**Ordinary Extraordinary Leaders Podcast – The Curious Case of the Umbrella in the Boardroom with Sally Steadman and Mike Hickman.**

 **Mike Hickman** 0:19
Welcome to the ordinary Extraordinary Leaders Podcast. Again, we have a special guest with us - and my name is Mike Hickman by the way, leadership development and training management. But you knew that already. You've heard my voice before - Here's someone whose voice I would like you to listen to over the next 15 minutes - Sally Steadman, former mentee now mentor with us and many other things besides. I will allow her to introduce herself, and we've agreed that where we're going to begin is not just that experience, but the learning that's come from it and that will lead us to our topic for today. So let's let Sally introduce herself.

 **Sally Steadman** 0:56
Hi, Mike. Hi everyone else. Hopefully my voice is not too disorientating.
I - gosh, where do I start? I've had number of roles over the years and actually you would say have that portfolio career right now, but I'm a vice chair of trustees for a charity. I am a trustee for a students union. I in the last year exited a business where I was chief executive and non-profit business. And I work within my day-to-day roles at senior leadership level.

 **Mike Hickman** 1:34
And of course also volunteering to mentor mentees with us and and about to about to receive a new mentee out there. So in terms of what you've learned from all of that and the key message that we'd like to get across here. What are the headlines?

 **Sally Steadman** 1:55
I think for me the biggest headline that has come across is if you don't get your governance right, things don't work and that's around having the right people on the board.
Managing the story around the board and actually people working together. And I'm not saying there shouldn't be disagreements and challenge at board, there absolutely should be. But if you've got a board that's pulling in different directions and the governance isn't strong enough to make sure that board works together and comes to a conclusion, that means everybody walks out of that meeting singing from the same song sheet - things go terribly wrong.

 **Mike Hickman** 2:40
OK, we'd like to avoid things going terribly wrong, so I suppose we're after a recipe or an idea for how to how to turn that round. So, what would you say?

 **Sally Steadman** 2:53
I think I mentioned governance for me and I sound like an expert on governance. I think sometimes and I'm not, I'm far from it, but I just have seen where good governance has supported to make the right decisions and that's it. That goes back to my very first Board position where I joined a charity - there was very little governance. There was very little structure to how decisions were made and it was a nice place to be,ubt actually we weren't moving forwards.
Move onwards 9 years and I'm towards the end of my tenure now. I step down at the end of October. We're a completely different board. We've recruited very differently. We've gone out and looked for specific skill sets and where we've got a gap and we need to fill a place, we will look for a particular skill set. But besides that, it's actually those people on the board when they do join the board knowing what their role is.
Now, as chief executive I had a board - they'd all done the same degree. They all worked in the same job. That board wasn't diverse enough. They didn't know how to make a decision outside of what they knew. We needed others on the board, but they were very close to that. So and governance there would have helped us. But trying to get the governance instilled there was quite a challenge. But what you do see is then, I think is a board that knows how to make decisions. You've got a chair that leads.

 **Sally Steadman** 4:29
But actually knows when to step back or when to say something and it's not a chair's role to actually make the decision. They might make the decision if you're at a status quo, but it's about them understanding that their job is there to support the chief executive and the management team in the strategy of the organisation. It's not to dabble in the operational side. And I think part of that as well is understanding.

 **Sally Steadman** 4:56
When, as a trustee, should you question and when is a trustee, are you providing support?

 **Sally Steadman** 5:01
And actually, some of my readings have taken me down the road off you question when things are going right and you challenge and you provide that challenge when things are going well, but that you support when things are going wrong and you are there to support through that. But you might ask questions once you come out the other side.

 **Mike Hickman** 5:07

When I suppose the question immediately that that comes to mind with that. But people who are conscientious really want to do a very, very good job. How am I going to know and, for those of you out there thinking, oh, it's an obvious one this, but I'm not sure it is. How am I going to know when it's going well? Because people will perhaps be anxious, won't they? That is this a good sign? Is this a bad sign? You've probably captured some of how we do this earlier in your point about diversity, and I think it's really important we stress diversity in that very broad sense - it's skills, it's background, it's you know where, where do you go to school? You know? Where do you live? All of those things as well.

 **Sally Steadman** 5:53
Exactly.
Don't all read the same newspaper.

 **Mike Hickman** 6:01
Don't all read the same newspaper. You can see the problem there, yeah.

 **Sally Steadman** 6:02
Yeah, I mean you can and I think when we talk about being inclusive and diverse on a board, people immediately think about age, ethnicity and like you said, it's so much more than that. It's social background. It's have they done something different? Do they have a very different perspective? Are they not linked to your organisation at all so can look very objectively at what you're doing, and I think that sometimes is where we.

 **Sally Steadman** 6:33
We tend to recruit people that we know that we like and might agree with us, and that's not necessarily what we should be doing, yes.

 **Mike Hickman** 6:38
We like people like us and that's understandable. And that's very true. And I like people like me. Of course I do. But that's not where perhaps we're going to get the ideas that we're not going to have because we don't know them yet. We need to be introduced to them. But let's go back to that question about - so someone thinks, how do I know it's going well?

 **Mike Hickman** 7:02
What? What would you say? Well, what is again a trustee coming into this thinking or chair, whoever. What do they need to bear in mind?

 **Sally Steadman** 7:12
In terms of it going well, I think it going well for me and my experience is that when your board leaves the room, regardless of the discussions that have been had around the table. You all leave with the same vision, and you all leave with the same idea regardless of whether or not you agreed or disagreed. If the consensus on the decision being made is not yours equally you still leave that room that that's the decision that the board made and that’s wWhat you are going to advocate.

