

We're in hot water – facing demons out, in, and all around

Scenario 1: It's 5pm. The conference room has a lovely view over the countryside and you've spent a challenging but energising day with fellow trustees strategising about the next five years – will we compromise 'quality' when commissioners squeeze budgets, how big should we plan to be in relation to our competitors, should we work with new groups of users?

You have worked out that these are the key strategic questions and looked them in the face. Some of the day's discussions touch on your deeply-held core beliefs and as you struggle you notice unsettled, uneasy feelings coming up in you. You wonder if they have shown through.

Scenario 2: It's 5am. It's dark and silent. You're awake. You think about the people who have just been made redundant. You think about the impact on service users of a reduced service. You can't stop thinking about how your charity's small reserves (you always said they should be bigger) could be made to stretch further.

"This shouldn't be too painful, compared to your next trustees meeting"



You think and think about your responsibilities as a trustee. All you want to do is sleep...but your troubled mind keeps you awake. Many people in our sector, including trustees, are worried sick right now and take their worries home.

These are challenging times, especially in our sector. The '3/11' date when large numbers of charities have reduced in size or are closing has passed. Those of us who have been in the sector a

long time have seen many ups and downs and times of cuts, but none as far-reaching or deep as this.

But we are where we are. For all of us the water is getting hot, hot hot – and for some it is boiling already. We didn't choose to be in hot water but we do now have a choice about how we respond to it – and that presents us with a profoundly personal challenge. Will the hot water we're all in, 'boil our egg', or 'melt our butter'? Same kind of hot water but different outcome depending on what we're made of.

These unprecedented times will call for a courageous response from each of us as trustees. And that courageous response will involve our facing not just what's going on in the world around outside but also facing up to what comes up for us personally. This is a struggle of the most challenging kind – an inner struggle – in which we may be provoked in ways which surprise or trouble us.

If we're in hot water we may be pushed to rediscover parts of ourselves which have lain dormant. Let's be open to that and find the courage to face demons of any shape or colour and wherever they arise from in the deeper recesses of our personal history.

Let's find the courage to be with whatever we find there – whatever we're made of, butter or egg, and whether it's 5pm or 5am.

And know that as we respond with courage we'll come out stronger and so will the sector we are seeking to serve. ●

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