

## **Engaging the board**

A risk taking approach to enterprise,  
I think, goes hand in hand  
with a risk taking approach to participation.

I think we've found real strong links across that.

What I wanted to ask you about  
was your relationship with your board  
and how you've taken your board on that journey.

Which is a risk taking exercise for a board.

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for asking that.

So, somebody once told me,

"A good crisis is a terrible thing to waste."

Definitely, the fact that I came into  
the museum at a time that it was literally  
about to close its doors  
created some opportunities for change  
in lots of different ways.

One of the greatest gifts I got from board members,  
which I didn't identify that way at the time,  
when I came there were many people who said...

I had a lot of one-on-one meetings  
with board members that went like this:

They said, "We're so glad you're here  
and so excited about what you're going to do,  
I'm very tired, it's time for me to  
resign from the board."

There was a lot of change on the board very quickly.

At the time that felt very stressful for me  
but it turned out to make a lot of sense.  
Here were people who had been working  
so hard to hold the museum together  
through crisis and they were  
not going to be the people  
who could take it to a growth mode.  
They were not gonna be the people  
who were gonna have energy to raise money  
and take it to the next level.  
So it was wonderful in a lot of ways,  
they gave the museum a gift by opting out.  
As we recruited new board members  
we really focused on pitching the museum  
from this community's perspective.  
And so, the example I always use is a food bank.  
I say, "Look if you're on the board  
of the Second Harvest food bank  
you don't expect to be in line and get soup."  
Similarly, if you're on the board of the museum  
you are not the prototypical museum visitor.  
It is not for you exclusively,  
you are helping make it available for everyone.  
And so, we use that as a litmus test.  
We still recruit people who have  
connection to our content,  
who care about museums.

But we really make sure they're seeing it in this different way.

I think, I see, especially this happening

in performing arts organisations,

where you'll have something like a symphony board.

Where those board members feel like

anything that detracts from their perfect experience,

or in the gallery, you know if there's some Post-It's in the

gallery and it ruined the exhibition.

So I think that finding ways that

board members get past that

to open up those questions about:

'Who are we for?' and

'What are they looking for?'

and 'How do we see ourselves in context?'

It's a different kind of power

to be the benevolent, behind the

scenes kind of collaborators.

But, it's a power that we're finding,

at least that our board, is welcoming

and also some of that quick change obviously

really helped it along in terms of what happened.

I also say any board that does not have strict term limits

and basics of those kinds of things, gotta get that in place.

Especially most places that aren't using that

they have it in their by-laws somewhere.

Boy, is it easy to pull out that

by-laws and say, 'Hey let's professionalise,

let's look at how we can take this on a little bit.'

I will say that unlike most, many museums  
in the US, especially art museums,  
as much as 50% of their giving comes from their board.

We are not that way at all.

Our board are all small donors to the museum.

They all have to be donors but  
they are at a small level.

And I actually like it that way  
because I feel like it means they don't feel...  
they already have a controlling voice  
from a governance perspective.

I don't also want them to feel  
like they are bankrolling  
the museum and that they own it.