You don't then leave the meeting and tell everyone I didn't. I disagreed with that and I didn't want that to happen. And I've seen that happen too many times where you've had consensus at board and then literally everybody leaves the meeting and then what you hear within a week is they're going off to members of your team or to other people, if they're representing the membership and saying, well, I didn't actually agree with that and I'm not happy that that was the decision that was made. That's not a good board.

You listen to reason. You understand why people are putting the decisions forward and you agree and you walk away, that you have all agreed. And I think what you then see is a board that comes together with respect, trust and honesty. And then you see an organisation starting to thrive.

 **Mike Hickman** 8:40
And we're talking cabinet collective responsibility and interestingly, having done politics A level folks, interestingly though, this is the second podcast in about a fortnight where that's come up as being important. You know, just to close the loop on the idea of being able to have a good measure of the organisation you're working with - how would you say a trustee would feel assured that there aren't things going wrong in the background that they are not aware of. What is it they need to bear in mind?

 **Sally Steadman** 9:19
I think, the chief exec can give you one view of what's happening in an organisation and actually, whilst I'm not saying a trustee should be going and doing hands on things, I'm not saying that at all. Actually, just go and have a feel around the organisation. Are staff happy? Is what you're hearing at board.

 **Sally Steadman** 9:40
what's actually happening in the organisation? You know, if you're passionate enough to become a trustee of a particular charity, actually you generally have your ears to the ground and now what’s going on. If you're not hearing that things are going well, actually as a trustee you probably should be questioning what the chief executive is actually telling you and challenging.

 **Sally Steadman** 10:05
Are they just trying to put on a rosy picture for you as trustees because they don't want you to think things that are not as good as they are, or do they just not have a clue? And I say that a bit tongue in cheek because I don't think there's any chief exec out there that doesn't have a clue. But I think you have to test that and that's, you know, you have, you know, staff, you know how the charity operates.
You generally get a vibe by the things are going well or not for the organisation. You also know through things like the balance sheet, through if you do staff surveys, if you do volunteer feedback, you start to get an essence of how that organisation working.

 **Mike Hickman** 10:47
And I've just been in a session immediately before this recording with WYCAS who are doing our our financial training cash book training with people. And the point made again that it's the trustee's job, not just the treasurer's job, it's the trustee's job to know how the finances are and and to make sure that they don't just hope that somebody else has an eye on that. So there's all this to so. So as we move into the last three or four minutes of the of the podcast, what are the calls to action?

What should people do? You're a new trustee, or you've been a trustee for a while. And you want to be sure that you're doing it right? What? What are the? What are the calls to action?

 **Sally Steadman** 11:27
I think - sorry, not been too blatant - There's lots of training out there that you can go on as a trustee. Community First [Yorkshire] has a raft of things that you can do. You've talked about the financial element being one side and I think not every trustee, me included, and I'm on the Finance Committee of one of the boards that I'm on - in fact, now I'm on 2 finance committees and I'm not really sure why I am not financially minded, but I've done enough to learn and I'll ask questions and understand. And I think in some ways that's why I get asked to go on.
They know I don't come with that background. But I do think you know, as a trustee, there's a raft of support out there, there’s sessions that you can go on to where you can learn more information. But dare I say it, and this is where I'm a massive advocate, is the mentoring, you know. Have a mentor, somebody who has been there, has done that, that you can test your ideas with, that they will challenge you back. They will challenge your thinking.

 **Sally Steadman** 12:26
And we did this with one board that I worked with is that we brought someone in.
It was a national company, so not a charity. But we brought somebody in who observed how the board worked, then spoke to each trustee individually. This was a board that wasn't working well together, I will put that in the background. But then we put a mentoring programme in place to help those that were either new to a position such as this one, new to decision making, that they had that opportunity outside of the board to ask some of those questions that they might not want to ask at board because they don't feel experienced enough to do.

 **Sally Steadman** 13:02
And I think sometimes that's a challenge is when you've got younger people coming onto boards. And that sounds really a bit discriminative of me and I don't mean it, but somebody who hasn't got experience as they're not younger, less experienced actually, that's some of the challenge. They don't want to feel like they're asking a stupid question, but actually sometimes they just don't know. So they would be better to ask the question, but sometimes just having that mentor to give you the confidence to go into a board meeting.

 **Sally Steadman** 13:29
And sense check things I think is, invaluable and. But you know me, Mike. I am a massive advocate of of mentoring, particularly at leadership level.

 **Mike Hickman** 13:38
Absolutely. And you know, we can talk about, and have done go to our leadership pages, by the way, look up leadership mentoring here about the benefits of that and... OK as we move towards the final minute of our time, is there anything that we haven't covered Sally that we really should.

Any tips, hints, anything you feel passionately about that you'd like the listener to go away with?

 **Sally Steadman** 13:46
Yeah.
There's a couple of things I feel really passionate about. One of them is if you're the leader of an organisation, be seen. I think all too often, you're there as a leader and people don't know who really who you are or what your vision is. And I talked to you about this last time we met is I often say, be that tall leader with the umbrella in the air and leading people forward.

 **Sally Steadman** 14:30
You need to stop and listen. You need to sometimes change route, but be that leader. Be seen, be present and I think all too often you see an organisation that the leader, and that's people on the board as well as the paid for team, aren't present or seen, and actually that's what most people want to see. They want to know they're in safe hands. It's back to that trust element. So I think if, if that's one of the things that I am really, I really am passionate about and talk to all my leadership teams of it is be seen, be that person that's at the front guiding people and taking them forward and taking them on the journey with them, and I often talk about going on a journey because this is what we're all on generally.

 **Mike Hickman** 15:18
Thank you and thank you for holding the umbrella all the way through the last 15 minutes for us. Sally, thank you ever so much. Do please join us for future podcasts from Ordinary Extraordinary Leaders. But in the meantime, thank you very, very much for listening. And thank you again, Sally.

