

No mud, no lotus

Cycling is not everyone's preferred means of getting around. Especially if you're at the bottom of a 2,000 metre climb with hairpin bends and hundreds of others jostling for position.



For the first time, with the interest generated by my having just about completed two triathlons over two years, I've taken to watching the Tour de France this year.

I see the blood sweat and tears from my sofa. But although hundreds of miles away, the struggle seems strangely familiar.

The danger as competitors race at frightening speeds down hills and the drama as they power to the top reminds

me of the struggles we as trustees suffer from time to time. Like the cyclists, struggle comes with the territory we have chosen.

I know something of that struggle myself, as many of us no doubt do. Also I've just seen a chief executive and board through a crisis from which I now see them emerging stronger. No mud, no lotus.

"I like a challenge so it was either this or become a trustee"



I saw the 'flowering' of the lotus at their awayday which I facilitated at which a group of trustees and staff acknowledged the pain they'd been through and recognised that there were points when it all got so awful that the organisation was teetering on the edge of collapse. They didn't wallow in it but they did own up to the pain.

As they generated ideas for the strategy of the next three years, there was a powerful sense of having overcome adversity and being the stronger for it. They didn't want the crisis and certainly don't want it again, but overcoming adversity had tried and tested their collective muscles.

Of course we also know that often there appears to be only mud...teams collapsing, night worries, redundancies, closure. Messy and muddy. But in there somewhere, hidden deep down are the roots of the lotus.

At the awayday I saw a number of factors which I think helped the lotus flower. (Sorry if you're finding the image a bit too cheesy...please read on anyway!)

- The patience and wisdom of one or two key individuals who were able to live with the tension and nevertheless make wise decisions.
- A belief, by a core group, in the mission of the charity and a fervent desire to see it continue.
- Using words carefully especially at critical moments, knowing that poorly chosen words will be taken the wrong way.
- Turbulent emotions being tempered by gathering and providing the facts. Absence of facts creates a vacuum which fosters fears and fantasies.
- Being respectful in practical ways. Coming a few minutes late to a meeting may be barely noticed in times of calm, but will grate when nerves are frayed.
- Do not blame 'them' for getting us all into this sorry mess, but own your own share of it.
- Having support outside the organisational muddle to help you get your thinking clear about what is happening.

Cycling 3,642 kilometres is not for everyone, nor is trusteeship. But if it is, know that there will always be mud and – somewhere deep down – roots of the lotus. ●

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