

TIPS FOR YOUNGER BOARD MEMBERS

BY HELENE USHERWOOD

At Anderson Quigley, we support younger Board Members, recognising how organisations can benefit from the perspectives and energy that younger board members can offer. This includes helping to bridge the gap between generations, providing new perspectives on issues, to enabling organisations to adapt to a new way of working.

So why is it so difficult for younger people looking to make that move?

Many young people still believe they must have had a successful executive career before embarking on a Board role. That just isn't true. Boards are increasingly recognising that age-related diversity is crucial to their future success. Bringing new perspectives, being more digitally aware, and being more representative of the largest part of the workforce and customer base means that you are acutely aware of the issues affecting key stakeholders for that organisation. In the public sector, Boards must be more representative of the communities they serve if they are to continuously improve and innovate.

So, what can you do, as someone who may be younger than the average Board Member?

- **What can you offer?** I call this your "Value Add". Look at your experience and career achievements so far. Can you distil from those skills that the added value you could bring to a Board? For instance, if you are working in IT, what specialist skills have you developed that could be used in other organisations? Are there particular projects or programmes of work that demonstrate success in these areas?
- **Broaden your expertise.** If your current executive role is very specialist, try and get involved in projects of work outside of the day job. This enables you to bring breadth to your insights and knowledge. As a Board member, you will contribute to whole organisations agendas, so that breadth will come in useful.
- **Elevate your experience.** Does your executive role give you exposure to the Board or to input into a strategy? Can you ask for more of that exposure? If so, this will help elevate your operational expertise and make a positive contribution as a Board Member to a wider strategy.
- **Become a Trustee.** Often, for many, becoming a Trustee of a local organisation is the first step to becoming a Board Member. There are no formal qualifications or levels of experience that you must gain before you join a charity board, and you don't need to wait to be asked.

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- **Network with others.** When we talk about networking, we mean talking to those you work with or for (and beyond), explaining to them your future career ambitions of becoming a Board Member. Can they provide any guidance or advice? Can they help you to articulate your “Value Add”? Do they know the best places to search for these roles? Can they make introductions to key individuals on your behalf?
- **Connect with Recruiters.** There are any number of headhunters working on NED positions. They won't all be for you. Once you have defined what is going to be of interest to you, get in touch with those agencies you recognise as working with some of your favourite types of organisations. Make connections. Tell them what you are looking for and register your interest. If the headhunter doesn't have something for you right now, the chances are they will do in the near future.
- **Work your CV.** Your executive CV won't be right for Board roles. Take some time to read job descriptions and person specifications. Get a sense of the language that is being used in these documents. Translate that language to your own Board CV; use it to articulate how your experience can benefit them. For example, when discussing partnerships, the recruiting organisations may refer to them as key stakeholders.
- **No one said this would be easy.** Securing your first Board role can be wholly frustrating. Key to your success will be perseverance and resilience. Key qualities of any Board Member. Keep pushing on the doors, and they will open. Ask for feedback, use it to your best advantage and see each opportunity as an opportunity to refine your proposition.

Helene Usherwood specialises in appointing executive and non-executive directors in the NHS, not-for-profits, and national organisations. She established AQ's Board Practice, working across all sectors to appoint Chairs and Non-Executive Directors. As well as providing bespoke services, guidance and advice to her clients and candidates, she is highly motivated to guide and assist individuals who have not considered a non-executive opportunity before but whom have unique insights and skills to offer.

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