

# Meet the Changemakers:

## Expert Tips for Effective Engagement



 [improving-support.org.uk/leadership-and-governance](https://improving-support.org.uk/leadership-and-governance)  
Your gateway to third sector support, information and services



ACEVO  
1 New Oxford Street  
London  
WC1A 1NU

T: 020 7280 4960  
F: 020 7280 4989  
E: [info@acevo.org.uk](mailto:info@acevo.org.uk)  
W: [www.acevo.org.uk](http://www.acevo.org.uk)  
Registered Charity Number 1114591

Published by ACEVO  
First published 2010  
Copyright © 2010 ACEVO  
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced by any means, or transmitted, or translated into a machine language without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed on 100% recycled paper.

# Contents

- 2 Introduction**  
Stephen Bubb, CEO, ACEVO
- 4 Foreword**  
Gary Buxton, CEO, Young Advisors
- 7 Chapter 1: Changemakers on Strategic Thinking Skills for Effective Engagement**  
Dame Clare Tickell, CEO, Action for Children  
Dame Suzi Leather, Chair, Charity Commission  
Hugh Biddell, Head of Charities and Public Sector, RBS  
[Key Changemaker Tips](#)
- 21 Chapter 2: Changemakers on Campaigning and Influencing Skills for Effective Engagement**  
Sir Bert Massie, Compact Commissioner  
Ben Cairns, Director, IVAR  
(Institute of Voluntary Action Research)  
Mary Reilly, Partner, Deloitte  
[Key Changemaker Tips](#)
- 35 Chapter 3: Changemakers on Communication and Interpersonal Skills for Effective Engagement**  
Rob Williamson, CEO, Community Foundation  
John Stokoe, Vice-President National Government,  
BT Global Services  
Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP  
[Key Changemaker Tips](#)
- 48 Acknowledgements**

# Introduction



Stephen Bubb,  
CEO, ACEVO

The ability of a third sector organisation to engage effectively with private companies and public agencies will be a key determinant of their success in working towards their mission. A key theme running throughout this collection of contributions from accomplished leaders is the need to stay connected, both to our colleagues within and beyond the sector. In our endeavours to preserve the independence of our sector we are sometimes in danger of retreating to the stony ground of 'splendid isolation'. This has proven to be of little benefit to those we are in place to serve.

The ippr north (Institute for Public Policy Research North) report *All Inclusive? Third sector involvement in regional and sub-regional policymaking* found that all too often the third sector failed to represent its own views and the views of its beneficiaries because of a failure in three key leadership areas: strategic thinking skills; communications and interpersonal skills and campaigning and influencing skills.

As leaders of a modern and professional third sector we should strive to present ourselves as organised, coherent and constructive in our approach. The diversity of our sector can act as our greatest asset and yet also our riskiest liability.

How can we ensure that our 'thousand flowers' bloom beautifully and are not crushed instead by our 'loose and baggy monster'?

As third sector leaders, are we holding firm to our first principle of putting the needs of our beneficiaries above all else?

And, in this age of austerity, are we continuing to offer the innovative solution and the pragmatic approach?

Leader to leader peer learning is one of the most popular and effective ways in which ACEVO supports its members. Leadership lessons translate across sector boundaries and we can draw many lessons and great value from comparing our cultures and contexts. I am therefore delighted to introduce this collection of reflections from our leaders in the third, public and private sectors.

I leave you now to one of ACEVO's youngest members, Gary Buxton, CEO of Young Advisors, a national organisation based in Manchester. Gary's organisation strives to show decision makers how to better engage young people aged 15-21 in community life, regeneration and renewal.

Gary has written a letter to his even younger self, describing his leadership journey thus far and his experience of developing leadership skills for effective engagement.

# Foreword



Gary Buxton,  
*CEO, Young Advisors*

## From 2010 to 2005... A letter to my younger self

Crikey! Over the next few years you'll make a journey where you'll be given many unique opportunities and where you'll meet some inspirational people. You haven't made this journey without a few hiccups, though, so here's a heads up and a couple of pointers.

In 2006, you'll think about setting up your own charity and taking your first job as a CEO. You'll worry about your security, how competent you are and if the idea will fly. Rest assured, all the worrying is a good thing and those sleepless nights will be a driver for you to work hard, learn lots and achieve. The idea will be Young Advisors, invented in Whitehall, but made a reality by you, some clever adults from across the country, and a whole host of talented young people. You'll be training 15-21 year olds to work with public services in deprived communities in order to make them better. You'll need to develop not only your own ability to engage effectively, but also support others to do the same!

Over the next five years you'll meet some people who intimidate you (be brave), some who inspire you (always listen), and others who will help you to help yourself (be grateful).

You'll need to read all of these different types of people quickly to know how best to work with them.

So, here are my five lessons for you, some of which I know you'll do anyway, but it's always good to have reassurance and comfort!

