

Board Appointments

UNITED KINGDOM

Board Search Resources Pack

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The Journey To a Successful Board Career Starts Here

A board appointment can be life and career changing. In fact, studies have shown that people who have Board Directorships are more appointable, earn more, are unemployed less and have better networks and connections. So, regardless of where you are in your career - starting out, considering retirement, wanting to future-proof your career, considering a career change, or you are an experienced executive - a board appointment must be part of your career plan and professional development.

The good and bad news

The good news is that 50% of organisations with boards recruit new board members each year, which means there are thousands and thousands of opportunities available across the UK. But, gaining a board appointment through traditional routes is a highly competitive exercise with there always being many more candidates than there are vacancies. Still, whilst the process is undoubtedly competitive, annually thousands of people successfully gain new appointments. You can too.

There is a better way

Most people go about finding and gaining a board appointment all wrong. They put their efforts in the wrong place and when that doesn't work, they do the same again, get frustrated, or quit. If this sounds like you or you can't find opportunities (or aren't getting appointed) then it is likely you are doing one of three things wrong.

Successful NON EXECUTIVE Directors (NEDs) on the other hand do things differently. They are clear about three things: 1. The organisations they are targeting, 2. Why they should be appointed to the boards of those organisations, and 3. How they will be appointed.

About this Resources Pack

This pack will go some way to helping you clarify these three things and map out your journey ahead, including what the three core pillars are for a board appointment, how to write a Board CV and cover letter and the questions you will be asked in a NED interview.

I want these resources to help you gain a board appointment regardless of your level of experience or scale of your aspirations (a paid, voluntary, commercial, government or a NfP board role) and whether it is your first, a subsequent, or a more significant board appointment that you desire.

Don't wait until it is too late - now is the time to begin. These resources and my advice are going to help you separate yourself from your competitors, provide the foundation for your success, and will help you "dare them not to appoint you". The end result being that a board appointment within 6 months should be your aspiration and a board appointment within 12 months should be your absolute expectation.

Let's get started



David Schwarz | CEO, Board Appointments



The Three Pillars of a Board Appointment

THIS IS WHAT SUCCESSFUL NON EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS KNOW.

Successful NEDs are clear about what role they want and can be appointed to. Yes, they can articulate the scope and scale of their aspirations, including how much they require to be remunerated and the industry they want to focus on. They can also name the organisation specifically. Without you also being able to do this your approach will quickly become reactive, unstructured, frustrating, and unsuccessful. So, defining your target - your Aspirations - is the first of three 'core pillars' of a board appointment.

The next thing successful NEDs are able to do is Articulate clearly what it is they offer their target's board or boards similar to it – the second 'pillar' of a board appointment. To do this you must understand what it is Chairs want to see in successful candidates and be able to succinctly state these formally and informally - both verbally and on paper. This will of course be a very different pitch to the one you give as an executive and may take some getting used to.

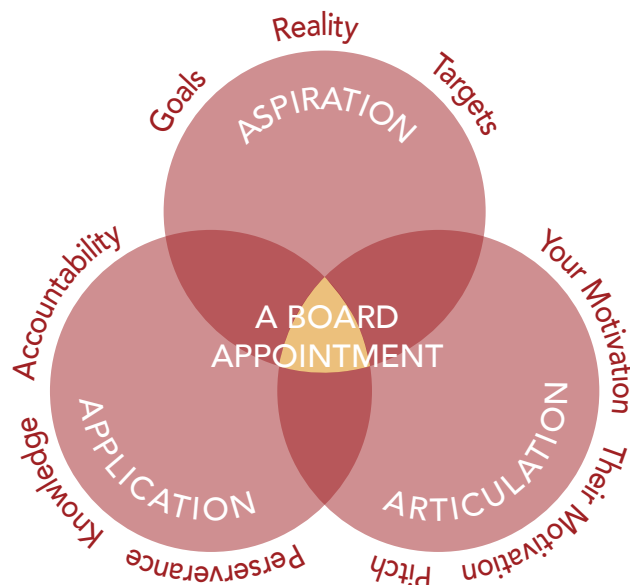
Finally, they understand how to use this knowledge to be appointed in 1 of only 4 ways:

1. Through personal connections
2. By directly approaching an organisation with an offer to help
3. Via a Recruiter or
4. Responding to an advertised opportunity.

They know that each of these routes requires different strategies and tactics - the final pillar: Application.

These three 'core pillars' (Aspiration, Articulation & Application) form the basis of everything we do at Board Appointments because we know that if our members get these right then they will separate themselves from their competitors and their journey to a board appointment will be quicker, more enjoyable, and more successful.

