial, technical and managerial activities, what are the things chief executives should be doing?

First and foremost, you have to remain upbeat and optimistic. If those around you think you've given up, you simply can't expect them to perform and inspire others.

Show your passion. If you 'believe', so will those around you. If you are making redundancies, do it fairly but quickly. A slow process does far more damage than you think.

You must continue to invest in staff development. It may also sound counter-intuitive, but you need to do more networking and raising your organisation's profile than ever before. Get out and about, this is where new relationships are made, deals are secured and inspiration is found.

You are only human and have to ensure managers can innovate, respond and take decisions as necessary. You need to be open and

transparent about the challenges but also create the conditions where trustees and managers can consider all the opportunities that present themselves openly. It is not your responsibility to know all the answers or to carry all the burdens of your organisation on your shoulders alone.

Our sector has a great tradition of prospering in times of adversity. It's 2011 and you are going to be tested like you have never been tested before, but you know what to do. Onwards.

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He is a trustee for Equinox Care and a special advisor to ACEVO and for the past decade has contributed to the debates around service delivery, governance, funding and trust. He is an Independent Assessor and advises on wide range of high profile Ministerial Public Appointments.

David is an ex-World Record Holder and four time Aikido World Champion.

Prior to becoming a head-hunter, David was a successful HR Director