1. Underpromise and overachieve! You will be asked to be more ambitious than your sense tells you is possible. Stay grounded and say what you think you can achieve, not what people tell you they want.
2. Don't get stuck in the office. Sometimes you'll need to be prised away from your desk as you'll become obsessed with box ticking, compliance and paperwork. You can't win people over by sitting in an office. Get out there, meet people, learn from them and have fun!
3. Don't be naive! You'll assume that everyone who works in the third sector is friendly and ethical but as a CEO you will find people competing for resources, prestige and position. If you find people who corner you rather than collaborate with you, walk away. The likelihood is that you'll never be able to influence them in a way you feel comfortable with.
4. Stay cheeky! You'll feel under pressure sometimes to become clinical in your leadership, but this won't create personal connections. Be yourself, friendly and personable and you'll find all kinds of people you meet helping you out later and championing your cause even when you're not there!
5. What goes around comes around. Being courteous, helping people out and participating in fringe activities will open up unexpected doors. Do as much as time permits and you'll create connections with people that will take you into new and exciting areas of work.

So, buckle your seat belt and get ready for what will be an exhilarating rollercoaster ride!





Chapter 1

# Changemakers on Strategic Thinking Skills for Effective Engagement

Dame Clare Tickell,  
*CEO, Action for Children*

Dame Suzi Leather,  
*Chair, Charity Commission*

Hugh Biddell  
*Head of Charities and Public Sector, RBS*

The ippr north report *All Inclusive? Third sector involvement in regional and sub-regional policy making* concluded that there were several aspects of strategic skills that could be further developed in the third sector. These include:

- Honing shared messages.
- Building strategic alliances including with the private sector.
- Scanning the policy horizon for emerging issues and priorities.
- Looking beyond the immediate, local and day-to-day.
- Clarity regarding policy debates to enter and why.



Dame Clare Tickell  
*CEO, Action for Children*

For any leader, finding the capacity to step beyond the day-to-day and focus on the strategic is, of course, very important. This can sometimes be easier said than done when you feel swamped by internal issues. Nevertheless, when it comes to the crucial issue of effective engagement, ensuring that the voices of those we are there to serve is heard, we must be clear.

Who are we working with and why? How are we connected to the outside world? When should we set aside competition for the greater good? How do we win the argument not only on the strength of our passion but also on our evidence?

When it comes to any strategic alliance there must be clear, tangible and enduring benefits for your organisation. Partnerships between or within sectors are to be welcomed where it is a case of '1 + 1 = 3'. Like any formal partnership or collaboration, it is not a sticking plaster solution and will not be an answer that works for either party where it is being employed as a tactic in crisis management.

As a charity providing services, when we collaborate and when we do not is as complicated now as it has ever been. Whilst on the one hand we compete for contracts and donors, on the other hand there are times when we need to join together to use our influence to improve the lives of children. It would be wrong, however, to allow this to detract from the importance of

collaboration when it matters. The Children's Society, Action for Children, the NSPCC and Barnardo's have all been around for well over 100 years and doubtless this will periodically have been a tension throughout for all of us.

It is important as leaders to stay closely connected to our own organisations and services, but also to the outside world. With an eye on the horizon and an ear to the ground, we need to stay alert to emerging trends and issues.

'Networking', the term used to describe how we stay connected to our peers and colleagues is a term that can be met with suspicion, and occasionally cynicism. However we describe the activity though, we must not neglect the invaluable influence, connection and sometimes coincidence that we can benefit from by staying in touch and sharing our experiences with colleagues and peers, sometimes in semi-formal settings. This is where ideas, thoughts and opinions will often be aired and when these begin to be repeated, emerging trends and issues and a chance to stay 'ahead of the game' will become clear.

Finally, I believe that there are two crucial elements to ensuring that you are able successfully and authentically to advocate on behalf of service users:

- connecting and involving your service users when expressing their needs;
- investing in an independent and externally validated evidence base.

The strength and power of an argument conveyed with passion and backed up by science is not easily lost.

Clare Tickell has been CEO of Action for Children since 2005, responsible for one of the UK's largest and most important charities. Action for Children employs over 6,000 people in nearly 450 projects across the UK and in parts of the Caribbean and Africa, supporting more than 156,000 children, young people and their families.

Clare is a member of the Public Interest General Council of the Office of Public Management, a Trustee of both Children England and NCVO and currently sits on the 2020 Commission on Public Services, chaired by Sir Andrew Foster.

Clare was awarded a DBE in the New Year Honours List 2010 for services to young people.



**Dame Suzi Leather**  
*Chair, Charity Commission*

A truly effective leader, I believe, is one who is always scanning the horizon, looking ahead and asking “What’s next?” Keeping an eye on the external environment and encouraging organisations to look outwards has always been a theme in my professional life and, as Chair of the Charity Commission, I spend a lot of time visiting charities of all shapes and sizes to make sure I keep up with their views, ideas and concerns. Building strategic partnerships that help you stay externally focused is crucial. When I chaired the HFEA, the horizon-scanning group of expert scientists we established not only helped us keep abreast of developments, but it created a shared sense of responsibility among the scientists for mapping and understanding the context we operated in.

