



Ten ways to keep your job

As the Chief Officer (CO) of a charitable organisation, you may have felt that your job would be safe. However, in these challenging times, there seems to be little optimism in the sector. In this note, we look at the reality of the situation and what you can do to protect your position.

COs are almost never made redundant, because an organisation will always need a leader. COs are rarely dismissed for misconduct reasons, as they are generally individuals with high personal standards of conduct and integrity. Usually, COs are also highly capable and experienced employees, so performance issues are rarely formally raised against them.

The single most common reason that a CO is asked to leave his or her position is through a breakdown of trust and of the employment relationship. Every CO is well advised to focus on retaining the trust and confidence of the Board of Trustees and also of the Senior Management Team. A CO may sense that such relationships are not quite right, but in many cases it comes as a surprise when an issue is suddenly deemed so serious that the CO needs to be asked to leave the organisation.

While this will hopefully never happen to you, the trouble is that if things were to begin to go wrong, the position can very quickly take a turn for the worse. Below are our ten tips in terms of areas to watch out for and where you can proactively assist in retaining the trust necessary for a good working relationship.

The Board of Trustees

A good relationship with the Trustees may sound an obvious strategy for preserving your employment relationship. However, building and preserving such a relationship requires work on your part as well as theirs and this is sometimes neglected by COs. Focus on the five areas below should safeguard against difficulties.

- 1 Establish with the Trustees clear goals, priorities and agree a clear strategy for the Charity
- 2 Identify clear boundaries between the Chief Officer role and the function of the Board
- 3 Communicate with the Board regularly and keep lines of communication open/on-going
- 4 Ensure Trustees understand their Corporate Governance responsibilities – arrange training for them if necessary
- 5 Avoid duplication of effort through efficient co-operation so neither the role of the CO nor the Board is undermined The Senior Management Team

A CO needs to gain and retain the full support of your Senior Management Team. If you were to lose the goodwill of the SMT, then a grievance or two raised against you by another employee - however unfair these may be perceived to be from your point of view - may result in your removal. Sadly, it is always easier to replace you, even if the Trustees have to pay a settlement to you, than to replace the entire SMT team.

- 6 Establish clear job roles, responsibilities and job descriptions for each member of the SMT
- 7 Communicate fully with the SMT through an 'open door' policy so you know of any concerns or discontent before these build up within the team itself

- 8 Ensure that you conduct annual appraisals. Performance reviews help set targets and is also an opportunity for the individual to comment on how well they work with you and to address any ongoing issues.
- 9 Have regular SMT meetings (and make sure you personally attend these) to ensure everyone has an opportunity to discuss and participate in the management of your organisation
- 10 Do not usurp a function delegated to a member of the SMT which may undermine that individual. Make sure you use appropriate management techniques and employment policies to deal with any issues of underperformance.

If you ever were to find yourself in a position where matters begin to go wrong for you, it is sensible at an early stage to seek guidance and talk this through with an independent advisor, we can assist in trying to turn the position around for you. If this is not possible, which is often the case if one party is not willing to try to rebuild the relationship, then we can assist in safeguarding your legal position and assert your employment rights while negotiating a settlement agreement for you through our legal partners. Alternatively we can seek to resolve the matter through mediation.

Members are urged to speak to us [ASAP](#), don't ignore any niggles or worries!