

## Michael Pain – Opening Speech

**National #TrustLeaders Conference 2019 (26<sup>th</sup> September)**

Good morning, colleagues.

It is great to have you Chairing the conference again this year, Jane. Thank you for your continuing support for our work at Forum Strategy

Last month, one hundred and eighty-one of America's most influential CEOs put out a statement redefining their roles as leaders.

Chasing the bottom line, they told their shareholders and the public, is no longer enough.

Rather than seeing their organisations in isolation. Rather than simply chasing more growth and competing for bigger numbers; these CEOs– including those of organisations such as Apple and Amazon - have recognised that their organisations have to adapt in a changing world.

It's not just *what you do* that matters anymore, it's *how you do it*.

In addition to their responsibilities to their boards and investors, they set out a simple statement that included the following commitments:

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- **Delivering value to our customers**
- **Investing in our employees**
- **Dealing fairly and ethically with our suppliers**
- **Supporting the communities in which we work**

**CEOs' Business Roundtable**

The statement went on to say:

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*“If companies fail to recognize that the success of our system is dependent on inclusive long-term growth, many will raise legitimate questions about the role of large employers in our society.”*

*CEOs' Roundtable Statement, August 2019*

There's some important messages there.

The big take-away message, in a complex and uncertain world, is that leadership - and success - has to be defined and pursued in a spirit of partnership both with those within and beyond our organisations. We may be – it seems – at the dawn of an era of inclusive leadership.

So, at a time when we are bombarded with depressing news, of social media anger, of 'us and them' arguments and agendas; can we hope that leaders are creating something better, and something more profound right now?

I think we can.

And I think it is crucial that academy trust leaders pave the way here too.

Now, focusing on growth and bottom-line results matters. Whether you are in the private sector or trying to lead in a highly accountable and – still - financially weak public sector. But, as CEOs, it's how we go about achieving that growth and improvement that matters, and, of course, the legacy we create for the longer term beyond the bottom line.

This is about the legacy, in the roundest sense, to our children and young people and the communities in which they live and grow.

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So, the theme of our conference today is **Academy trusts at the heart of their communities.**

I couldn't think of a more timely topic.

And, it is a real honour to welcome you, our #TrustLeaders members from right across the country to Nottingham today.

Nottingham is a great place if you want to visit successful academy trusts, and a bad place right now if you enjoy watching successful football clubs.

I say that from living out both experiences in the last twelve months.

Last season's game between Notts County and Mansfield Town is 90 minutes I will never get back.

Yet academy trusts can learn something from good football clubs. Like many of our good football clubs and sports clubs, trusts have huge potential to be at the heart of their communities, to be part of the identity and fabric of their communities. Loved by their communities, supported by their communities, and – perhaps, even ‘owned’ by them. I’m sure we’ll hear more on that later today.

In any case, I believe academy trusts and academy trust leaders can be at the forefront of this new era of more inclusive, community-focused leadership.

Like some of those businesses and organisations across the economy, academy trusts have a choice to make. They can become the caricature that seems to have stuck a little, - distant and removed, obsessively focused on growth, bigger numbers and what the ‘powers that be’ define as successful – often seen to be working in spite of our communities. Or do something more profound, with a spirit of partnership, looking outwards to the passion, knowledge, capacity and aspirations of those around us – within and beyond our organisations – to find the best way forward and to achieve sustainable success together.

Now if you think this sounds warm and fuzzy, let’s consider the context a little more.

Looking upwards for solutions or strategies is not as helpful as it once was. The well has run a little dry.

We can no longer rely on a stable or predictable political context.

Political leadership is uncertain and lacking consistency. We've had four governments in five years and five education secretaries in that time. Austerity still bites. In the quagmire of Brexit, politicians may be able to promise more money, but they're not providing vision or strategy.

The challenges that threaten to hold back our pupils and their families – from mental health to gang violence, poor speech and language development to poverty - are becoming more complex.

And the pace of change, driven predominately by technology, is revolutionising how we all work and socialise.

The CEO groups' message is clear. The role can no longer just be about running an efficient organisation that chases bigger numbers and ticks the shareholders' or governments' boxes; it's also about an even greater premium on CEOs to provide leadership and strategy in a world that lacks it.

Isn't that what autonomy is all about?

The constant in all of this needs to be you – trust leaders, the children and young people, and the communities you serve.

I thought Sir Steve Lancashire put this is well in his tweet following the appointment of the latest Secretary of State

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I think we can all relate to that rather healthy mindset.