I value charities for their nimbleness and agility in responding to changing circumstances and new challenges, and for their willingness to build alliances to secure change for their beneficiaries. The brilliant combination of the charismatic and vocal Jamie Oliver with the charities and voluntary groups working with children and families in food poverty was hugely successful in securing improvements in school food and in winning the confidence of parents and educators, and I was proud to be a part of that coalition for change. An effective leader certainly remembers how powerful it can be to blend compelling evidence which engages the mind and personal experience that engages the emotions.

Balancing these strategic considerations for effective engagement is no easy task and only one element of the complex role of a chief executive in the diverse and fascinating charity sector. As an experienced non-executive there are some characteristics common to the successful chief executives with whom I have been privileged to work, and which I have particularly valued.

Firstly, an understanding and recognition of the role of the board is paramount; the chief executive needs to recognise and value (and sometimes demand!) the strategy, stewardship, support, stretch and scrutiny roles the board should play. Particularly key to success is the Chair and CEO relationship which I think works best when it is a respectful partnership.

I look for leadership presence, which involves demonstrable integrity, honesty, a willingness to take difficult decisions and an ability to inspire mutual trust.

In these difficult times, the emotional intelligence of third sector leaders may be one of the most valuable assets they bring to charities. Hopefulness and inclusiveness are more in demand than ever before. A leader who is self-assured can hold a calm centre even through the most difficult times. Coupled with pace – driven by an interest in improving quality rather than by anxiety – third sector leaders can create and nurture the sorts of organisations which change lives.

Dame Suzi Leather DBE MA DL chairs the Charity Commission and DEFRA's Council of Food Policy Advisers.

Suzi has broad professional experience; she chaired the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the School Food Trust, was the first Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency and also chaired the Exeter and District Community NHS Trust and a local community project, St Sidwell's. Suzi's academic background is in social sciences. She is married with a family and lives in the West Country.



Hugh Biddell,  
*Head of Charities and Public Sector, RBS*

I want to give you an example of an alliance between a third and a private sector organisation.

In early 2000 I was asked to take on an extra role of encouraging volunteering amongst the 150 staff in Corporate Banking at RBS. An easy choice to say yes, but I did ask the Chief Executive of our division to agree to do a whole day of volunteering himself before taking it on. In addition, I asked a few enthusiastic younger staff to help who I knew were energetic and would gather like-minded colleagues – it had to be entirely voluntary so I needed enthusiasts for the idea. I also knew we needed third sector partners to deliver. In the first year 100 staff did a great project alongside some young people in danger of exclusion at a local school with the Prince's Trust, who were, and remain, an established RBS partner:

I wanted to build capacity and the staff wanted to do something practical together. BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) were a good partner on paper; doing projects all over the country, used to many volunteers and with the right health and safety background and proper equipment. I also knew Tom Flood from ACEVO; Tom talked about the environment but also about people and communities. We had done background thinking so I knew we wanted to involve our staff together; do something worthwhile in the community but also something interacting with the community and that would

be sustained. After an ACEVO dinner sitting next to Tom and Rowena Estwick, a young project leader for Groundwork Southwark and Lambeth, BTCV and Groundwork teamed up to enable us to do a variety of projects in and around Lambeth and Southwark in the course of one week. We provided finance that enabled the charities to deliver and for them to engage the local community. We also invited RBS contacts at the two boroughs to volunteer too. We needed to listen hard to make sure it met Groundwork and BTCV's needs. The Media Trust also filmed the event so that we could all watch it together. BTCV showed their commitment as their Chair, Rupert Evenett, waded into the pond with me at Burgess Park.

This start led to the Bank adopting BTCV as a partner. Whilst there was a lot of goodwill from this engagement, our Community Investment Team funded a manager's post at BTCV to enable them to put together projects across all our divisions. This meant there was someone there to keep the relationship fresh and interpret RBS to the different project teams who had not the impetus we had to work together. On a quite separate note we have come closer as, more recently, BTCV moved their banking to RBS; this has helped as it has meant we have got to know more people across their business. Strategically it makes sense but the alliance will not work without people and relationships at every level. So some points I have learned are:

1. Get buy-in at the top in both organisations.
2. Think about what you want from your point of view and the fit but time taken beforehand to challenge assumptions, without the pressure of a timetable, helps.
3. Gather people around you at various levels to sustain the alliance.

4. Invest time in the relationship.
5. Be honest about what you would like from the alliance.

Hugh Biddell is Head of Charities and Public Sector, Major Corporate Banking, The Royal Bank of Scotland. He runs a relationship team looking after large charities, local authorities, NHS and foundation trusts and government bodies. In addition, he has responsibility for graduate trainees in Corporate Banking, encouraging volunteering across the Corporate Bank and is a member of the RBS Group Community Development Banking Steering Committee, Corporate Responsibility Forum and Financial Inclusion Group.