The three core pillars of a board appointment.



Where To Begin When You Don't Have Any Board Experience

One of the questions I get asked by people who are considering their first board appointment is how and whether their executive experience is relevant at board level. This is a great question to ask and goes some way to inform the way you articulate your value at board level.

A vast number of skills and level of experience are valued at board level. It is not just those with existing board experience or past CEOs who get appointed to boards, the vast majority of board members have neither past NED experience or weren't CEOs. But, let's be honest, not every organisation is going to value every skill-set and some organisations will require more board experience than others.

The key to your successful appointment begins by ensuring you balance your aspirations against the reality of your appointment. That is, ensuring that the sort of board you want to be appointed to will actually appoint you. If you can do this then you stand a far greater chance of becoming a NON EXECUTIVE Director.

The first thing to do is to clearly define what your primary skill set is. Many are tempted to state that they offer any number of highly transferable skills. They may, but by stating this they water down their pitch. So, it is of paramount importance for you to be clear on the primary skill you offer a board – whether it be finance, legal, HR, Change, IT, industry experience or something else.

The next thing to do is to articulate why this skill set is valuable at board level. This pitch is very different to your executive pitch and must address concerns and challenges that a board face. It can be surprisingly easy to do. To help you do this think about the primary drivers of a board. They are (but not limited to): risk, strategy, governance and growth or influence.

People often stall their journey to a board appointment because they are unclear about how or why their skills and (lack of) experience translate to a board. This is a good question to wrestle with, however, there is a better one to ask - 'What organisation would appoint me to their board?'

This is a far better question to ask because rather than focusing on your deficits (and we all have them) we focus on the positives. This, in turn, means you will be able to define a list of potential target organisations rather than a long list of organisations that won't appoint you.

Prior board experience is valuable but for many organisations, it is not crucial. If you balance your board aspirations against the reality of your appointment, then you will find a successful appointment.



What a Chair is Looking For

THE PERFECT BOARD CANDIDATE

After stripping away the contextual issues, in my experience, there are five core criteria that, regardless of the scope or scale of your aspirations, you must be able to address verbally and in writing in both formal and informal contexts. The combined value of these elements will result in your Board Profile and will answer the question you will be asked by Chairs, recruiters or Nominations Committees: 'Why should we appoint you to this board'. The summation of these elements will go some way to making you the perfect board candidate.

1. PRIOR GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCE: Despite many boards overemphasizing the value of past governance experience, it is still something that many Chair take comfort in – someone who has done the role before. For this reason, being able to demonstrate some form of governance experience – board or committee level experience – is really valuable when applying for a board role.

2. AN EXECUTIVE SKILL SET: What is your value at board level? Why do your skills matter in this context and why are they more valuable than one of your competitors with the same skills? These are the questions you must be able to answer clearly and effectively. Being unclear about this is a killer. So, be clear about what you have to offer and ensure that you can articulate it.

3. PERSONAL CONNECTIONS: Many organisations with boards don't need much prior governance experience or even particular skills represented. Instead, what they really want are your personal connections. The value of your personal connections should not be underestimated and they offer more to an organisation than you might imagine.

4. DEMONSTRABLE PASSION: NEDs and Chairs are passionate about one of three things; 1. What the organisation does, 2. What the organisation is or 3. How they can contribute. You must be able to share these passions – and be able to articulate them. As such, your passion must be demonstrable. In many cases, this passion can be manufactured. Simply engaging in a real way with the organisation and sector will allow you to do this. However, it will be difficult to do this convincingly if you don't start that journey early.

5. CULTURAL FIT: Cultural fit is a difficult one to define. In many ways, it is a catch-all of the four points above. However, it is also more than that. Cultural fit is one of the reasons that people are appointed via personal connections so often. In essence, being a good cultural fit means that you are going to work appropriately with the board and as such do not offer a risk to those appointing you.

There is, of course, no such thing as a perfect board candidate and there are countless reasons why you might not be appointed to a board. However, understanding what the 'appointment levers' are means that you can begin to address them and thereby increase your chance of successfully being appointed to a board.



Your NON EXECUTIVE CV

A Board CV is vastly different from your executive CV and writing one is the best place to begin when considering your first, or subsequent, board role. While there is no set template for the style or format, it must answer the central question any Chair/selection committee will want to know: 'Why should we appoint you?' For this reason, your Board CV must demonstrate your success at board level, be succinct, be readable and separate yourself from your competitors.

