

Goodbye ... hello

I've been asking around and I've found out that on average we do it dozens of times a day.

We do it in all sorts of places. Sometimes it takes a few seconds and sometimes hours or days. Sometimes it's virtual and sometimes it gets physical.

Sometimes it's with the same people in the same place and sometimes it propels us into a whole new phase of our lives. We use lots different

words to do it but they all convey the same basic message.

Goodbye.

When pondering this piece I felt uneasy about writing about such a seemingly trivial matter. Then, the subject started growing on me. Although saying goodbye is part of the daily round, we often get stuck when it really matters.

Whether bringing meetings to a close or delivering leaving

speeches ('Charlie has been a wonderful chief executive for the last ten years') or finalising a merger (the process is complete and our old charity name has been deleted from the record never to be seen again), we are presented with endings all the time.

Our lives as trustees are peppered with goodbyes large and small and getting good at handling them is a key governance skill.

The better we are at saying goodbye the better we'll be at saying hello to what comes next.

Endings are often more challenging than beginnings. We become so wrapped up with things that to let go feels like losing a bit of our identity – founder syndrome is the classic example and painful it is too. Then there are the chairs or indeed chief executives who can't work

out for themselves that they're well past their 'sell by' date.

How well do you say goodbye to trustee colleagues whose time has come? A stumbled thank you from the chair under AOB? Not really good enough. So establish a ritual to recognise their gift of time – a party, a card, a speech. (Remember: even if you forget, they won't.)

In spite of all efforts, project funding has ended and redundancies loom. It's tough but you can help the chief executive and staff team see the new day by being big enough to face the facts, offering gracious and courageous farewells. If there's not a decent and respectful burial, the nasty smell can linger for a long time.

Sooner or later, a small voice whispers in your ear. It's time for you to leave the board. Do you listen? Maybe you notice that you are less keen to read those board papers, and alternative attractions seem ever more alluring.

Time to turn up the amplifier and listen to the small voice. Time not to ignore the niggler.

As you do, you will help others to be as wise as you are.

And as you say your goodbye the world will not come to end – neither yours nor theirs – and there will be space for a new world ... of hellos. ●



'Please Mr Jenkins. Everyone has to retire sometime'

This article is part of a series by Martin Farrell that looks in a light-hearted, but nevertheless serious way, at some of the more subtle issues facing trustee boards.

Martin Farrell
Chair, Time Banking UK
Founder and Director, Get2thepoint
020 8404 8661
martin.farrell@get2thepoint.org