Previous roles have included establishing and growing the Bank's UK market-leading businesses in private healthcare, professional practices and education. Hugh is a trustee of homelessness charity Crisis.

## Key Changemaker Tips

- Always back up your passion with valid independent evidence.
- Challenge assumptions before developing plans.
- Always remember that the interests of the beneficiaries come first.
- Consider and connect with the outside world especially with people and organisations that will impact and influence your own. Be honest about what you would like from the alliance.
- Always connect and involve service users when expressing their views.
- Always get buy-in from the top of all parties involved in projects.
- Develop your emotional intelligence to ensure success.

## ACEVO Recommended Reading

*Creating Change: Chief Executives on Strategic Planning*, 2008

*Third Sector Leadership in 2027*, 2007







Chapter 2

# Changemakers on Campaigning and Influencing Skills for Effective Engagement

Sir Bert Massie  
*Compact Commissioner*

Ben Cairns  
*Director, IVAR (Institute of Voluntary Action Research)*

Mary Reilly  
*Partner, Deloitte*

The ippr north report *All Inclusive?* Third sector involvement in regional and sub-regional policymaking concluded that there were several aspects of campaigning and influencing skills that could be further developed in the third sector.

These include:

- Thorough understanding of where decisions are taken (in theory and practice).
- Understanding and responding to small ‘p’ politics.
- Measuring outcomes and impacts as the basis for building a robust evidence.
- Campaigning skills to develop and target key messages, providing a more coherent voice for the third sector.



Sir Bert Massie  
*Commissioner for the Compact*

In order to develop a better understanding of how to operate politically to best effect, my first piece of advice is to learn from others. Understanding of this nature can't be learned from a text book. If you are less experienced, seek out a mentor and benefit from their greater experience.

I have had a number of mentors and learnt a number of valuable lessons in my various campaigning roles:

- Check that the cause you are campaigning for and the groups you are with are the right ones. Ensure you are working from facts and not just emotion.
- Understand, but above all respect the views of those you are opposing before you try to alter their beliefs towards yours. Get to know them personally and find the common ground first. Lunch might be a good place to start!
- Put the work in. Campaigning and influencing is about the long haul. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) took 18 Bills. It took 15 years to come about but has resulted in massive change.
- Be persistent. When you are feeling discouraged draw strength from your support network.
- Don't underestimate the small victories and the impact that these have.
- Win public opinion by keeping arguments simple.

Take heart from your successes and ensure that you are measuring and monitoring your impact.

Over the 40 years I have spent in various campaigning roles, some of the best ways I have learned to deliver key messages successfully are:

- Decide on the specific message for each constituency. Mass messages don't hit specific targets.

Take internet marketing. When you order a book online you will receive an email suggesting other books which are related in theme that you might be interested in. They use what they know about your interests to interest you further.

- Decide how you will word the message to win over your audience.

When writing to a Government Minister it does no harm to praise those policies with which you agree before saying what you think needs changing and invite them to discuss this with you. However, if writing to an Opposition Minister then you can go straight in with what the Government is failing at and offer a solution!

- Keep the message short or people will not read it.
- Maintain your integrity – be principled to win.

Peter Tatchell, the Gay Rights campaigner, is a fine example of someone who has stuck to his views and had them understood.

- Always look at what can be done.

When the issue of why there weren't female bus drivers was explored, the main reason provided was that females were not

considered strong enough to manipulate the large bus steering wheel. Although this was not true for all, it was for some. So, what could be done? The answer was to put power steering on buses so women could steer easily. This is an example of moulding the environment not the people and using technology to turn issues around.

Finally, in campaigning always take the long view. Change often happens slowly and is not noticed and then all of a sudden you notice it like a tree growing or a child suddenly grown up. Be magnanimous in victory as your opponent in one battle could be your ally in another. Respect and courtesy are as important in your work life as in your personal life. Don't be afraid to have your opinions changed! The economist John Maynard Keynes once said "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?"

Bert Massie was appointed as Commissioner for the Compact in 2008. He has spent most of his adult life promoting equality and human rights of disabled people. From 2000-2007 he was Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission during which time the rights of disabled people were strengthened through legislation and through groundbreaking legal cases. Prior to that he was the chief executive of The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and was instrumental in ensuring that Parliament passed the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

He has been a member of many statutory committees concerned with meeting the needs of disabled people or advising ministers on appropriate policies. He has close links with many disability organisations and is a leading thinker on social policy issues affecting disabled people.



**Ben Cairns**  
CEO, IVAR, (*Institute for Voluntary Action Research*)

From the very beginning of my career I've learnt lessons about campaigning and how best to influence. At 23, I set up a day centre in Shepherd's Bush for homeless families in collaboration with a cross-sector grouping of local churches, health visitors and children's workers.

