



How to:

Get the most out of your trustee board.



Penny Wilson, 10th July 2026

What we will cover

- What do you want from your board?
- Unhelpful board behavior
- What trustees need to know and how they need to behave to be effective
- What can help trustees to be effective?
- Common mistakes when working with boards



What do you
want from your
board?

What you might want from your board

Support, respect, trust and empathy	Challenge	Time
Useful skills, knowledge and/or experience	Person power	Engagement and enthusiasm
Bravery	Focus on what matters and understand their role	Humility and curiosity



What are the
ways in which
trustees behave
ineffectively?

What are the ways in which trustees behave ineffectively?

- Overly operational (“nit picking”)
- Disengaged between meetings
- Poor meeting attendance
- Not reading the papers
- Not listening enough/overly dominant
- Entrenched views/shutting down debate
- Know it all



What do trustees
need to *know* to
be effective?

How should
trustees *behave* to
be effective?

What do trustees need to *know* to be effective?

- ☐ The law / the rules
- ☐ Policies and processes
- ☐ The line between staff and board (where relevant)
- ☐ The organisation's mission, strategy and work
- ☐ The people
- ☐ The field/s
- ☐ Finances
- ☐ Stories (to be able to advocate)
- ☐ The truth

How should trustees behave?

- ☐ Respectful
- ☐ Able to engage in constructive debate
- ☐ Two ears, one mouth
- ☐ Curious / keen to learn
- ☐ Ask the right questions (and listen to the answer)
- ☐ Mission first (ego last)
- ☐ Humble
- ☐ Look for their own weaknesses and those of the board/organisation
- ☐ Speak out (bravery)



Why are trustees
ineffective?

Why are trustees ineffective?

- They're not the right person
- They don't understand their role
- They think they're behaving in the right way
- They have been recruited in the wrong way
- They feel they can't leave
- They are genuinely concerned
- Other trustees make it difficult
- Practical barriers
- They don't care about the charity
- They have stuff going on their life

What helps boards to be effective?

- ☐ Recruit trustees openly and strategically
- ☐ Board size big enough but not too big
- ☐ Composition (open recruitment best bet)
- ☐ A good chair
- ☐ Turnover
- ☐ Induction, training and development
- ☐ Clear expectations and roles (including a scheme of delegation, trustee code of conduct)
- ☐ Engagement with the charity's work
- ☐ Good board admin, e.g. papers on time
- ☐ Spend time with the board beyond board meetings
- ☐ Assessment/evaluation

Common mistakes we make when working with boards

- Not giving clarity
- Lack of induction, training and development
- Asking too little
- Working around them
- Governance by tradition
- Thinking it's all about meetings
- Not making space for debate
- Neglecting relationships
- Ignoring niggles

Further help

- Charity Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-commission-guidance>
- Charity Governance Code: <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/>
- Association of Chairs: <https://associationofchairs.co.uk/>
- DSC: <https://www.dsc.org.uk/category/governance/>
- Reach Volunteering Trustee Recruitment Cycle: <https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/trustee-recruitment-cycle>
- Festival of Trusteeship: <https://eastsidepeople.org/resource/festival-of-trusteeship/>
- The Confident Trustee: <https://heartcentredleaders.aweb.page/p/49b02bca-9e6f-45b9-ae0b-97048b54ee75>
- ACEVO: <https://www.acevo.org.uk/>
- WCVA: <https://wcva.cymru/governance-leadership/>
- NCVO: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance/>
- SCVO: <https://scvo.scot/support/running-your-organisation/governance>
- Cranfield Trust governance films: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCROAkYFnf2Hunpcg_Af_w5Q
- Example trustee code of conduct: <https://www.diycommitteeguide.org/app/uploads/2022/09/Example-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>
- Example scheme of delegation: <https://inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Scheme-of-delegation-template.docx>

Thank you

Penny Wilson

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/penny-wilson-charity-sector-geek/>

penny@pennywilsonconsulting.co.uk

