#TrustLeaders

Building togetherness: Academy trusts and their local communities

FEATURING

Frank Norris: Community Action with Schools Leading the Way

Focus Trust: Establishing Community Champions in Every Academy

CEO in Conversation: Rebecca Meredith, CBE.
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#TrustLeaders
Introduction

Schools and Academy Trusts, as organisations that are absolutely central within their local community, have always played an important role; but this role will no doubt become even more key in the coming weeks and months ahead.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to this magazine. We hope in the pages ahead you will find many opportunities to learn from other leaders, and that their approaches and actions may bring you new insight and inspiration concerning how your Trust can deepen its connection with your local communities moving forward.

Finally, I wish each and every one of you all the best during this challenging time, and hope that come the next edition of our #TrustLeaders magazine, things will be returning to normality again.

Warm regards,

Rachael Gacs
Marketing and Resources Manager, Forum Strategy

Welcome

The focus of this edition of our #TrustLeaders magazine is about deepening the connections between Academy Trusts and their local communities.

While most of this magazine was written before the seriousness of the current situation regarding Co-VID19 became fully apparent, we believe that the articles ahead will very much resonate with the growing consensus that it is vital to look out for one another in our communities.

Visit our new website at: www.forumstrategy.org

#TrustLeaders
I am delighted to be reaching out to you as Forum Strategy’s new National CEO Network Director.

**Learning from Sir Steve Lancashire**

On the first day in my new role, I was honoured to interview Sir Steve Lancashire, REAch2 CEO, who leads our Being The CEO programme. The in-depth, honest, insightful interview gives a lot of food for thought. Constancy, ambition, integrity and flexibility are key for Being The CEO, according to Steve. I hope that you were able to view it.

One area he was adamant about was the value of learning with others and being the Chief Talent Officer and Culture Maker. He articulated the value for himself and his organisation about networking. He shared what networking actually means in practical terms and the positive impact that it has had on his work. He encourages all CEOs to, “Build your networks.”

**Learning from you**

I am keen to learn about what networking opportunities are valuable for you. My intention is to build on the networking that is already available through our six established #TrustLeaders Networks. Having worked at the National College for 15 years, I am committed to evidenced based learning and professional generosity. I want to develop time effective ways for you to be able to learn, reflect, support and share in confidence with your CEO colleagues.

**Learning from within education**

In Michael Pain’s book Being The CEO, chapter 8 concentrates on fostering key relationships, building social and professional capital. He quotes Gandhi, “Leadership was once about muscles, now it’s about getting along with people.”

Michael explores the role of professional capital in CEO development on page 162. He highlights two important ways of growing this, through networking and having a mentor. Both can provide CEOs with much needed support and solace.
In our six regional networks there are a number of characteristics that are key –

- The network must provide a **safe haven**, where CEO’s can express themselves freely and openly in a confidential environment

- The network must provide a **strategic focal point** for review and discussion that enables all those involved to participate and gain value

- **Cross sector networks** are far more valuable than those that are confined to a single industry. For this reason, we aim to draw in colleagues from the private, public and third sector.

If you haven’t been actively involved in your local network yet, I would encourage you to do so. The feedback from those who have is highly positive and the fact they return is evidence of the impact. For more information see here.

**Learning from outside education**

As Harvard Business School professor Francesca Gino has shown, professionals can think of networking as ‘dirty’. When we reframe the activity as a way of making interesting intelligent like-minded friends for the long-term, it becomes far more appealing.

Networking doesn’t have to be self-serving, states Rosabeth Moss Kanter in The Harvard Business review (March 06, 2020). ‘Successful leaders who shift their attention to tackling big, societal problems can be overwhelmed by how little control they actually have. But, by using network-building and collaboration skills, they can navigate a path to successful innovation and transformational change.’ If CEOs are to gain real value from their networks, the research encourages them to:

- **Show up.** Presence is powerful. Being on the scene provides a first-hand look at problems. New possibilities and new relationships might emerge.

- **Knock on many doors.** Small asks of many people can prove helpful.

- **Help your way into inner circles.** By helping others with their agendas, you can further our own.

https://hbr.org/2020/03/networking-doesnt-have-to-be-self-serving

**Learning together**

As academy trust CEOs you can utilise Forum Strategy to enrich the value of your networking and ensure that it has a positive impact on your teams and students’ lives.

I will explore with you, share good practice and opportunities regarding effective networking. We have much to learn from current educational practice and also from business and the third sector. Please do share any opportunities you have valued, whether they be speakers, blogs, resources, research, books or social media. We can then ‘re-share’.