So, the time has come for the reference point for the academy trust sector to be less the politicians and top down

accountability system (important though that is, and will remain), and much more about the sense of partnership between academy trusts and their communities. A partnership firmly centred on serving this generation of children and young people. And, I believe you as CEOs are at the heart of that.

If we look at the trends for global organisations, the CEO role is certainly changing

Take this research from the consultancy organisation EY, and apply it to your own context

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*“There is widespread perception that national governments have failed to respond effectively (individually or collectively) to global challenges..... As corporations have grown more powerful, employees, customers and other stakeholders expect CEOs to lead the way in addressing growing global challenges. 71% of employees globally believe it’s critically important for their CEO to respond to global challenges, with 76% of the general population agreeing that they want CEOs to take the lead on change instead of waiting for governments to act.”*

*2019 EY CEO Imperative Study*

Now the focus in that research is global, but I believe we are seeing exactly this sentiment around local and regional level organisations too.

So as well as the theme of our conference today being **Academy Trusts at the heart of their communities**; the theme of my speech is CEOs as community leaders.

Community is a broad term. I want us, today, to think about community in the broadest possible sense.

Within our communities are the employers making sense of technological change and artificial intelligence that is coming to dominate young people's lives.

There are the nurseries at the frontline of speech and language development and school readiness.

The higher education institutions who can help raise aspiration and inform curricula.

The health and social care organisations and charities focused on securing mental and physical wellbeing in our communities – for parents and children.

The community leaders focused on avoiding gang violence and raising aspirations amongst our most deprived and disengaged young people.

The professionals – young and old – who want to give back and to help govern organisations with a big stake in their communities.

There are the growing numbers of retired people (including former teachers) who want to give their time and make a difference to children's lives through volunteerism.

And, of course, the people who want to serve their communities and see their role as serving their communities, as teachers.

The potential for generating social and professional capital is enormous.

This isn't about CEOs taking on more responsibility and all of society's ills. On the contrary. On the doorstep lies enormous potential, not just for working together and sharing information, but for creating and shaping the solutions together. Growing our organisations and the system around us to meet the huge opportunities and complex challenges that face this particular generation.

The sheer complexity of some of the issues we face and the lack of money and people around to solve them, almost demands it.

However, at last year's national conference, I described academy CEOs as conductors of an orchestra. I think academy trusts and CEOs in particular can step up here, and are beginning to do so. Far from being seen as remote, over paid, and corporate figures, I think we are seeing the trust CEO role being redefined in exactly the way forward-thinking CEOs envisaged.

CEOs as people who are figureheads in their communities, championing children and young people, bringing organisations and people together around the needs and priorities of a locality's pupils, and shaping their trusts as employers of choice in their communities.

That is a far cry from the caricature that some in the media would like to paint of a 'MAT CEO'.

But it requires a shift in mindset in some trusts and certainly at a system level. As with the CEOs I mentioned at the beginning, this is about a recalibration, as it were, of the role of CEO.

Why does this begin with trusts? To be frank, there is a leadership vacuum and you are well placed to fill it.

As a headteacher of a single school, I think the conductor task is almost impossible at the level we are envisaging here. As the leader of a trust – a major local employer and organisation, you have the scale and the local influence to really shape the landscape around you and around your pupils.

You can get the meetings with and backing of local employers, you can work with the CEO of the foundation health trust or the Dean of the city university, you can get a speech at the local chamber meeting, or get a regular column in the town newspaper.

CEOs have a new level of leadership calling. To shape a shared narrative and sense of partnership with all of those who are invested in children and young people's lives and futures.

Yet, I want to begin today with a provocation. Communities do not yet feature sufficiently in the mindset of enough academy trusts.

Later, you will be hearing more on our research with the Key, but I want to share something quite challenging that emerged from those findings.

The issue of community engagement was almost bottom of the list of CEO priorities.

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Of course, financial viability, growth, recruitment and retention were all there. You would expect money and curriculum to top such a list right now.

However, what we intend to consider today is that, without community engagement, without putting academy trusts at the heart of their communities, some of these challenges will be very hard to address indeed. We will forever be in reactive rather than proactive mode – looking to an ever-changing band of politicians to set strategy and direction, rather than looking to the wisdom, capacity and passion of our communities.

A trust with strong community identify and role will enthuse local people to work for it, it will find it easier to fundraise and bring in volunteers, it will find it easier to work with local partners – such as employers and HEIs - on enhancing the curriculum, and it will get the backing and support of parents for serving more schools.

