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THE ART OF GIVING YOUR TIME AND GOVERNANCE SKILLS

When we think of giving in the context of charities and voluntary organisations, we usually think in terms of financial gifts. However, whilst funds are usually always welcomed, there are many other ways in which individuals and businesses can help. Tracy Hickman explores opportunities for those with a little time to spare and experience to offer.

BOARDS AND COMMITTEES OF CHARITIES, business associations and other organisations used to be relatively easy to fill from the ranks of retired business people. Today, the combination of later retirement, and greater family commitments (particularly looking after grandchildren), results in a lack of experienced volunteers for governance roles.

Potential recruits may be reluctant to get involved due to concerns regarding the level of commitment required. You can easily mitigate this issue by being clear about your potential availability from the outset, and matching that to the requirements of the role. A trial period could also be helpful to ensure suitability, both for you and for the organisation.

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU NEED?

Typically, if you have successfully managed a business, you will have a variety of skills to offer a Not-for-Profit organisation, such as:

- Providing the board or committee with direction using your experience in governance;
- Acting as treasurer or helping with fundraising using your financial knowledge;
- Assisting with profile building and fundraising using your communications skills; and
- Identifying other potential board members, patrons, donors, and pro bono advisors using your networks.

Think about the broader applications of your skills, and don't feel constrained by your 'work' role. For example, if you work in HR, you will potentially have great people skills that could be helpful when building relationships with potential donors.

WHAT TRAITS ARE DESIRABLE?

Not-for-Profit boards and committees are often relatively large in order to ensure that the burden on any one volunteer is not overly onerous. Yet there are often a small number of 'doers', who keep the organisation moving towards its goals.

If we analyse our roles in business, we can probably identify whether we are, say, task-focussed, an 'ideas' person, or someone who prefers to interact with people. That self-awareness may be helpful in working out where and how our skills can be best used.

HOW TO FIND A ROLE?

Opportunities to join Not-for-Profit boards are advertised by the Institute of Directors, individual organisations and organisations such as www.volunteeringnz.org.nz. There are also opportunities for volunteers listed on www.seekvolunteer.co.nz.

Even if you have very limited time available, there may still be opportunities to suit. For example, Business Mentors asks mentors to give an hour a month to a business or organisation that needs help and guidance. For more details, visit www.businessmentors.org.nz.

Also, consider one-off opportunities. If your skills are in facilitating strategic planning or project management, there may be stand-alone projects that you could undertake which would benefit an organisation. For example, many fundraisers would benefit from the involvement of someone with good project management skills.

IS IT FOR YOU?

If you are planning to commit a few hours a month, your role is more likely to be sustainable over the long term if you identify with the organisation and your fellow board/committee members. It's helpful if you feel passionate about a cause or purpose, whether that has a social, charitable, business or sporting orientation.

Next time you are thinking about giving to an organisation, consider whether it may be appropriate to gift your time as well as, or instead of, your money. As Dave McCone explains in his article on page 8, using your skills in this way can be immensely rewarding for both the organisation and for you personally.