Your time is valuable, and we will maximise the time that you carve out to be part of your #TrustLeaders Network.
Since 2016, the vision of Focus-Trust has been to have, “great academies at the heart of our communities”. Here, Helen Rowland, CEO of Focus, explains how the Trust’s commitment to ensuring each academy has its own ‘Community Champion’, is already having a significant impact, and helping the trust to realise its vision.

**Making the Decision**

In September 2019, my board and I made the decision that one of my appraisal objectives would be to establish Community Champions in each school across our Trust, demonstrating our continued commitment to having great academies at the heart of our communities, and to move this vision forward at a Trust-wide level. Our plan was that each Community Champion would have, or at least acquire, a deeper understanding of the challenges in their school’s local community. Stemming from this understanding, their role would be to instigate and oversee projects which would help their community respond to its own specific challenges, and, in doing so, have a positive impact on pupils, parents, and others in the local community. If we can address some of the challenges and make the most of the potential in our communities, that can only help us to ensure children are growing up in safe, caring and – as far as possible - inspiring environments. Our shared values are ‘Fair, Care, Share and Dare’ so as a trust we must play a key role in facilitating that.

**Designing the Role, and Recruiting**

I enlisted the help of the trust’s Procurement Lead Allison Simpson, to help make this happen. I knew this would be a big job, and I was very aware that Allison had great connections with businesses, charities, and other organisations within our local communities. We had to make the most of that!

Together we created a flyer advertising the voluntary role of Community Champion, and what it would entail, and sent a copy to the principal of each of our schools to distribute in November 2019.
The flyer outlined that we required a special person in each academy who was passionate about making a difference to their local community, and who wanted to work as part of a team to benefit their academy’s children, families, local community, and the wider Trust community also. We decided that the role should be aimed at our support staff, such as teaching assistants, site managers, pastoral and behaviour leads, family support workers, cleaners, and others – those people who are often ‘under the skin’ of what’s happening in our communities and provide such a valuable link to them. Ideally, we also wanted Community Champions who lived within the local community of the school they would be representing. Applicants had to fill in one side of A4, explaining why they were interested in becoming a Community Champion, and what they felt they could bring to the role.

Once we had chosen our Community Champions, we sent out a questionnaire to each of them, which entailed some research on their part. It included questions such as, ‘what are the key challenges of your local community?’, ‘what is the school already doing to address these challenges?’, and ‘what ideas do you have for future work within the community?’ The questionnaire provided such valuable intelligence and insight for our schools and the trust itself. It not only helped our volunteers to gather important information to bring to the first Community Champions meeting, it was also an opportunity for them to demonstrate their commitment to the role, and reassured us that we had chosen the right people!

The Community Champion Forum
We brought together our Community Champions for the first time in early February this year.

Allison and I led the forum, and began by sharing the purpose of the forum, and the expectations of their role as Community Champions. It was important that, as CEO, I demonstrated my
commitment to the initiative from the beginning, as it is integral to what we are trying to achieve as a trust.

We explained that their role would be key in driving forward our vision, and that their commitment would enable them to take a lead in continuing to improve our Trust and continuing to make our vision a reality.

It was great to see the Community Champions get to know one another, and each person fed back on the main challenges currently being faced within the local community of each of their academies. This highlighted for everybody the diversity of the communities, and the breadth of challenges within those different communities, all being served by our Trust. It also highlighted some of the common challenges too. The Champions also outlined what was currently being done within their academy to help their local community, and what they could do to improve on this provision moving forward. It was interesting to see what support had already been received from local and national businesses and what we could possibly enlist going forwards.

The group were able to help and learn from another, and each Champion was supported in producing an ‘action plan’ to take back to their school, which focussed on one particular issue within the local community.

The enthusiasm and passion in the room was palpable. Examples of projects outlined in action plans included; ensuring that there was a defibrillator in every school, which could be used by the local community; looking at how school buildings could be used during evenings/weekends, or outside of term time, for the benefit of the community; undertaking an audit of local community groups, and then raising awareness of these groups and signposting them to parents; and establishing links with local supermarkets to support projects in school which help the local community, such as setting up food banks.

Allison and myself kept a copy of each action plan, and I contacted the principal of each school, asking them to set a meeting with their Community Champion to discuss the action plan and how it would be implemented.
ForumStrategy

Our next Community Champion forum is set for May, during which each action plan, and the progress made so far, will be reviewed, and next steps will be discussed and put into place.

