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## **HILARY'S HANDY GUIDES**

**TWELVE TOP TIPS TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH CHANGE**

**HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE GOOD?**

**TEN TRUTHS I WISH I'D KNOWN  
BEFORE I STARTED RUNNING A MUSEUM**

and

**WHAT IS NEEDED TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL TRUST?**

***a checklist for local authorities***

## HILARY'S HANDY GUIDES:

### TWELVE TOP TIPS TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH CHANGE

- 1. Change takes time.** Change is not a project, it is not one moment and it isn't fast. It is a process to achieve your goal, not one event. Change needs a holistic approach as it is about the museum as a whole entity. You can't rush it and complete cultural change for a whole organisation takes a long time. Have patience and stay focused.
- 2. Change is everybody's job.** So involve everyone in both planning and implementing the change. This is not solely the job of the director and Board. Use representatives from each part of the museum as an Implementation Group to ensure a variety of voices and viewpoints can create the change for a sustainable organisation.
- 3. Find your *why?*, your common purpose.** Once you have a shared vision, everyone will understand what the change is about and why the museum exists, so a shared understanding of change will assist your cause. Clarity of purpose is needed by all museums but most concentrate on the *what?* and the *how?* and never establish their *why?* So start with *why?* and the rest will fall into place. [ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action).
- 4. Communicate with Everyone.** Consider how you should communicate in the coming weeks. Staff/volunteers who do not work full time Monday to Friday may not be able to attend briefings/staff discussions and can quickly feel "out of it" and ignored. In these vacuums, rumours will fill the space and risk destabilising your plans. Consider introducing new methods of communication and/or a WhatsApp group. Above all, ensure that your communications strategy is inclusive and effective but accessible and appropriate for everyone.  
**Communicate, communicate, communicate!**
- 5. Test things.** Pilot projects can save you from disaster later on so try things on a smaller scale and then tweak your plans accordingly. One small aspect of the change could be piloted. Trying things out without a change sword of Damocles hanging over staff/volunteers may be a true test of how effective something may be during the real change process.
- 6. Small changes add up.** It doesn't need to be about the grand gesture, the expensive re-displays. A series of small changes are easier to implement and less scary for staff. And they will still contribute to your change process. If you can find a **quick win**, or a series of quick wins, then it will help at least some of the staff/volunteers to buy into the bigger picture, but also progress the change programme too.
- 7. Don't forget the day job.** But don't let it distract you or waylay your staff. It's not an excuse to delay or ignore the change so ensure it continues, but not takes over.

8. **Be visible as the leader.** Management by Walking About becomes even more important in times of stress as people need to see their leader. Staff feel you're more approachable if they are used to seeing you in the public areas.
9. **Make time for people,** their worries, their fear and their questions.
10. **Bring in a Critical Friend.** A critical friend can ask provocative questions, or bring a question into the open that others are avoiding, in addition to ensuring that everyone's opinion or concerns are heard and given value. Some leaders see external voices as a threat. If you do, then your organisation is not encouraging an open and honest exchange of views so your change journey may be compromised as a result, because difficult problems are not being addressed.
11. **Asking for help is not a sign of failure.** Use your friends, personal networks and use as many tools as you can find to inform your decisions. Learn from the change journey of others. As a sector we are very supportive, so you don't need to re-invent the wheel (but do buy our book!)
12. **And if you're a leader, don't forget to breathe.....** The Age of the Heroic Leader is past. You need to look after yourself if you are the leader, so you can not only deliver the change but look after your staff/volunteers too.

If you would like more on the subject of Change look out for *Managing Change in Museums and Galleries – a practical guide* by Piotr Bienkowski and Hilary McGowan, publication spring 2021.

## HILARY'S HANDY GUIDES:

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE GOOD?

If you are an independent museum, how do you know if you're good at what you do? You may be Accredited, have a VAQAS award or a great rating on TripAdvisor, but you really need to ensure you have all 7 of these key elements if you are to be successful. If you lack any of them, draw up an action plan to help you to develop what is missing. Or better still, book one of my workshops to help you do so.

#### What is needed to be a successful independent museum?

- **create a culture of positive thinking with a clear sense of purpose:** what do you do? what do you stand for and why? what are your values? what is your USP? You must all believe in the organisation or it won't succeed. Have you re-defined yourself or adapted to the 21<sup>st</sup> century? create a *how can we do this?* attitude, in a supportive atmosphere where skills and knowledge can be shared with honesty. Do you all know your mission statement: Trustees, staff, volunteers?
- **leadership:** keep a clear strategic focus about priorities, prevent the day-to-day details from eating into your time. Your role – as chairman, director, manager – is to inspire hope for a better future
- **effective governance:** make your governing body as strong as possible to lead you, support your strategic direction and ensure a succession plan prevents stagnation
- **a sustainable business model:** do you have people with the right attitude to help you ensure a business-like approach remains (or becomes) the culture of the organisation? Do you have funding to change the culture if you need to do so (e.g. an AIM Hallmarks Grant)? Are you honest about your ability to earn additional income? Can you reduce your dependency on public funding?
- **connect to your community:** help them find their roots or sense of belonging; encourage active championing by your users. Tourists won't visit if the locals don't recommend you, or know where you are. Why should the public support you?
- **digital profile:** actively use all forms of social media and the internet; they're now more important than leaflets for audiences
- **partners:** everyone needs partners. All funders expect you to be working in partnership with other museums and cultural organisations. There may be unlikely external partners you have not as yet considered, so think creatively and across subject boundaries: Age UK and MIND are charities with whom museums have worked; they were new to heritage five years ago. If you are ex-local authority (or considering being), you should start to create a grown up relationship with them so they see you as a partner to help to deliver their corporate objectives, not as a drain on scarce resources.