During this time I gained basic but crucially important understanding about where the power lies, where decisions are made and how to situate your organisation or cause strategically within that framework.

A simple but important first principle is that the decisions with the greatest strategic importance are made by elected officials. That is where, for example, it will be decided to save 10% on children's services or spend 5% more on support for low income families. When these decisions are made, the officers employed by the local authority will have very little room for manoeuvre, yet this is the level at which most voluntary sector organisations hold and invest in their relationships. Of course when it comes to negotiating a grant a good relationship with your grants officer will certainly make life a good deal easier; however, they will only ever be able to tinker at the edges of what is available to your organisation and your beneficiaries.

Where and how you market your organisation, case or agenda is extremely important. Combining your strategic skills with

influencing skills here is crucial. The Partnership Improvement Programme, delivered by IVAR and IDeA, is focused on relationships between public agencies and the local voluntary sector. It has highlighted the concept of 'exchange' in these relationships whereby both sectors are motivated to participate in partnerships in order to secure those resources they most lack: for example, delivery capacity and expertise for local authorities and financial resources for the third sector. This has allowed cross-sector partners to identify areas where they can achieve mutual advantage from coming together.

Where relationships can be established on this level, it also reduces the risk of resorting to special pleading. And where it is achieved it usually works by identification of the 'superordinate' goals, a term often used in conflict resolution to describe the objectives which are above the interests of one or other of the stakeholders individually. This offers the potentially powerful opportunity for you to be heard in the context of shared objectives with those who you are trying to influence.

'Influencing' in large part takes place through relationships rather than formal structures. It is a dynamic process not a linear one and often what can be counted towards success in campaigning and influencing happens over a phone conversation or lunch at an event, rather than through more formal routes. A report published in 2008 by IVAR, 'Exploring the advocacy role of community anchor organisations', found that the process of influencing was often informal; within organisations there may be no person or resources assigned to this role. It is more of an organic process which is sometimes unclear and this can make measuring success and impact difficult. For example, in my own street there is a public debate over the introduction of a controlled parking zone with residents organised around simple and clear 'pro' and 'anti' campaigns. While the outcome of this will

be easily measured (the parking changes will or won't be introduced), the unintended consequences and social capital built (even amongst those whose campaign proves 'unsuccessful') will not be so easily captured.

Finally, a positive example of strategic relationship building, interpersonal and influencing skills which benefited local people in Sutton. Lack of awareness of the different working environments of the Local Authority and the local voluntary sector was identified as a key barrier to effective partnership working. In order to grow empathy and understanding, a work shadowing opportunity was created between the Local Authority CEO and the CEO of the local Citizens' Advice Bureau. When the recession hit, the CAB was very effectively and quickly allocated extra resources to tackle the financial and employment advice needs of the local community. This wasn't a planned consequence of the shadowing but because the relationship was in place it enabled the strategic decision to be taken quickly in the best interests of the CAB's beneficiaries.

Ben has more than 20 years' experience of work in and around the voluntary sector as a volunteer, manager, trustee, trainer, writer and researcher. As co-founder of the Aston Centre for Voluntary Action Research in 2000, Ben led the development and delivery of a dynamic new approach to action research and capacity building with local, regional and national organisations. Now, as the founding director of IVAR and Honorary Research Fellow of Birkbeck, Ben is responsible for taking this work forward. His current research interests include: 'high engagement' funding practices of charitable trusts and foundations; multi-purpose community anchor organisations; and partnership working.



**Mary Reilly**

*Partner, Head of Charities, Deloitte*

A quick Google search for leadership gives over 110 million results. This in itself is not surprising as there are nearly as many opinions as to what makes an outstanding leader. In reality the best leaders are adept at altering their leadership styles to fit different circumstances. Currently one of the main challenges for leaders in any sector is to deliver results through a motivated workforce in an age of austerity and recession. In such circumstances, what do leaders need to do?

There are four clear areas where good leadership can be demonstrated:

- Leading effective change management.
- Having the appropriate skills to manage effectively in a demanding environment.
- The demonstration of emotional intelligence to motivate their people.
- Building leadership at all levels in an organisation by developing capability and empowering individuals across an organisation to exercise leadership.

Change management in times of recession is often necessary to re-focus an organisation to meet its goals. This is probably one of the hardest aspects of leadership, not least because many individuals are resistant to change and the level of concern and emotional stress in an organisation is heightened at such a time. One of the best leaders I worked for in such circumstances said that "It is necessary to be resolute in decision making, but

compassionate in execution". To be effective, leaders have to develop a clear strategy based on fewer priorities, moving excellent well-performing staff into roles that will stretch them further; dealing with underperformers and the redesign of systems processes which are failing to deliver. Good leaders encourage leadership behaviours among their team and at lower levels in an organisation and at a time of change deal swiftly with those individuals who are blocking any progress.