The Impact so Far
We have already seen notable developments taking place across the Trust. One of our academies delivered home-made Christmas cards to homes in their local community, which included an invite to a community event taking place within the school. Another academy is using one of its buildings to host community groups in the evenings; after a meeting with parents about what groups the building could host, it is now used by the local community for classes such as yoga, ‘knit and natter’, a car maintenance group, and DIY. Other examples of developments so far include a litter picking initiative, an initiative to encourage people to pick up after their dogs, to help eradicate the problem of dog dirt in the local area and establishing a food bank in school.

Measuring Impact, Moving Forward
Getting our Community Champions to fill in the initial questionnaire was key for creating a baseline upon which we can monitor impact and progress over time. From this point on there will be biannual meetings with our Community Champions each year, during which they will feedback on what action has taken place, what impact these actions have had on the local community so far, and what the next steps will be moving forward. Each action plan review will also be put into a written document, which Allison and myself will keep a copy of, as well as the principal of each academy. This will ensure that progress, and next steps, are continually reflected upon.

Conclusion
The decision to appoint Community Champions at Focus Trust is intrinsically linked to our Trust’s commitment to have great academies that provide a positive presence at the heart of our communities, and that make a real difference within our local communities. It has also encouraged a renewed commitment to fulfil our vision at every level within our Trust, especially as our approach to appointing Community Champions has provided a distributed leadership model when it comes to working with, and supporting, our local communities.

It is still early days, but there is no doubt that our Community Champions are already becoming hugely influential within our academies, our local communities, and across our Trust as a whole. They are genuinely passionate about making a difference to their local communities, and I am very excited to see what they will accomplish over the coming years. I am sure that their impact will be very powerful indeed.

Focus-Trust is a charitable Multi-Academy Trust, established in 2012. The Trust is made up of 15 primary academies based across Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the North West of England with over 6,000 children and 1,000 staff.
Frank Norris became CEO of the Co-op Academies Trust in 2014. He was previously the Education Director of the Trust. During his five years in charge, the Trust grew from just six academies to 23, and has gained an impressive track record of turning struggling schools around. Frank retired last Summer. Here he discusses the importance of community action, with schools and trusts leading the way.

The Co-op has a long history of community action. It goes back to the meetings held by 28 men at The Weavers Pub in Rochdale during 1844 when they considered what they needed to do to improve the lives of people living in their hometown, Rochdale. After collecting a pound from each of the men they had enough cash to walk into Manchester to buy pure wholesome food that was weighed and measured accurately. Any surplus was to be shared fairly with those who shopped with them. Their idea, unlike hundreds of previous ventures across the years, was a great success and it was the start of a worldwide revolution, called co-operation.

The Rochdale Pioneers believed that when people worked together, they were stronger and that principles were more valuable than profits. A key element of their business was a strong commitment to education because they realised that this was a direct way to address disadvantage and poverty. Their first shop at Toad Lane had space upstairs so reading classes were organised so that members could benefit.

All future shops had similar reading spaces and within a couple of decades the Co-op was a deeply embedded aspect of local community retail and social activities. Its reach stretched to all corners of the globe. A worldwide movement had been formed.

I realised there was much to do to embed the Co-op’s ambition to support the wider school community at each academy.

Many Co-op members can still recall their parents’ ‘divvie’ number and have a strong affection for the business. Its history, like any other business that has survived over 175 years, has had its ups and downs but it has always been committed to education. This explains why the Co-op accepted the invitation made by Ed Balls when he was Secretary of State for Education in the Blair government, to sponsor two secondary academies in north Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent respectively. In the case of the Manchester school it had never been judged ‘Good’ by Ofsted in its entire history and both served very challenging economic and social areas.

The Trust has grown considerably since then and now stands at 25 academies located across the M62 corridor from Birkenhead in the west to Leeds in the east and down the M6 to Stoke-on-Trent.
Forum Strategy

Once I had given myself time to get to know the Co-op and its academies after being appointed CEO of the Co-op Academies Trust in 2013, I began to consider how best to connect the academies’ communities with social action activities driven by the Co-op. I thought the best people to do this were the headteachers and Principals of the academies. How wrong I was! Many senior leaders willingly accepted the invitation to get involved but others were more cautious; they were largely concerned about staff workload especially as many were not Ofsted ‘Good’. I realised there was much to do to embed the Co-op’s ambition to support the wider school community at each academy.

