

Beginnings - A Phone Call

Four years ago I received a phone call from MTI tutor Sally Morris. She wanted to nominate me for the role of Chair of MTI. I remember her saying "Before you say 'no', just think about it for a minute".

So I did.

I thought *"I can't do it", "I don't have enough experience", "I'm too shy", "I'm not the right person for the role"*, and so forth.

But I also thought, Sally wouldn't have asked me if she didn't believe that I was capable of doing it. So with some hesitation and gentle persuasion, I agreed. It was only when I put the phone down that I panicked and thought *"What have I just got myself into! How will I be able to do this?"*

Lorraine Horton was the MTI Chair, whose shoes I would be stepping into so to speak. Lorraine gave me an overview of the things the Board had been working on and what the role of Chair entailed. When discussing how much time the role takes up I remember she said that it *"could be a full time job if you let it"* as there was plenty to do but only a finite number of hours you can fit in a week around your work.

After Lorraine officially stepped down, I stepped up, suffice to say I was concerned about my ability to do as good a job as previous holders of the role.

The two Directors (Andy Fagg and Richard Leadbeater) and myself made up the Board. Andy and Richard both had years of experience with MTI and were a great support for me, together with the Administrator, Chris Wing (the world's most organised person), they know everything about MTI. This was a huge help for me to understand how MTI functioned as an organisation, the various procedures and people's responsibilities. The first few months I was grateful for colleagues to lead the way and 'hand hold' me through the first AGM, I felt very much like the new boy in the office but people were always supportive and encouraging.

One of my responsibilities was be the MTI representative for the CNHC (Complementary and Natural Health Council) and GCMT (General Council for Massage Therapy). Attending meetings with these organisations brought me into contact with other Professional Associations and into the 'politics' of the industry. It was my responsibility to represent and uphold MTI's standards and ethos in developments with the regulator and governing body, and to update Board colleagues and MTI members of changes and consequences for our organisation. I enjoyed this aspect of my role, I felt I was making a valuable contribution by ensuring our members were up to date with industry matters, and at the same time I was learning a lot, including quite a few acronym's!

Sudden Changes

It wasn't long after the AGM that Chris Wing who had been the MTI Administrator for many years announced she would be leaving. She and Richard were going to organise interviews to find a new person to take over her role.

At this time Richard had suddenly taken ill and was in hospital, everyone's concern for him grew as it became clear his condition was serious. Tragically Richard died, it was an immense shock for everyone. There were people for whom Richard was just as much a friend as a colleague, everyone liked him and had great respect for him. I first met him as my AP&P tutor, one of his many strengths was his kindness, I can still picture him teaching the nervous system in his own unique way. He made things fun.

We set up a fund in Richard's name to offer extra hours AP&P tuition to students that need it.

I went to Bristol for a meeting with Andy, it was only then that the seriousness of the situation for MTI became clear to me. Richard knew so much and did so much for MTI that without him things were unstable. We realised how much had MTI relied on Richard. Andy had come up with solutions to deal with the immediate effects it caused, and also ideas for the longer term. Su Fox and Darien Pritchard stepped in to help us out and keep things running. There quite a lot to do and it marked the beginning of a period of changes for MTI.

A New Team

Chris and I interviewed candidates for the Administrator position, this was another learning curve for me, I hadn't interviewed anyone for a job before. Chris and I agreed that Diana Newson would be the perfect person to take over the admin role, and Diana has definitely proved we were right!

We also needed another Director. I was keen to redress the all male balance of the Board members, after all the majority of MTI Tutors and Assessors were female, so we needed a female on the Board. Karen Yarnell took up the role, and brought her valuable knowledge, experience, and perspective to the Board.

There were two more roles to be filled, a new Practitioner Association Administrator, and a Finance Administrator. Anna Glowacka and Alistair Collier completed the MTI admin team.

I was no longer the 'new boy in the office'.

New structure and balancing time

The admin team are the 'engine room' of MTI. We would get nowhere without having a robust admin structure. As a Board member you need to be familiar with the system and know the individual admin roles responsibilities. The implications for admin need to be considered when thinking of new ideas and changes. As Chair I was the exam

administrator supervisor, so I worked closely with Diana Newson. Just about everything we did effected Diana in some way, and we spent quite a lot of time amending and updating sections of the tutor handbook. Diana supported me in many ways, and I hope that she found me supportive too. I feel it's important to remember that the admin team are employees and Board members have a responsibility to ensure they are supported and have someone to go to when they need to.

One of the challenging things for me, and undoubtedly Karen and Andy too, was balancing time between my own work and my MTI work. I would always do some MTI hours each week, the amount of hours would fluctuate depending on other work and personal commitments. Sometimes there would be busy periods which would involve juggling of time which could feel quite pressured. Apart from time there is also the mind space that MTI occupies, I found that things where always on my mind and that could be overwhelming at times.

Endings

After serving as MTI Chair for four years I felt it was time for me to step aside. I had put some plans on the shelf in order for me to devote time to being Chair and I wanted to have the time to focus on them again. I also think it's healthy to have a change among Board members from time to time, to bring new energy and shift in perspectives.

Through reflecting on the last four years and jotting notes in preparation to write this I realised how much has been achieved in MTI, how much work and commitment go into it, and how much I've learned in the process. In particular our P.A activities have evolved and there are more opportunities for practitioners to come together, at the annual conference or regional meetings.

There have been ups and downs of course, feelings of disappointment when something doesn't work out and of achievement when something does work.

Dealing with training centres I've got to know many of the tutors much better. There have been phone calls and emails when someone has a concern, I've listened and tried to remain impartial and objective. It has shown to me how much MTI means to people, that we have something precious and special that requires care and nurturing.

I have always been proud to be part of MTI. It is the 'people' that make it so special. From my journey that began as an MTI student in 2002, there has always been support and encouragement along the way. I hope I have been able to give some in return.

I wish Earle Abrahamson and Tim Bartlett all the best as new Chair and Director, and I want to say 'thank you' to everyone, in particular Andy, Karen, Anna, Alistair, and Diana.