Leaders need to have a high level of cognitive skills, which is a combination of intellectual and rational skills. Without these skills leaders will be unable to make practical progress in improving organisational performance. Cognitive skills are a necessary part of leadership because ultimately, in most organisations, it is about the ability to deliver change through people. Leaders must be able to create solutions that will work within the context of their organisation; hence another definition of cognitive skills could be the combination of technical mastery with well-developed behavioural skills. These are particularly noticeable in people with excellent 'political' skills who know how to work with different groups to get them all to focus on a particular strategy or course of action.

Some key issues/tips for leaders in such circumstances include:

- The ability to create an articulate, effective and compelling organisational strategy – i.e. they know what they want to do.
- They know how to deliver operational goals, i.e. to put the strategy into action. Many leaders benefit from mentoring advice and coaching on personal effectiveness which can help to judge the appropriate degree of management versus delegation – I found this particularly helpful.
- Handling information effectively is knowing when to get involved in a potentially damaging issue at a detailed level through the effective and rapid analysis of situations.

- Every good leader needs a stock of effective questions.

It is well recognised that many failures could have been averted if leaders had been able to probe; for example “demonstrate to me that we have the capabilities necessary to deliver this” or “show me what we would miss if we adopted a simpler standardised approach”.

Mary Reilly is a Partner and Head of Charities at Deloitte and has been actively advising clients for the last 25 years. She is also the Corporate Responsibility leader for the London Audit Practice of Deloitte and is a member of the firm’s Diversity Leadership Team.

Mary graduated from University College London and did a postgraduate course at the London Business School. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and was Chair of the London Development Agency (2004 – 2008), Chair of the CBI London Regional Council (2003 – 2005) and was a Board Member of London 2012, the London Olympic bid committee (2003 – 2005).

## Key Changemaker Tips

- Learn from the experience of others – seek a mentor who has experience in campaigning and influence. What you learn from them will not be found in a text book.
- Work from facts not just emotions.
- Be persistent and don't underestimate the value of small victories.
- Be magnanimous in victory – opponents in one battle might be allies in another.
- Target your message for each specific audience for best results.
- Ask questions – probing can reduce the risk of failure and increase success.
- Decisions with the greatest strategic importance are made by elected officials so develop your relationships accordingly.
- Influencing takes place mainly through informal relationships – think about how you interact over the phone or with people you meet at an event.

## ACEVO Recommended Reading

*Preparing Successful Funding Applications*, 2009

*Impact Briefing: Putting Impact at the Heart of the Tendering Process*, 2008







Chapter 3

# Changemakers on Communication and Interpersonal Skills for Effective Engagement

Rob Williamson  
*CEO, Community Foundation*

John Stokoe  
*Vice-President National Government, BT Global Services*

Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP

The ippr north report *All Inclusive? Third sector involvement in regional and sub-regional policymaking* concluded that there were several aspects of communication and interpersonal skills that could be further developed in the third sector. These include:

- Developing and sustaining professional relationships, importantly ones that are not premised on fund seeking.
- Communicating professionally, concisely and persuasively.



**Rob Williamson**  
*Chief Executive, Community Foundation  
Serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland*

One of my first bosses told me at my induction to start building a professional network of people I could trust and to get to know something of the current and previous relationships of people I engaged with. That early advice, although it sounded alarmingly Machiavellian at the time, has stayed with me. There's no doubt that my successful professional relationships have been built on trust, reciprocity and an eye for people's histories.

Building a professional network has sometimes meant drawing up a list of 'would like to meet' people, but just as often I've called a former colleague and said 'I've moved jobs, can we catch up over coffee?' In my experience, really strong professional relationships are not unlike good personal friendships – they take time, nurturing and need 'currency'. Otherwise, rather like all those old school contacts on social networking websites, professional relationships become merely nostalgic.

Professionally, as with friends, there have been people I've clicked with straight off. They become confidantes, the people you can chew the cud with and go to in a crisis or (just as importantly), when you want to celebrate. But I've also enjoyed the company of a few mavericks and leftfielders – the contacts that make you think again, or differently. (They can exhaust you, too, of course!) Inevitably, some professional relationships have to be with people you wouldn't have as friends – they are the hardest to maintain, but necessary nonetheless.

People tend to collect enemies as well as friends along their professional journey. I'm not saying I haven't, but I think I've mostly avoided professional bust-ups. I guess that's because I try to understand the different demands, priorities and organisational restrictions others operate within, and look for the common ground. When I worked in a policy role in the sector, liaison with local government officials was a crucial bit of my job – and I managed to maintain good relations even when our two organisations disagreed. There's nothing better than demonstrating your integrity and humility, and exercising your political nous and diplomacy in such situations.