I discussed the problem with other colleagues in the Trust and we agreed to try and focus more on less senior staff who had shown a strong commitment being a strong co-operator. It was agreed to use central resources to enable each academy to appoint a Co-operative Co-ordinator or Co-Co for short. This role was to be a bridge between the sponsor and the academy on all matters relating to wider community engagement and specific projects such as Fairtrade Fortnight and Co-operative Fortnight each year. The responsibility for appointing these colleagues rested with the academies and they had to commit to giving time to the colleague to undertake the duties. The job specification was agreed centrally and it was determined that the Co-Cos would meet face to face at least three times a year. A colleague from within an academy was persuaded to coordinate the work of all Co-Cos, so, believe it or not, a Co-Co-Co, was appointed, initially for the first year.

We knew what we wanted… to see our academies in their communities, promoting traditional co-operative values and taking responsibility for driving improvement and opportunity in their community.

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I didn’t really know what it was going to look like, but we knew what we wanted to see our academies in their communities, promoting traditional co-operative values and taking responsibility for driving improvement and opportunity in their community. Four years after the first appointments we now have 25 academies and at least one Co-Co in each academy, and in some cases more than one. Their work ranges from capitalising on the many opportunities the Co-op provides for its academies including promoting Fairtrade events and highlighting the benefits of co-operation.

All Co-Cos are free to develop the role in the way that suits their academy and their community. While some have increased connections with vulnerable groups in their community, such as regular visits to local care homes or developing local unloved spaces within their community others have developed strong links with major co-operative businesses.

Arla, the large dairy business (the third largest co-operative retail business in the country) bring an inflatable cow shed to each of the primary academies. They spend the day talking to children about milk production and how this affects the different types of milk that are available. It’s incredible to see that most children just drink the milk their parents put on the table, without really knowing the difference.

We started to realise that the Co-Cos were becoming real co-ordinators. They were setting up the contacts and opportunities and the staff were developing them further. From the Arla Cow Shed we had children visiting farms to learn about co-operatives and sustainability and we have developed ‘Facetime a Farmer’ where a class video call a farmer whilst he’s out on his farm.

The Co-Cos are helping us to develop children and young people who are thoughtful and aware of their local community and have the confidence to take on leadership roles in their communities and hopefully larger social issues in the future.

Many of the Co-Cos now take students to participate in events such as the Co-op’s AGM in central Manchester where they explain their work to the Co-op’s members to support regional arts’ project or city Pride events. Co-op Academy Priesthorpe, for example, renovated an overgrown Commonwealth war grave and in 2019 the first remembrance ceremony was held there with students in attendance.

All academies are focusing on larger global issues like climate change and reducing the use of single-use plastics - all via the Co-op Coordinator. In addition, Co-Cos are contributing strongly to the development of a co-operative theme for all year groups as the Trust refreshes its curriculum plan.

The Co-Cos are helping us to develop children and young people who are thoughtful and aware of their local community and have the confidence to take on leadership roles in their communities and hopefully larger social issues in the future. The creation of the Co-Co role is without a doubt one of my proudest achievements as CEO.
Chief Executive Officer

Plantsbrook Learning Trust (PLT), Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

Start date: Post available from July 2020
Contract type: Full Time, Part Time also considered
Salary: Attractive remuneration package for a suitably qualified and experienced candidate.

Our current Executive Head is retiring at the end of the Academic year and the Trustees of PLT are seeking to appoint an inspirational and innovative leader as Chief Executive Officer to lead our Trust through its next exciting stage of development.

PLT was formed in 2014 when Town Junior joined Plantsbrook School in a Trust. The two schools are on adjacent sites and this has facilitated close collaboration. We have a strong sense of community, with a very clear collective ambition to improve the lives for all our children and we work in close partnership with local schools. For a number of years we have been strategic partners in the National Forest Teaching School Alliance, which operates around North Birmingham and Staffordshire. Town Junior is also a member of the Learning Trust for Excellence.

We have high aspirations for our young people and we use our combined and collaborative strengths to support them and each other to be successful. On the back of our upward trend in children’s outcomes, building on our successes to date and the strengths of our teams, we want the Trust to continue to improve and further grow within our region into a cohesive family of schools, sharing good practice and able to support the improvement journey of member schools.

As CEO you will exemplify the inclusive values and ethos of PLT and its commitment to delivering excellent teaching, exceptional care and outstanding performance, based on collective collaboration. You will have the determination and vision needed to lead the schools, representing the Trust’s values and vision, deepening effective collaboration between schools and leading an inspirational development strategy for PLT.

Applicants for the post will be able to evidence experience of operating at a senior executive level within a MAT environment. You will have had experience of leading growth, reporting to Trustees/Governors and be able to demonstrate sound financial management skills; this will be combined with the ability to build collaborative and strategic partnerships, improve standards and maximise the future opportunities available to the Trust.