- 1. LENGTH:** In the vast majority of cases the length of your document doesn't matter. Some Executive Search Firms may demand your Board CV be no longer than 2 pages.
- 2. PHOTO:** Including a photo is perfectly acceptable, however, doing so can lead to discrimination based on your age, sex, disability or race - I recommend against it.
- 3. BOARD PROFILE:** Your profile should never be aspirational. It should pitch you at board level and outline any board level experience you have had - not necessarily just your board appointments. Writing in the first person is fine but your profile should not exceed one paragraph.
- 4. BOARD & EXECUTIVE SUCCESS:** This section evidences your governance or strategic successes and things you are particularly proud of achieving in your executive or board career. Again, please be as specific as possible and include statistics or numerical evidence wherever possible.
- 5. NON EXECUTIVE & COMMITTEE EXPERIENCE:** In an executive resume this section comes after details of your executive career; here it comes first. This section should outline in chronological order your current and past NON EXECUTIVE or committee experience. Where you have been on board sub-committees or executive committees, these can also be included.
- 6. EXECUTIVE BOARD EXPERIENCE:** Here you can include the names of any committees or board roles you have held as part of your executive career.
- 7. EXECUTIVE CAREER:** Whilst this section will begin with the same information as would be found in your executive resume, it should be much shorter and only include headline successes – ideally strategic ones that can be evidenced. Also include information about the scale of your company and your responsibility within as this quantifies your experience.
- 8. QUALIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** This will likely replicate the content of your executive resume.
- 9. EXTRA-PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES & INTERESTS:** A list of any professional activities or personal interests that cannot be incorporated in the sections above e.g: languages, awards, charity work, memberships or personal successes.
- 10. REFEREES:** Many Chairs/selection committees head straight to this section. They are interested to know if they know your referees. Your list should include the highest level genuine referees you can muster. Do not include their contact details.

Writing your Board CV can be almost as valuable as the end product as the process will help you to articulate your successes and as such the sort of organisations that will value them.



Your Board Application Cover Letter

In the past, cover letters were often deemed to be good enough if they simply introduced you and your interest in the role advertised and then referred to your attached CV. As a result they were often too brief, functional at best, added no additional value and for this reason were rarely read.

In a competitive environment when there are far more candidates than opportunities, cover letters form a crucial part of the NON EXECUTIVE application process, regardless of whether you are responding to an advertisement, using a recruiter or approaching a company directly. A good cover letter can only be written after conducting significant research and should include 5 paragraphs:

1. PASSION FOR THE ROLE: Not a statement about your understanding of the company, where you saw the job advertised or what the role is that you are applying for. Instead it must demonstrate your passion for the role - based on the research you have done. It is where your earlier research will pay real dividends. 'Based on your research what are the needs at board level and how can you help?'

2. YOUR PROFILE: Insert the profile you should have already written as part of your CV. It summarises your experience, your success, your networks, your achievements and your education. It is your answer to the question 'Why should the board appoint me?'

3. ADDRESS GAPS OR CONCERNS: It is not uncommon for boards to disregard an applicant because of a misinformed interpretation or assumption based on a poorly crafted CV. In essence, this paragraph should briefly allay any fears the Chair or nominations committee might have with regard to your application so that they do not discount you. Conflicts – real or perceived? Seem too busy to contribute? Unemployed? Career Break? These should all be addressed.

4. SOMETHING MEMORABLE: Tell them about your extra-professional activities. The things outside of your professional career. It might not get you appointed but it might be the difference between being remembered or forgotten and therefore getting an interview or not.

5. PASSION FOR THE COMPANY: This is one of the most important sections but different from your opening paragraph. Again, based on your research this summary demonstrates your understanding of what the company does, your connectedness, intelligence and strategic approach. Most importantly, it demonstrates your passion for the objectives or goals of the organisation. It is a strong way to finish any cover letter. 'Why are you applying to this organisation as opposed to another similar one?'

One page, focused on what you know about the organisation, your research, their challenges and how you can help - be specific and 'dare them not to appoint you'.



The Interview Questions You Should Expect and Be Prepared For

Every board interview is different. Some are formal (with the whole board) and some are done in a coffee shop (with just the Chair or consultant). You should consider what your response would be to the following questions prior to any interview.

GENERAL OPENING QUESTIONS

- Tell us about the synergies between your experience and that which is required by this board?
- Why does this role appeal to you? Why are you considering it now?
- What is your opinion of our organisation? What should we be doing differently?

GOVERNANCE STYLE

- What are the warning signs that usually precede a breakdown in good governance?
- What do you think the board's role is in relation to development of strategy?
- How do you think the board should engage with executive management?
- At board level there is a point at which challenge can go too far. What are your thoughts on this?
- What do you consider to be your role as a NON EXECUTIVE director?
- What would your relationship with our Chair be like? How would you support the Chair's role?
- How 'hands-on' are you as a NON EXECUTIVE? How interested are you in the operational detail?
- How would you describe your style as a NON EXECUTIVE director?