Community can't be at the bottom of the list for CEOs. We need to change that.

As a sector, there's a long way to go.

There is a mixed picture. But the perception is not necessarily good one.

Last year, the education select committee in the Houses of Parliament wrote to Lord Agnew stating that:

*““parents, staff and students are in the dark over who is running their schools and that decisions are being taken behind closed doors”*

More optimistically, over the Summer, the NGA's excellent report on academy trust governance stated that:

*“Whereas some academy trusts struggle to engage with their community, others are putting community at the heart of what they do. In many cases, boards are keen to get ‘buy-in’ from the wider school community. This includes working closely with parents, the local authority and employers and consulting with these groups to gain their input into the creation of a trust vision.”*

Things are moving in the right direction.

So, today, I want us to reflect on and begin to take forward this notion of academy trusts as community-focused

organisations. Good corporate governance and organisation, yes, but driven by service to the community.

I think if we are to address the criticism, and to win hearts and minds – bringing people along with us

If we are to mitigate some of the challenges of austerity – drawing on volunteers and accessing wider funding and resource

If we are to establish academy trusts as employers of choice – enthusing talented and passionate local people to work with us towards a vision for our localities

If we are to prepare children and young people to thrive in their lives today, and in the local and global economy – working in partnership with those who are living in the world that children inhabit and will inherit.

We need to bring things back much closer to community leadership.

Academy trusts can finally shake off the perception of being a flagship policy of Michael Gove, to being a force for community vision, greater cohesion and partnership, and representing an exciting future that enthuses and galvanises those around us.

What kind of leadership does this require?

Over the last year or two I have had the privilege of visiting dozens of academy trusts. And I am impressed by the pockets of work that are emerging, where academy trusts, led by their CEOs, are forging deep and strategic relationships with other stakeholders in their local areas

I had the chance to visit the Wellspring Trust in South Yorkshire. They have recognised that the mental health and wellbeing of this generation of pupils is a major challenge, so have developed a partnership with the local clinical commissioning group to provide frontline Mental Health support for young people in schools. As a result of this partnership and the funding it brings, Wellspring has developed services – working with local charities and health practitioners - for pupils in ten secondary schools across the Barnsley area, some of which are not in the trust. From frontline counselling services for pupils to mental health first aid training and support for staff.

One parent said: “We have come such a long way in the 12 short weeks you have been involved and have achieved more than we have in the last two years. Prior to your intervention, we felt lost and alone, but this is no longer the case.”

That’s an academy trust making a difference to families and communities.

Our Networks Manager, Rachael Gacs had the opportunity to case study the Maritime Trust in London, the Transform Trust in Nottingham, and Victoria Academies Trust in the West Midlands, looking at how those trusts are working with local people to develop an entrepreneurial curriculum for pupils – including involving parents and local businesses. People from within and across the community – including local businesses - are supporting those schools to develop inspiring educational experiences, informed by the realities of self-employed and entrepreneurial people. Already preparing children for a rapidly evolving local jobs market, and with the skills and traits that will stand them in good stead throughout their future lives.

I visited the Chiltern Trust in Bedfordshire which has developed numerous strategic partnerships – including one with Luton Football Club. The CEO and head of the Teaching School are on the board, and, when a pupil sadly lost their life last year, the club's first team came in to spend a day with pupils. The trust's PE teachers receive training from the club; the trust is engaged with the FA's 'reading stars' initiative through its relationship with the club, and the club is also running an initiative to ensure the hardest to reach pupils are supported to be physically active and well. More widely, the Chiltern Trust has made a commitment that at least one member of the trust's senior executive team will attend every major community event in the town – with the

CEO modelling this expectation. Members of key organisations across the town are also on local governing bodies, from local charities, community radio stations, foodbanks and Mosques.

And I do think that those trusts who are losing their LGBs are missing an opportunity in fact to perhaps reform, rather than dispense with them, so that they truly reflect and bring on board wider community leadership. That's particularly important in more geographically dispersed trusts.

Finally, I met the CHAT academies trust in London which has completed a project with Save the Children to support parental outreach and has longstanding relationship with local charities who support parents with parenting skills and developing employability skills. Parents are now queuing up to volunteer and support those schools.

In each of those cases, the CEO has led from the front in shaping the leadership narrative around the trust's place in its community; prioritising and putting the impetus behind those relationships and identifying the common goals – which almost always centre on raising aspirations and improving the lives of children and their families. To prepare the next generation of those communities as best they can – for life and work.