As a highly skilled communicator with excellent interpersonal skills, you will have the ability to engage credibly and successfully build, lead and further develop key relationships. The appointed candidate will bring the drive, inspiration and commitment to lead the fresh vision for the Trust and its stakeholders.

This is a remarkable opportunity for a highly motivated individual to join the Trust at a very exciting time in its development.

For an informal and confidential discussion about this unique opportunity please call our HR Manager, Gina on 0121 362 7310 ext *2012 or email g.wosket@plantsbrookschool.co.uk

How to Apply:
If you are enthused by this superb leadership opportunity and want to be part of the next stage of our strategic development, we’d love to hear from you.

For further details and application form visit our website
https://plantsbrookschool.co.uk/staff-vacancies-plantsbrook/

Closing date: 12 noon, Wednesday 1 April 2020 Interviews: Week commencing 20 April 2020

Plantsbrook Learning Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Please note successful candidates for all Plantsbrook Learning Trust vacancies will be requested to apply for Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service, although a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining the position.
Rebecca Meredith CBE, is the CEO of Transform Trust, a Trust made up of 19 schools across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. After several years of being in the CEO role, here she shares her reflections on her journey so far.

You’ve been the CEO of a growing Trust for a number of years now, what are your main reflections on the role?
When I first became CEO of Transform Trust, I was still an Executive Head for three days a week, over three different schools, and Chief Executive for the other two. In the early days of the role, I still saw myself as an Executive Headteacher who was taking on more responsibility. However, in time I realised that this approach was not sustainable; I was spreading myself too thinly, and therefore not making enough impact where it was needed most. I soon learned that the job of Chief Executive is very different to that of Executive Head, and I made the decision to focus solely on the role of Chief Executive in order to be most effective.

I soon learned that the job of Chief Executive is very different to that of Executive Head

Another important lesson I have learned so far from being the CEO of an Academy Trust is to never forget to keep the children at the centre of every decision you make. As you become further removed from the classroom in the role, it is important to remember the reason you decided to work in education in the first place, and that is, of course, the children. One of my key mantras is – ‘whatever decision we make, what impact will this have on the children?’ I also make sure to regularly go back to my ‘why’, and I try to consistently role model this approach to everyone in the Trust.

What have been the key strategies that have helped your Trust to grow successfully and sustainably?
Employing a Chief Finance Officer was very important. Our CFO is in charge of our business plans, and ensures that we do not take on any new schools until we are financially ready. The CFO also ensures that when we do take on a new school, we are completely prepared to do so.

Whilst we have grown as a Trust over the years, we have always grown in a measured way. All schools who are interested in joining our Trust have to become a part of our teaching school for a time first.

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In this way, we are able to learn if their values, ethos and culture will fit with our own - or otherwise give them time to develop so that their values and ethos come to fit with our own - before they become a part of the Trust.

As a CEO, your team is everything, what does your team look like and how do they complement your leadership?
It has been of paramount importance to get the right executive team in place, and a Teaching School Director was already in position. The appointment of CFO was made because I knew as CEO I had a huge amount of accountability for the financial situation of the Trust, so it was vital to appoint an expert. As the Trust grew, I also decided to appoint a Chief Operating Officer, to oversee key areas such as governance and safeguarding, and an HR director to help look after our staff across the Trust.

Each member of our executive team is an expert in their own field. They complement my leadership because they share the values of the Trust, and also my values as a leader. Each one of us has the children within our Trust as our first priority, always.

How is the Trust ensuring it stays at the heart of its communities?
We are currently looking at our community engagement strategy, talking to our schools about who they are engaging with in the community, and finding out who are the lead representatives that can be worked with, at both a school-wide level and a Trust-wide level. As a Trust which now has a large number of schools (19 altogether), we are also developing a partnership model, where between four and six schools who are geographically close to one another are forming their own partnerships, which will sit in the wider community of the Trust. This is because we want to ensure that we keep the local knowledge of our schools central as our Trust expands.

The school partnerships will be able to do community research work, and take action from this research which is truly meaningful in their local area.

Our partnership model should be of real benefit for the Trust because it will co-ordinate the schools in local geographical areas as a family. As a result, the school partnerships will be able to do community research work, and take action from this research which is truly meaningful in their local area. We are also currently developing ‘partnership leads’ who will oversee each of the partnerships of schools, and this is a great opportunity for many of our headteachers to take the next step in their career, as the role will fall somewhere between that of a headteacher and a CEO.

What are the key challenges facing your communities and how is your Trust staying ahead and responding to these?
A key challenge facing our communities is attendance, and linked to this is the need to raise aspiration, and increase the value placed on education in our communities. We have been investigating the causes of the challenge we face with attendance for a while, and we have also been making a real effort to put a positive message across throughout the Trust about the value of education, to both our pupils and parents.

