

**“If you are up against 30 others, the determining factor is often passion**

## David Fielding

Managing partner,  
Attenti



David Fielding specialises in recruiting chief executives and has one salient piece of advice for those looking to land the top role: “If you want to become a chief executive, it’s essential you contribute as a trustee because it gives you vital experience and skills, and helps to position you.”

Trustee opportunities have opened up in recent years as charities strive to embrace people from a wider range of backgrounds. “Charities are beginning to realise that diverse boards make better decisions and acknowledge that they haven’t put enough effort into this,” says Fielding.

Most board roles remain unpaid, but Fielding says charities are “having more conversations” about remuneration.

Fielding’s other top tips for aspiring senior charity executives include getting two or three mentors, fostering good relationships with headhunters and developing a strong social media footprint. “You need to tweet and blog,” he says. “If you are passionate about your organisation, you should be doing this anyway.”

Networking is good, he says, but be discerning. “Don’t be a busy fool,” Fielding says. “Go to any old event and you could be perceived as lightweight.”

To get interviews, candidates should be able to demonstrate achievement, he says. “Past performance is a great indicator of future success, so be brilliant at your job. People will notice you. You cannot bluff your way into jobs these days.”

But to get a job requires more intangible qualities. “If you are up against 30 others the determining factors are often passion and emotional intelligence,” Fielding says. “Softer skills make a difference: the ability to engage and put yourself in other people’s shoes.”

Before the interview, think about all aspects of the person specification and prepare to be probed and picked apart. Panels, says Fielding, usually ask for evidence of people skills, developing a team and strategic thinking. But one standard question often gets overlooked these days. “Panels used to ask ‘what would you do if you got the job?’” he says. “But that’s a stupid question because it’s so easy to answer. They are more likely

now to ask about when you did something successful as evidence of your ability.”

Whatever you do, don’t make the mistake of assuming you’re a shoo-in. “If you do, there will always be somebody who goes that extra mile and puts together a stronger case,” he says. It helps if you can talk to interviewers about life beyond work. “Charities prefer someone with hobbies and passions,” says Fielding. “Frankly, they don’t care what they are as long as they’re something.”

The odds of success aren’t great. For example, adverts for chief executives of large charities can easily generate 50 applications. “They probably end up with 10 to 15 exceptionally good people who could all do the job, so it comes down to choice, fit and feel,” says Fielding.

He is less bullish about the market than the other headhunters. Austerity and Brexit, he says, have bred circumspection. “People are less likely to move and boards are more cautious about hiring,” he says. But if you’re great at your job, and do your homework, opportunities do exist, he adds.

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