## **HILARY'S HANDY GUIDES: TEN TRUTHS I WISH I'D KNOWN BEFORE I STARTED RUNNING A MUSEUM**

- 1.** Leadership is vital so make time to be strategic; it is too easy to get swallowed up by the day-to-day work which should be the responsibility of your staff. Details may feel safe but they are not the preserve of leaders. So lead, not do; inspire, not tell.
- 2.** Be visible as you cannot be seen too often. So spend time talking/listening to people, especially FoH staff/volunteers, and practise MBWA – Management By Walking About.
- 3.** Don't be afraid to hire staff better than you; don't worry about not being able to control them as they should be a vital catalyst in your change programme. These people may be disruptors and innovators but they will help make the organisation more resilient, even if they create an upheaval; that may be necessary.
- 4.** You should never shy away from praising a job well done, saying "thank you", or from telling someone the painful truth about their performance or behaviour. Whether praising or telling off, keep it short and simple, then shut up. Less is more in these situations.
- 5.** Morale is always low so don't worry when someone says this. Good leadership will prevent it becoming an endemic problem. Leading staff/volunteers day in, day out, is the challenge of leadership. Leading them through the low points is perhaps what you expect as a leader but leading them through and beyond a major success is a true test of leadership.
- 6.** Always rely on your instincts to ensure you don't get pushed around. Stand up for what you know to be true and right for your organisation, and for you. You will also earn respect as you continue to be seen to have made the right decisions. If you feel you don't have strong, reliable instincts, listen more carefully to yourself so you can develop them.
- 7.** You will need to cultivate your own mantras to aid decisive decision making: you cannot be seen to be vacillating. So when in doubt you can ask yourself, for example: "*What would Maggie Appleton/Tony Butler/Diane Lees/Matthew Tanner do?*" And while you're thinking about this, ask your member of staff "*If I wasn't here to ask, what would you do?*" Then ask them open questions so they can come to their own decisions. These are powerful developmental tools to use as they help anyone to improve their analysis of a problem and their decision-making, so growing as a result.
- 8.** Remember that staff/volunteers will never forget anything you say to them, even years later!
- 9.** MCC Syndrome: the Members in the Pavilion always think they could lead England more effectively than the Captain out on the cricket field, so accept that staff will think this too and consequently be a real challenge to manage. If they are passionate about their work or the organisation's mission, if they are intelligent and experienced, so they will think they can do your job better than you. Accept this and get on with your real job.
- 10.** Leadership again – it's that vital. Your role as a leader is to inspire hope for a better future.

This is an edited version of Chapter 15 of "Fit for Purpose Leadership #1" published with my colleagues in Leadership Gigs (ISBN 978-0-9956051-9-0)

## HILARY'S HANDY GUIDES:

### WHAT IS NEEDED TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL TRUST?

If you are in local government and are contemplating moving to an independent organisation – whether to a new one or into an existing one – you should ideally have the following 7 key elements in place before you make the decision to do so (or be in a position to know that they will all be in place before your independence becomes a reality). In an ideal world you need between 18 months to 2 years to develop a trust\* properly. Also bear in mind the speed at which local government moves.

#### What is needed to create a successful trust?

- **political will** to support the idea or it will not succeed. You also need support from the Council's senior management, including your own line manager and heads of service in key areas such as finance, not just from the politicians
- **a clear sense of purpose:** what will you do? what will be your values? what will be your USP? what can you do and what should you do?
- **belief:** you must all believe that it will work as it will need all of you in order to succeed. There is a real danger of sabotage unless you all buy into it
- **determination:** many will try to distract you or derail you, if only from indifference. Your day-to-day job also needs to be done in addition to this
- **good leadership:** you will need champions. Within the Council (see first bullet point), within the staff (this will mean you), and/or from your first Chairman or the interim Chairman of the Shadow Board, if you have one
- **finance:** this has to be right especially as your parent authority will be driven primarily by the apparent savings. Key is your core funding, also the freedom to operate as you wish, to raise your own money and buy in professional services from wherever you want, i.e. not the local authority
- **partners:** you need them as you can't do it alone. These should include the local authority, and could include other cultural organisations in your area, and any remaining arts services still in the local authority, e.g. the library service, or there may be unlikely partners you have not as yet considered

\* for the purposes of this Handy Guide, the word "trust" is used to denote the new independent organisation, irrespective of whether it is a charitable trust or not