We have also put an emphasis on sharing best practice in this area, and we have introduced breakfast clubs, attendance officers, and other measures, in order to try to tackle this challenge. One of the things we’re now looking into is working alongside a behaviour analyst, and creating an app to help us with attendance. We are considering how we can change current behaviours, not just through rewards and sanctions, but through changing attitudes and habits. We are using research from beyond the
education sector, about how medical services have successfully changed the behaviours of people who forget to take their medication, and we are looking at whether similar strategies could be used to improve attendance.

**What do you see as the big opportunities and challenges for the sector in the next year or two?**
One of the biggest challenges will probably be weathering the amount of policy change that is likely to come our way in the coming months and years, and navigating the logistics of those changes, whilst still keeping our children at the centre of every decision we make.

The biggest opportunity I think will come through Trusts working together more, and I think we need to embrace that opportunity. As Trusts we can use our own areas of strength and expertise to support one another, and also receive support from other Trusts in the areas where we need to improve.

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I am personally a big believer in looking at challenges as opportunities to do things differently. For example, schools are all facing a huge challenge at the moment in terms of funding, but there are also opportunities out there to find various funding which is available, through resources such as Forum Strategy’s Funding Grants briefings. As CEOs, we need to be as positive and proactive as we possibly can in the face of challenges.

**What advice do you have for someone who is new to the CEO role?**
Ask to shadow someone who is already an established CEO for a period of time, and also find out if any other CEOs have resources that they can share with you, as there is no need to re-invent the wheel in every instance.

Another key piece of advice I would give to new CEOs is that you can’t overcommunicate. Just because you think you’ve said something once, you must keep going back and re-iterating and communicating, with all staff and stakeholders, so that the message you are trying to get across reaches everyone. Tied in with this is visibility. Ensure that you visit all the schools within your Trust regularly, speak with staff, and find opportunities to be involved in school events whenever you can.

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I would definitely recommend becoming part of a network of CEOs in your area. You can do this by joining one of Forum Strategy’s Trust Leaders networks. In this context, you will meet other CEO’s who you can discuss issues and ideas with, and who you can learn from.

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Finally, I would definitely recommend becoming part of a network of CEOs in your area. You can do this by joining one of Forum Strategy’s Trust Leaders networks. In this context, you will meet other CEO’s who you can discuss issues and ideas with, and who you can learn from. It will also create the opportunity for you to develop contact with many other CEOs, and that means that when you are unsure about something, or feel you need a second opinion, you will have other people in the same role that you can get in touch with for advice. I would also suggest looking beyond the education sector for advice and wisdom on being a successful CEO, such as the charity sector, business, or the NHS, because the role of CEO has been around for a much longer period of time in these sectors.

**How do you relax and recharge?**
I think it is really important to have something in your life which is completely separate from work which helps you to switch off. For example, I have a horse, and looking after my horse means I have to finish work at a sensible time most days, and also gives me another focus in my life.

I also listen to audiobooks in the car. I have to do a lot of travelling as a CEO and audiobooks stop me from replaying things that have just happened in my head.
Concentrating on the story diverts my attention, and helps me to focus on something completely different, which helps me to relax and recharge.

**What’s next for Transform?**

We are developing a Transform Enrichment Diploma for our pupils, which compliments the curriculum. It includes activities such as building a den, public speaking, and displaying art in a public place. Part of the reason we decided to introduce this was based on research that if children in our particular contexts went for an interview for university against pupils from a more affluent area, those from more affluent areas would be more likely to be selected as a result of having had a greater range of life experiences. This would be the case even if their academic results were the same. Therefore, we decided that the development of a Transform Enrichment Diploma would be an opportunity to help to close that gap, and we also saw it as an opportunity to develop something really exciting, fun and enriching for our pupils to take part in too.

We are also looking to expand our collaboration with local businesses to help raise aspiration. Currently one of our schools does some work with Rolls Royce and some of the female engineers there. We would like to introduce similar initiatives into all our schools, through collaboration with local businesses, in the near future.

Transform Trust has existed for a few years now, and I think that it is also important to celebrate all the great things we have achieved so far, and reflect on how far we’ve come. We have a 100% record of academies in special measures becoming ‘good’. We also no longer struggle with recruitment (which wasn’t always the case) and this is because of the positive reputation we have built up as being an employer of choice. It’s so easy in education to only look at what still needs to be done, but it is also important to take the time to reflect on our successes too.
A Different Approach to Understanding Parental Engagement

By Ernest Jenavs and Ilze Vaivode

Schools throughout England regularly gather feedback from parents and carers to understand how they perceive the education provided. They often use Ofsted Parent View or design their own surveys to measure parental engagement. However, a closer look at these surveys reveals that most of this is, sadly, wasted effort. Despite their good intentions, many schools are measuring the wrong things.