When I'm communicating more formally, there's no magic wand: it's all about preparation, preparation, preparation. I'm frequently astonished by people's inability to keep to time when speaking in public – which can only mean that they didn't rehearse. The other big crime is using Powerpoint as a crutch. The best communications course I ever did refused to let us use Powerpoint; instead, the trainers used the mantra of 'you are your own AV'. And not relying on Powerpoint means I'm never that floored if the slides fail to work!

The other thing I try to be aware of is communicating in an internal language. We all laugh at government jargon, but the third sector is just as guilty, and organisations (my own included) slip very easily into their own shorthand, excluding outside audiences and, very often, our own staff teams and Board members. Constant vigilance in this area – and using outside people for a reality check – has definitely helped me to avoid these pitfalls.

Rob became Chief Executive of the Community Foundation Serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland in July 2009. The Foundation is a hub for community philanthropy, enabling effective giving by people and businesses. It is the largest community foundation in the UK, holding an endowment of over £40 million and making grants in the year ending March 2009 totalling £5.2 million.

Rob was previously Acting Chief Executive and, prior to that, Director of Policy and Communications at Northern Rock Foundation. He began his career working with homeless and vulnerable people and went on to development work in urban regeneration. He also spent three years as a policy and strategy officer with Newcastle City Council. He has been a trustee of several national, regional and local charities, including the Association of Charitable Foundations. He is currently a Board member of Live Theatre in Newcastle, and a member of the advisory group for the National Research Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy.



**John Stokoe**  
*Vice-President National Government,  
BT Global Services*

I've found from my years of experience communicating and networking at the heart of government that the key building blocks to establishing sustained and productive professional relationships are clarity and preparation; clarity of purpose, clarity of vision and clarity of communication.

The first step to clarity is to recognise what it is you really want to achieve from a potential relationship and to identify the person within an organisation who has the power to really help you achieve these goals.

Once you have a clearly defined purpose for the relationship it is a matter of knowing how to establish this connection effectively. You should know in advance what you need to communicate, clearly and effectively. This is where preparation is vital; you need to prepare the key message you want to get across, but just as important is gaining an understanding of where the other person is coming from professionally, but also personally. Knowing their background and interests can be an important resource in a first meeting. This understanding means you can tailor your approach to this initial connection, and remembering that any professional relationship is based on give and take, you need to be clear in what you can offer as well as what you can gain.

I find that a helpful way of thinking about this first meeting is to

ask yourself the question: “What would you say if you were in a lift for two minutes with them?”

This forces you to consider how to make an immediate and lasting impression that effectively communicates your core message.

This preparation can really pay off; knowing the little details about a person can make all the difference to that first meeting. Before one particularly important meeting I researched the background of my contact and discovered that we shared remarkably similar histories; using these past experiences as the basis of our first conversation I was able to develop a productive and lasting relationship.

Keeping in touch with contacts through the years as they move careers and sectors can be very rewarding. Someone I met many years ago in Germany as a junior official has since risen to a senior position in the Shadow Cabinet, and I didn't hesitate to pick up the relationship where we left off. It just goes to show that relationships with talented people are always worth holding on to.

While I don't believe the personal skills required in effective networking and communication can be simply taught, there are ways to develop them, and it's important that you aren't too proud to ask for help.

Cross-sector mentoring schemes can be a very effective way to develop these skills; having that access to real world experience can make all the difference to your own professional development. I've personally seen the value of mentoring and job shadowing schemes, where people from totally different areas have been able to learn from each other. In my role as a

mentor I've been able to introduce people to the work of influencing government, and the insight they have gained from seeing first hand how things really work in high level meetings was an invaluable learning experience for them.

I believe that these cross-sector relationships are going to be increasingly important for the third sector in the future as it looks to expand its voice and influence with those in power; nationally and regionally.

Finally my top tips for successful networking and communicating:

- Know what it is you want to talk about.
- Be clear in identifying your desired outcome.
- Do the preparation; research who you are speaking to.
- Be self-confident and just do it.
- Agree on the points you have discussed that need to be followed up, establishing a clear opening for the next meeting.
- If you agree to do something then follow up as soon as you can; this is an important way of maintaining the contact and building up a relationship.

John Stokoe CB CBE is the Managing Director of BT National Government.

A former Major General in the British Army, he joined BT in November 2006 from the Lend Lease Corporation, where he was the Director of Corporate Affairs for the UK, Continental Europe and the Middle East. Since leaving the Army in 1999, he has followed a business career spanning support services, construction and real estate development. He is currently a non-executive director of the Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, Chairman of the Regular Forces Employment Association and non-executive Chairman of Debut Services Limited, a joint venture between Bovis Lend Lease and Babcock Infrastructure Services, the company building and maintaining the new accommodation for single servicemen and women in the British Armed Forces.



Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong MP

Effective communication is critical for leaders of all sorts, within your organisation, between your organisation and others, and with stakeholders, some of which will be users of your service. That means you need methods and approaches which are different - whilst keeping a consistent message! It's a lot to think about and sometimes tough to deliver, and it's an irony that if successfully applied will feel natural and effortless to those receiving your messages.