Those trusts are generating enormous professional and social capital.

Leading an academy trust is hard work. I know that building community relationships is time consuming and its fraught with failure as well as success.

Recent analysis by INSEAD business school discussed the growth of strategic partnerships, both in business and other sectors, and the fact that between 60 and 70 per cent of alliances fail or at least face some difficulties. The article suggests that partnerships in many respects resemble marriages, and puts forward the following top tips for successful strategic alliances

- 1. Be selective and faithful (make sure you find “the one”)**
- 2. Find a win-win (the whole should be greater than the sum of the parts)**
- 3. Ensure leadership alignment (make sure that the chemistry is right)**
- 4. Create a simple contract (exchange vows but make it simple)**
- 5. Invest alongside one another (demonstrate your devotion)**

- 6. Push connections deeper into the organisations (get to know the extended family)**
- 7. Balance leading and lagging indicators (don't rush to judgement)**
- 8. Deliver on your end of the bargain (live up to expectations)**
- 9. Blend formal governance with informal collaboration (keep communication lines open)**
- 10. Be open to different ways of collaborating (always keep your relationship fresh by trying new things)**

I am beginning to see trustees and CEOs make external partnerships a priority and I'm encouraged by how many are embarking on those partnerships with due diligence – do those they work with share the values; wish to invest time, energy or money; wish to be accountable for shared outcomes etc?

The danger is if we don't stick to some of these principles rather than developing successful partnership working, we create collaborative overload or exhaustion – too much undisciplined and unfocused behaviour.

I want to conclude today by a little about accountability here.

If academy trusts really are going to be at the heart of their communities, they need to be accountable to them too. If the onus of accountability is completely focused on top down measures of success, looking upward to government for guidance and challenge, then it will be hard for trusts to be responsive and driven by those they ultimately serve or to be true community organisation.

I was really impressed to see one trust this year that had taken a lead here – particularly around its accountability to parents. Bellevue Park Trust asked parents in all schools across the trust the same questions;

Not only do they ask questions such as:

Do their children enjoy coming to school?

Would they recommend their child's school to others?

Whether they are satisfied with a school's leadership and management?

They also seek detailed feedback from parents on what they value and areas for improvement. The trust reports back to parents on how it is taking their feedback on board.

For two consecutive years now it has placed the 'trust-wide' results in the public domain, on its website and social media. Now done, the intention is to show progress and impact around parental satisfaction and engagement with the trust.

One of our members, Cathal Lynch, based in the West Midlands has taken a similar approach in a school improvement model that he has developed and is about to be published in a book with John Catt. The model is using annual parental survey results to inform and drive many of the school improvement priorities, regularly reporting back to parents on implementation and success.

It's a simple fact of life that *what gets measured gets done*, so backing up community focused -leadership with community focused accountability will make the chances of success much higher.

Ghandi famously said:

*“Leadership was once about muscle, now it's about getting on with people.”*

We don't want our academy trust CEOs to be leaders with muscle. Chasing bigger numbers, pleasing ministers, and building corporate empires. I think most aren't doing that – but let's be frank, that's the perception.

We want our leaders to be the facilitators of a better world.

That begins in our communities.

When I wrote my book *Being The CEO* earlier this year, I said that the most important trait of a CEO is humility. The second, ironically, is self-confidence.

Self-confidence as a CEO comes from approaching the world – our communities – with a sense of humility. Humility in the face of potential, wisdom, and social and professional capital that lies within them. Our confidence, our ability to get the job done, increasingly comes from how we work with and learn from others.

Mother Teresa, said this:

*“None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.”*

Nothing binds communities of people together like service to the next generation. As CEOs you not only have the scale and influence, you also have a galvanising call to arms, service to children transcends sectors and generations.

As CEOs – leading in a complex and uncertain world - your job is to create that sense of doing that together. great love, hope, ambition and togetherness, you can achieve something wonderful.

I hope today provides you with plenty of inspiration, ideas, and reflection on how to not only be effective leaders of your organisations, but great and influential leaders within your communities. Seizing the opportunity to include others and to shape a context in which all children and young people thrive.

If we can redefine the academy trust sector as one that not only achieves great outcomes and efficiencies, but does so in a spirit of service to and partnership with the communities around us and around our pupils; we can set the system up for a long, sustainable future that truly makes a difference to children and young people's lives.

Thank you