COMMERCIAL/BUSINESS ACUMEN

- What relationships/contacts do you have with our key stakeholders?
- How would you recommend we achieve our purpose and financial goals?
- What could be further commercial opportunities for an organisation like ours?
- What do you think of our structure and governance arrangements?
- What are the current economic threats and opportunities?
- How will your background and experience add value to our organisation?

THE ORGANISATION

- What do you perceive to be our current strategic considerations?
- Who do you consider to be our key stakeholders and how may that change in the future?
- What do our members/clients/stakeholders expect from us? How can the board support them?
- What do you consider to be the key challenges facing us in the next 5-10 years?

ADMINISTRATIVE

- This role is remunerated/unremunerated. Are you comfortable with this?
- Could you confirm that you are able to commit to the time required to perform effectively as a board member?
- Do you have any concerns about joining this board? Any conflicts of interest?
- Is there anything we didn't ask you that you wanted to talk to us about?
- Do you have any questions for us?



How Board Appointments Can Help

Board Appointments has cemented its reputation as a leading International NED career development and board vacancy advertising firm. We have helped thousands of people gain a board appointment. This is how we measure our success.

We help people get appointed by leveraging over 15 years experience of putting people on boards and leverage our unique 5 Step Board Appointment Plan that walks our members through every element of the board appointment journey - including every strategy and tactic you need to get appointed as quickly as possible.

THE 5 STEP BOARD APPOINTMENT PLAN

This model and our associate training programs offer, together with the templates, documents



and training, our members an unparalleled and achievable structure that helps them achieve their board aspirations - regardless of the scope or scale of their aspirations or whether they are an existing or aspiring NED.

With pleasure... as a result, I believe, using your advice and the Board CV style and content you worked on with me, I have now received an appointment as a NON EXECUTIVE director ... I asked what attracted their attention to me, to which they responded "the style, format and clearly articulated content of the CV". Rodney, Executive Member

Thank you, since you re-worked my LinkedIn profile and NED CV I have had a lot more hits and no end of approaches for roles. Michael, Access+ Member

'Thanks to my Board Appointments membership my NON EXECUTIVE career is well underway. I secured two NON EXECUTIVE board positions this year!' Sandra, Executive Member

'Thanks to your advice and support I now sit on two boards!' Hamza, Executive Member



The Most Valuable Thing You Can Do

People will 'peg' you in the first instance by focusing on immediately graspable facts and, ignorant of context, are unable to hold differing views simultaneously (it is called the Fundamental Attribution Error). This means that if you don't tell people you are looking for a board appointment, they will peg you some other way and not be able to help. So tell people you are looking for one.

However, if you do this you need to be ready to answer the subsequent question 'What sort of board appointment do you want?' Here you need to be specific, that is be able to name the organisations you are targeting. Anything but will demonstrate you to be poorly thought through, opportunistic and unclear about how you can help at board level.

Beyond being clear about what boards you want and can be appointed to you must be able to articulate the reason you should be appointed to your target boards or boards just like them. Finally, know how you are going to get appointed. 80% of people are appointed via a personal connection or by directly approaching organisations. If you are spending all of your time working with recruiters or responding to adverts then you have to consider whether this is the best use of your time.

YOUR GAME PLAN

Don't wait for the 'perfect' time to start your board career. There are six simple things you can do today to gain a board appointment. They are:

1. Tell people you are looking for a board appointment - otherwise they won't know and won't be able to help. It really is the most valuable thing you can do.
2. Put just an hour a month into your diary - to devote yourself to the journey ahead. It is easy to get sidetracked by life if you don't.
3. Define a list of target organisations - the first thing for you to do. Know which organisations you want and can be appointed to.
4. Know your value - boards require different skills, so regardless of your scope or scale of your experience you must be able to articulate your value at board level.
5. Understand how you will be appointed - the best way to separate yourself from your competitors is by developing opportunities directly or through new contacts.
6. Write a Board CV - it is dramatically different to your executive CV and will make a massive difference to your success.

ABOUT DAVID SCHWARZ

David is the Founder and CEO of Board Direction (AU) and Board Appointments (UK). He was an international head-hunter and a NON EXECUTIVE recruiter, where he interviewed and assessed thousands of NON EXECUTIVES, placing hundreds into some of the most significant public, private and NFP roles in the world. He is a published author and a regular keynote speaker on the board appointment process. He now works exclusively with individuals to help them gain board appointments.

For more information visit: www.boardappointments.co.uk