For me, the basis of all good communication, particularly for leaders in the voluntary sector, is to have something you want to say that really matters. If it is clear that it doesn't matter to you, why should anyone else bother? All the networking opportunities now can mean that unless you are clear about what you want to communicate, you could spend all your time networking and not getting much done. If we think about professional contacts, in my view good leaders will be discerning about who is necessary to have as a professional contact, and who will be really useful. They would be the people I would develop my network around, so that there was challenge, as well as sharing of knowledge and experience.

It is too easy to lose strategic direction in networking, so it is important to keep focused. When I was the senior minister in the Cabinet Office and we took responsibility for Social Exclusion and the Third Sector, the organisations that impressed

were those who came together to put a united, clear case, and who backed that up with exposing ministers to the client group. Children's organisations were particularly effective in that way. When meeting them, they had usually worked out the clear two or three points they wanted to make, in ways that drew on the experience of their different approaches, backed up by research and hard experience. That meant I knew precisely what the priorities were; I knew what the young people would want to talk to me about, and it was clear where useful, focussed visits could take place which would expose me to good practice. That would inevitably affect the department's decisions. The organisations that did not impress were those that came in and whinged about how difficult things were without displaying a clear focus about what they were achieving, or capable of achieving, nor articulating what was needed to develop good practice in a cost- effective way.

The next parliament is going to bring many challenges and opportunities. If the polls are right, then the parliament will be much closer. There are going to be a lot of new members. For well focused voluntary sector agencies, this will offer opportunities to get to newly elected members and persuade them to be your champions. Demonstrating the difference that your organisation makes to their constituents will encourage Members of Parliament to support your work, so make them part of your network. Remember that in a parliament with slim majorities, individual MPs have more influence.

As public expenditure is squeezed, so it becomes even more important that charities are able to present their strategic priorities effectively and develop good professional networks to support priorities. The challenges will be there, but that means that we all have to raise our game. Good luck!

The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong MP is the Labour Member of Parliament for North West Durham.

Before entering parliament, Hilary spent time overseas as a VSO volunteer, teaching at a girls' school in Kenya. Returning to Britain, Hilary turned to social and community work in Southwick, Sunderland and in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne. Building on these experiences, she became a lecturer in Youth and Community Work at Sunderland Polytechnic (now Sunderland University).

It was this background that led Hilary into politics. Hilary has held a number of Cabinet positions in Government including Chief Whip and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Social Exclusion.

In June 2007, Hilary announced her decision to step down from the Government and return to the backbenches after 18 years as a Party spokesperson and Government Minister.

### Key Changemaker Tips

- Build and nurture a professional network. Include those you 'click' with, those who challenge your thinking and those who are most useful to your key priorities.
- Make the most of your communication and networks by always ensuring that what you say matters, otherwise you are wasting time and energy.
- When communicating formally – prepare, prepare, prepare. Rehearse so you get your message across in the time allocated.
- Avoid internal jargon when communicating with externals.
- When presenting to Ministers or MPs, ensure you have developed a clear united case with a few points outlining approaches backed up by research and experience.
- Never complain about things unless you can state what you have achieved, are capable of achieving and can articulate what needs to be done to develop good practice cost effectively.

### ACEVO Recommended Reading

*Win Win: A Guide to Negotiation Strategy and Tactics for Third Sector Leaders*, 2007

*Only Connect: A leader's guide to networking*, 2006

# Acknowledgements

'Meet the Changemakers: Expert Tips for Effective Engagement' publication, accompanying podcasts and DVD have been produced as part of ACEVO's programme on effective regional leadership delivered through Capacitybuilders Leadership and Governance workstream in partnership with NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) and CSC (Community Sector Coalition). The ippr north report *All Inclusive? Third sector involvement in regional and sub-regional policymaking* which came before this publication and highlights the need for development of these leadership skills can be downloaded from [www.ippr.org.uk](http://www.ippr.org.uk)

ACEVO wishes to extend its thanks to all of the contributors to this publication:

Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong MP  
Hugh Biddell  
Gary Buxton  
Ben Cairns  
Dame Suzi Leather  
Sir Bert Massie  
Mary Reilly  
John Stokoe  
Dame Clare Tickell  
Rob Williamson



**ACEVO** is the professional body for third sector chief executives. We connect, develop, support and represent our members, to increase the sector's impact and efficiency.

We promote a modern, enterprising third sector, and call upon organisations to be:

- **Professional and passionate** in achieving change and delivering results
- **Well-led**, with a commitment to professional development, training and diversity
- **Well-governed and accountable**, with robust and fit-for purpose systems to protect independence and enable effective decision-making
- **Enterprising and innovative**, taking a businesslike approach to funding issues and striving for continuous improvement and sustainable development.

For more information, visit [www.acevo.org.uk](http://www.acevo.org.uk)