In Trustees we trust

[00:00:00] Hi, I'm Shahida Iqbal, director at Manar Associates Ltd and welcome to the Ordinary Extraordinary Leaders podcast. So firstly, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I’m here today and mainly I’m going to focus on my role as an ex trustee of an organisation, but currently I am sitting on two boards as a non-executive director who also plays a very similar role as trustees.

My main job is as a trainer and coach. So I design range of training programs and deliver them across the private, the public, and the third sector. I have a particular specialism in leadership and management, but I'm often asked to design and deliver a range of training programs from communication, conflict management, equality, diversity, and inclusion. So I do work with Community First Yorkshire as one of [00:01:00] their trainers as well. And I also support boards on governance aspects. So, as well as sitting on a board and having that strategic decision-making responsibility, I also support boards.

I live in Yorkshire, although I'm originally from Lancashire. You might be able to tell from the accent, but I class myself as a pink rose with affiliations in both camps, as I have family living there and travel to Lancashire on a regular basis. Now whilst living in Lancashire over ten years ago, I was asked to join a group as a trustee. I had worked with the founder of this new organisation on other projects, who thought that my experience and skills would add value to her new organisation.

Trusteeship was something I'd heard of but I thought it was something for older people who had maybe retired. But what sparked my interest was it was involved in coaching, and I was really interested in coaching and I was just dipping my toe [00:02:00] into that. So I thought this would be a great way to learn about trusteeship as well as actually, you know, developing my interest in coaching as well.

Now, when I joined the organisation as a trustee, I didn't really have a clue, to be honest, about what the role actually was, actually involved. I was a bit like a rabbit in the headlights in my first few meetings. I'd received a set of papers. I'd read through the set of papers, but then when I got to the meeting, I was thinking, and what questions am I meant to ask? What is my role meant to be focusing on?

Now, a huge amount of trust is placed in the role of a trustee. You are making decisions that could potentially impact on people's personal lives. And that could be a huge number of people as well. So I thought that if I want to do this role, well, I need to understand what I'm actually meant to be doing.

So, I went on a couple of [00:03:00] workshops to develop my skills and I started to understand the strategic aspect. I start to understand what governance really meant, how I was meant to be looking at the finances, what was risk, et cetera. And then more importantly, how to apply this knowledge back into those meetings that I was attending.

What surprised me was the time that people will give up to a worthy cause. When I looked around this particular trustee group, there were individuals who were young parents, who had their own businesses, who were generally very busy people, but they were still giving up their time months in month out to support this new organisation.

And I found that, really, what also surprised me was [00:04:00] that I had the skills. So I personally had the skills to be able to do this role. What I just needed to do was understand how to apply those skills to this new role. And that's how the workshops really helped me. It really helped to build my confidence.

I left those workshops and I thought, lightbulb moments went on in my head and I thought, ‘Ah, right, this is what I'm meant to be doing with that. And this is the kind of questions I'm supposed to be asking.’ So how did it support me in my later work and career? So one of the things I've really taken away is the ability to be able to build relationships with people so that we can work well together in that boardroom environment.

Over the many years that I've sat in boardroom environments, I have worked with different people from variety of experiences, variety of [00:05:00] professional backgrounds. So it's that ability to be able to work well with people who have very different experiences, as well as being able to challenge appropriately.

So I might not agree with the person that I'm sat next to, but what I've learned over the years is to be able to do that in a way which is positive, which is constructive. It's important for me to be able to get my point of view across, but I just need to do it in a way which is going to be positive to that relationship rather than damage that relationship.

What's really important is keeping an eye on the fact that I'm there to act in the best interest of the organisation. What I've also developed is my critical thinking skills. So the kind of questions to be able to ask, that the balance between the operational versus the [00:06:00] governance role of a trustee and where to spend my time appropriately as a trustee.

And that's really also helped in my career because it's helped me to be able to develop those critical questions, those good quality open questions. It's massively helped me in my role as a coach. Has it helped me in my career? Well, absolutely. I have taken on senior roles. Because I can put that on my CV that I've been a trustee and it's definitely helped me in getting the non-executive director roles that I'm on as well.

But also it's helped me in my day to day ability to be able to have good quality listening skills and really listen with interest to what people are saying and respect people's perspectives and people's opinions and people's views. [00:07:00]

So why should people consider being a trustee and I've covered maybe some of the skills that are involved? Well, I think it's a real opportunity to make a difference to people's lives. I got involved at the very outset of an organisation starting out. So I was able to see this particular organisation develop and thrive and flourish. And I'm really pleased to say that this organisation still exists and is doing incredibly well, even though I'm not on the trustee board any longer.

I think it's a great way to spend your time and give something back, particularly if you are acting as a trustee in your local community. Serving as a trustee is an excellent way to support a cause that you're passionate about. So I was really passionate about coaching and I was really able to add value to that organisation, but because it was a passion of mine as well, I got [00:08:00] something out of it as well.

You know, you're making a real difference at a strategic level. You're ensuring that resources are being used in the best way possible. Staff are being supported. Volunteer skills are being utilised. So all in all, it's really rewarding being a trustee. And in terms of your self-development, sou can develop a myriad of useful skills to support yourself.

You know, I've talked about developing strategy, understanding of governance, your own leadership skills, because you are acting as a leader in that particular organisation. Develop your financial acumen. Risk management. I think it's also a great way of meeting new people from a range of personal and professional backgrounds.

So in this organisation that I was a trustee in, you know, over 10 years ago, there was a really fantastic chair. And I learned a [00:09:00] lot from her in terms of being able to listen to the discussion that's taking place within that boardroom meeting, being able to summarise that, and then being able to put forward actions and decisions.

She was also great at being able to manage any tensions or differing opinions that occurred regularly during those boardroom meetings. And I found it fascinating how she was able to do that in a positive way. And so it's a great way to be able to learn from different people, different professional backgrounds. And I definitely learned a huge amount from that particular individual that is still helping me to this day.

So I really want you to thank you for listening to this podcast. If you're interested in developing your skills as a trustee, then please do visit [00:10:00] Community First Yorkshire's website at www.communitysupportny.org.uk and click on training and events. You never know, I might see you at one of the workshops that I deliver for the organisation. So like I said, thank you for listening to this particular podcast. There will be others to follow this one so keep an eye on the website.