



## **How to Build an Effective Network for a Board Opportunity**

Networking is important, but networking effectively is more important. To build an effective Board network, you must first answer this question, “How do public company Boards find their members?” Surveys indicate that public companies find a majority of their Board candidates in one of three ways: (1) nominee identification by a Board nominating committee; (2) word of mouth and/or reputation in the industry; and (3) executive recruiting firms. With this information, you can begin to build a targeted network strategy.

### **Network to Build Relationships**

Effective networking is long term, genuine and meaningful. Networking is really another word for relationship building. It is not attending a one-time large and well-advertised event for a drink at the end of a long day. Stop wasting your time. Effective networking should instead be longer term opportunities that enable you to establish relationships with others who are talented, knowledgeable, and supportive. Networks are only as good as the people that are in them and the support they can give. Look for and join a few groups that meet regularly and have opportunities for substantive communications. Look at the members of these groups. They should be diverse in terms of experience and seniority. Building real relationships with people who are more experienced than you can help you find mentors and sponsors. Building real relationships with people who are less experienced can help you develop your advisory skills. You might find such a group by joining a non-profit board that is supporting a cause you care about or by joining a planning committee for a community event. In this way, your networking opportunity is also giving you valuable Board meaningful skills and experience. No matter what you do, remember to “listen and give” as much as you “talk and take.” You are attempting to build your reputation as a leader who can advise and collaborate, not execute and command.

### **Network to Build Your Reputation within Your Industry**

Joining a network that has some association to your profession and/or industry means that the network connections can share and enhance common goals, goodwill, commitment, and interests. Boards look for executives and professionals that have good reputations within their industries. Accordingly, without forgetting the rule above, i.e., finding opportunities to build relationships, seek to build networks within your industry. You can do this through industry associations and/or organizations. You can attend, plan and/or speak at industry conferences. To be meaningful, you should commit to appear at such events regularly. You can write articles for industry based journals. Whatever you do, be involved in a meaningful, visible and repetitive way.

### **Network to Build an Active On-Line Profile**

Your on-line reputation and visibility is a separate and important networking opportunity. In this regard, building and maintaining a meaningful and Board-focused LinkedIn profile is incredibly important. You should also join industry on-line groups, and actively (and thoughtfully) engage in on-line communication via LinkedIn Share and other industry specific online organizations. Board nominating committees and executive recruiters will often find Board candidates via LinkedIn. Seeking and providing endorsements via LinkedIn is also a form of networking. Do not forget the importance of connecting via social online media with friends and colleagues from university, clients, customers, former employers, etc.

### **Network to Build Your Confidence and Skills**

Seek opportunities to network where you can also build your confidence and skills. There are many Board related training programs offered by many different organizations. Make a list of the skills that you want to gain and research the programs that teach those skills. When you sign up for training programs, be strategic about it in terms of networking as well. In addition, seek leadership and



advisory opportunities in your community or with organizations and/or activities that interest you. Such involvement not only is a form of networking, but will also help build your confidence and skills for a Board role.

### **Network When You Are Not Networking**

Here is an important point that many people forget. Networking is not an isolated “to do” item that you put on your list to accomplish at networking events. Building your network is a daily effort that should be incorporated into the natural way that you interact with people and conduct your business. It is not a false way of constantly promoting yourself. It is in truly valuing your interaction with others and taking the time in the moment for meaningful interaction. Above all it is awareness. When someone asks you “how is it going?” – take the time to answer them with a bit of substance. Highlight just a few things that are going well and ask for input on challenges that you face. Remember to listen and give advice and support to others when they share things with you. These casual interactions will be meaningful in the moment and may also lead to opportunities for greater visibility in the future.

### **Network to Advise People That You Want to Serve On a Board**

When you are ready -- when you have the time, skills, and desire to serve on a board -- then make it happen by putting that desire out to your network. If you have managed your long term networking appropriately, you will be amazed by what opportunities and connections exist to help you find the right board to serve on.