For example, Ofsted Parent View is a diagnostic of parents’ opinions on how their child is doing at school, asking if the child is happy there, and how supportive the school is in the child’s education. A series of short opinion statements, mainly evaluating their child’s feelings, which is often a skewed view. And when schools design surveys, they typically focus on various ways of measuring how happy the parents are with the school. Parent satisfaction is a useful but lagging indicator of school performance - it’s just another outcome for the school leader to improve on top of their many other priorities. For feedback to be actionable, rather than just another accountability metric, we need a reframe. We need to gather information on the one thing parents can give – their engagement with the school and their child’s learning. This means asking parents to reflect on their readiness to engage with learning and how the school can support parents in this process.

#TrustLeaders
For over half a year the Edurio team trawled academic literature, debated with our partner Trust and school leaders and sought guidance from education NGOs to understand how to measure parental engagement meaningfully and create a better way to guide school efforts. Our research led us to conclude that meaningful parental engagement depends on three factors:

1. **Clear communication:** Do parents and teachers communicate, and how do they do it? Schools need to ensure that staff and parents can understand each other and have appropriate means to communicate, so they can start building a solid relationship. Accessible communication channels used, interpersonal skills and confidence to ask for support are all equally important in establishing dialogue. Our research last year with over 10 thousand staff members across academies showed that communication is the most frequently mentioned area for improvement in schools.

2. **Effective collaboration:** Do parents and teachers feel ready to work with each other, and do they recognise each other’s responsibilities? Schools need to set clear expectations for pupils and their parents and must ensure that there is alignment on a child’s learning objectives and how best to achieve those. Likewise, stakeholders should be given opportunities to voice their questions or concerns and know where to ask for assistance to support their work with children at home. Teachers possess vast knowledge on how to trigger and encourage learning, and they can help by sharing practical advice, if they know what type of support is needed.

3. **Mutual trust and respect:** Is the relationship strong enough to truly work for the benefit of the child? School staff should recognise parents as partners in educating children, and schools need to create an environment where staff and parents feel safe and comfortable discussing pupil learning or any other issues. If parents and teachers trust each other and feel comfortable discussing student-related issues openly, they will be able to constructively support each other in their effort to help children.

We designed two survey instruments based on this - one for parents and one for teachers who interact with the parents on a day to day basis. After validating the instruments with hundreds of respondents, we are now embarking on England’s largest study on parental engagement in partnership with the Confederation of School Trusts. Over 20 Trusts with thousands of parents and staff members will complete our Parental Engagement review, giving insights on the state of these three areas in academies. We will be collating the findings in a report over the summer - stay tuned!

Meanwhile, consider the current approach to parental engagement in your Trust. What do you do to make parents and carers genuine partners in educating their children?

Ernest Jenavs is a co-founder of Edurio. Ilze Vaivode is an education research specialist at Edurio. Edurio works with 50 Trusts throughout England and over 1000 schools globally supporting them in gathering and analysing staff, parent and pupil feedback.
As we all come to terms with the very fluid situation around Co-VID19 and its impact on our society and economy, academy trusts and schools are having to adapt quickly and deftly, with very little in the way of specific guidance.

One area that is coming to the fore in all of this is the quality of corporate leadership available to headteachers and individual schools during these enormously challenging days. Whilst some heads are immediately able to draw on the support and expertise of a wide range of professionals, others, unfortunately, are feeling the enormous weight on their shoulders and the intense pressure of taking decisions in areas that are less familiar to them.

There has never been a more important – yet more demanding – time for schools to be communicating and engaging with their local communities.

In recent weeks, facilities management and public relations has been of paramount importance. Ensuring our schools, staff and children and young people are aware of and supported to follow public health guidance to prevent the spread of the disease has been essential. Likewise, school leaders are now in the throws of ensuring that that parents and local stakeholders are informed of the measures being taken and what may, or may not, come next. There has never been a more important – yet more demanding – time for schools to be communicating and engaging with their local communities.

For individual headteachers of schools this is a big ask, yet it becomes a huge ask as soon as key staff need to self isolate. The inevitable need to take human resourcing decisions, in a very fluid context, is stressful at the best of times. Contingency planning and workforce modelling – especially in early years settings, becomes an enormous challenge, as does following fast evolving and changing guidance.

