

## How to get noticed:

### Joining a board is a team sport:

As a search professional and the President/Founder of a search firm, I have been committed to presenting my clients with a diverse slate of qualified candidates. When it comes to board participation, women are underrepresented but I do believe with effort they can be proactive and earn the seat on a corporate board. To do this successfully, I compare it to being successful on a team sport. A successful team is a result of people working together, communicating well, showing tenacity and mutual respect, going after the opportunity and sharing with your team members.

Many highly qualified women and men are overlooked or never get on a company's radar for board opportunities and some are not prepared. With the emphasis on good corporate governance and on attracting independent directors, this is a good time to lay the ground work, become prepared and seek out that opportunity.

What are companies look for? Whether they are private or public companies, there are common qualities that run through both sectors. Operational experience with a proven track record is highly sought after followed by:

- Deep domain experience – could be specific functional experience as finance, marketing, business development, clinical
- Knowledge of good corporate governance
- Cultural fit with board members
- Character and integrity

Board participation at the private and public company level is a path that needs to be thought out, planned, and executed just as one prepares for a corporate, operational career. New areas of knowledge in corporate governance must be learned, visibility in your area of expertise must be gained and focused **networking with decision makers and existing board members** must be a priority. Getting the word out about your interest is important. Women so often focus on excellence in their functional roles within the work environment at the exclusion of networking opportunities.

After you have made the decision about your interest in serving on a board and have carved out time in your schedule, start the plan. A humbling experience is to write a **draft biographical summary** to evaluate where there are holes and gaps which can be filled and then fill them. This is your calling card and first impression to a company so it needs to be well written, concise, and focused on your area of expertise and accomplishments. As a foundation to serving on corporate boards, it is helpful and unselfish to **serve on a not-for-profit board** for which you have a passion. Most existing board members have stated that serving on a not-for-profit board is a great way to gain experience, showing your leadership and interacting with other leaders while giving back.

Another area that you have already excelled in is in your functional role within your work environment. What you have probably not done is to gain visibility for yourself. Becoming a leader in your field and **getting noticed** can be accomplished through a leadership involvement within the national trade organization, serving as chair of a subcommittee, publishing an article with your opinion, etc... These activities usually lead to speaking engagements and panel participation all of which put you on the leadership radar. These opportunities could be in your industry or a service organization.

As you develop relationships with other men and women who are in leadership positions, **form your own personal “board of directors”** to provide input, advice and support as you move toward your goal. No solid, on-going relationship is one way so give before you get and show that you are worth the time and energy investment. It could be that a board opportunity comes your way but you may not be the right person and you can pass it on.

Corporate boards are formulated in a variety of ways. There are board opportunities which are focused on specific functional skills and are often developed with representation from operations, finance, business development, marketing, clinical, commercialization and legal. There are also plenty of other opportunities to serve which are broader in scope and may be more in need of a member with experience in guiding a young company into growth.

Finally, from an executive search point of view, **take the calls**. The relationships with retained search professionals could be life long relationships and it is always a two way street. Ask about the searches on their plate and provide quality suggestions which would help them out. Believe me, proactive suggestions and referrals will not be forgotten. Also reach out to search professionals from both the top national firms as well as boutique firms as ours. We are constantly expanding our candidate pools. Boutique search firms often have board opportunities for smaller, private and public companies and these companies' criteria may not be focused on the top profile individuals at the Fortune 500 companies.

### **Joining a board as a team sport –**

Participation in sports has made a big impact on my life. Lessons learned by participating on teams have transferred to my business life. Working with others, working towards a goal, learning that it takes a diverse set of people with different skills to make a great team and having the resilience to keep trying are lessons learned.