It is at this time that the quality and expertise of Chief Operating Officers, operational leaders and support staff comes into its own.

It is at this time that the quality and expertise of Chief Operating Officers, operational leaders and support staff comes into its own. Too often unfairly described as ‘back room’ support, in reality these leaders and their teams are – on a
Forum Strategy

– currently helping to alleviate much of the stress and decision making required of headteachers in more isolated or less-supported settings. Today, we have received numerous messages of how operational staff have been a ‘godsend’ and ‘our rock’. The benefits of being part of a supportive collaboration of heads and schools is obvious on a week to week basis. Now – even more than ever – headteachers are recognising how important high quality central support – often generated and made sustainable through collaborative models – is.

Operational and corporate leadership, always essentially to getting things done, is also essential in a crisis.

If our schools close, it is very unlikely that the work will stop for our operations staff. The next stage will include an even greater demand to communicate with parents and carers, the need to deliver accessible and efficient online platforms for learning and sharing information, and the need to manage the legal and commercial implications of being closed. Those headteachers in supportive trusts with good corporate support will be able to focus much more on the crucial and unprecedented ‘business’ of learning and safeguarding of their pupils under highly unusual circumstances; and at a time when both will be under the spotlight and under strain like never before.

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In normal times I describe the good COO as ‘the finger’ to the CEO’s ‘thumb’, working together in harmony to ensure vision and strategy are translated through the day to day operations and culture of the organisation. COOs will certainly need to have their CEO’s and their headteachers’ backs as the legal, HR, financial and technological implications of closure and ‘new ways of working’ come into full view. Leading expert Jennifer Geary sets out the kind of traits COOs need to demonstrate in unchartered territory:

“They need to be prepared to…

• Learn fast
• embrace new ideas and new disciplines
• apply their knowledge and wisdom to new contexts
• see common themes
• create a plan
• move quickly, reassuring your people along the way

You need to be the sort of person who can be dropped into an unholy mess, quickly make sense of it, see key issues, discard distractions, clarify the way forward, develop a plan and get people executing it, fast.”

This resonates so much right now.

Indeed, COOs and operational leaders will, to a large extent, also act as guardians of the values and culture when unprecedented operational decisions need to be taken, and where the pressure to get it right is intense. Many will find themselves doing even more in the way of advising and supporting board members, whilst modelling the right kind of leadership across the organisation and with external stakeholders.

The support and expertise of our operational leaders will make an enormous difference to our children and young people in the coming weeks. To those trusts and schools that don’t have this support or capacity, I urge you to see how those with it can help.

#TrustLeaders
The third annual National #TrustLeaders Conference takes place on Thursday 24th September, bringing together CEOs, leaders and trustees from across our six regional CEO networks.

In 2019, 91% of our delegates rated the event as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, as we welcomed leaders from the wider public sector, business, and academy trusts to share ideas and insights on how academy trusts can ensure they are organisations at the heart of their communities.

This year the focus is on ensuring our organisations become truly accountable to and driven by our purpose and our people, ensuring that we remain focused on our legacy, as well as being responsive and adaptable to the needs of our communities. Previous conferences have included contributions from the British Franchise Association, the Co-Op, Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, amongst others.

This event is exclusively for members of Forum Strategy’s #TrustLeaders networks (as of September 2020) and our #BeingTheCEO participants.

Facilitated by Jane Creasy

The conference will be facilitated by Forum Associate, Jane Creasy (pictured left). Jane is a leading educationalist working across the public, private and third sectors on leadership, innovation and improvement.

#TrustLeaders
In the film - which is available online until Thursday - Sir Steve reflects on his career as a headteacher and then CEO. He shares that constancy, ambition, integrity and flexibly are key CEO characteristics. He discusses the importance of building a great team, the all-important relationship with the board of trustees, the need to ensure values driven growth, and his pet goats...!

To watch the video in full visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts8-0R6ifhc

You can also find many more useful videos on the Forum Strategy YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVUeMc2dCKCnsChDmWdrtrw

More videos to watch on the Forum Strategy YouTube Channel

Leaders In Conversation:
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Ku4Me5bo0

Leaders In Conversation:
Episode 2 - David Strudley CBE
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scr3AArGaTE

Leaders In Conversation:
Episode 3 - Kate Lester
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDeswJYrqrE

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Our commitments to clients include:

• Supporting organisational improvement wherever possible;
• Staying informed on the key & emerging issues;
• Producing high quality research & communications;
• Ensuring our integrity & maintaining client confidentiality at all times;
• Being responsive & professional in all that we do.

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