

Network Leverage & Enhancement

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As an accomplished business leader, you have spent a career developing relationships. So it might come as a surprise to learn that when it comes time to pursue a board seat, you may not have the network you need.

That's because the kinds of people who will support you in getting that board position are not necessarily the ones who supported you in your career. To date, your network may be filled with executives, clients, and colleagues – but now, you'll need to round out your network with board members, investors, governance influencers, and CEOs. And, some of your current network may include these targets, but you may need to stretch to get connected if this is a new arena for you.

Fortunately, you're ready.

From Preparation to Outreach

Along the journey to a board seat, we have seen a progression through a number of steps.

- First, you learned the Steps on the Journey.
- Next, you built your Executive Brand Package.
- Then, you polished your Executive Presence.
- After that, you clarified the key messages in your Thought Leadership.
- Last, you considered your Personal Positioning.

Having done those things, it's almost like you've completed the packaging, and now you've created the product that is you.

And so now it's time to go to market.

In other words, you've prepared yourself to introduce yourself as a board candidate, and now you're going to put all that good preparation to work.

What will that outreach look like? That depends on what you want. In this sixth of six steps on the journey, you need to think specifically about what kind of a board seat you want – the one that is uniquely suited to you.

Nancy Sheppard, Executive Coach and Chief Journey Advisor for Athena Member Aspiring Directors, suggests asking yourself these questions in order to build a bit of a strategic plan.

- What kind of a board do you want to be on?

- What kind of industries interest you?
- What are five companies on whose mission and boards you'd love to serve?
- What do you need to do in order to connect into those kinds of companies?
- What research might you have to do?
- Who can help you, and how can you reach out to those people?

This kind of thinking helps you orient to what you really *want*. You might also take some time to consider what you might be *missing*.

- Do you have the experience needed for the board seats you want?
- Do you have any conflicts of interest?
- Do you have the time and your management support necessary to serve?
- If you were *really* honest about the board you'd *secretly love* to be on...whether or not you're sure it's possible...what would it be?

With the answers to these questions, you may find yourself adding or subtracting some names from your list. And now it's time to start some outreach.

- Who do you know?
- Who do you need to know?
- How can you connect with the boards and companies that are your targets?

These questions, she notes, are an ongoing process. You'll keep building out your "allies" as you progress in identifying new targets. She encourages member to "get started" and to go out and share your interest so that you can be on the top of minds of those who can consider you for, or refer to you, opportunities.

This is where all the good work you've done to this point pays off.

You'll use the "Value Proposition" developed for your new Bio and Resume from your Executive Brand Package to introduce yourself to board members you've not yet met.

You'll use your refined skills in Executive Presence so you're making a strong impression.

You might look for opportunities to deliver presentations or submit publications to share your thought leadership. Think TED Talks, LinkedIn Groups, and networking events.

You might tailor your personal positioning to each new connection so it's relevant to the person before you, whether they are someone who can help you get on a board, make an introduction for you, or simply give you some guidance.

In all of these ways, you will be building allies for your board search.

From Outreach to Opportunity

As you know from the other newsletters in this series, the Athena Alliance has specifically designed a process for getting to the board seat you seek, and they know that you will be even more successful if you don't have to do this alone. If this step seems intimidating at all, it's definitely worth bringing in a coach who can ask the right questions and even advise you or share their knowledge from working with other leaders. Not only will you feel more confident that you're doing the right things, but you will also save time and be sure the time you do invest will be time well-spent.

For instance, Nancy Sheppard coaches leaders in thinking about the deeper questions and helping them articulate what they really want with a specific opportunity such as:

- What kind of due diligence do you have to do?
- *Why* do you want to be on *this* board?
- What's important to you about being on a board?
- How can you help this company, and how can you be of value to them?
- Are you a good fit for the board culturally? Is it a good fit for your personality? How should you look at companies or their board to be sure they're the right fit for you?
- And what kind of research do you need to do to find out?

She also prepares them for the interview process and answers questions like,

- What are the most important things to remember in any board interview?
- What scenarios might I encounter in the interview process?
- How is a board different than the process for an executive position?
- What tips will help ensure the interview goes well?

She even role plays mock interviews with board candidates so they go into the interview feeling calm, competent and confident – and so they get the board seat they want.

Success Story

To understand the impact of Nancy's coaching, listen to how [Nancy Vitale](#), Co-Founder and Managing Partner at Partners for Wellbeing, and former CHRO for Genentech, describes her experience.

"Nancy helped me re-frame my approach to networking for both my business as well as for board opportunities. Nancy helped me to be more targeted in how I leverage my network thoughtfully for these two distinct needs. I am now approaching my reach outs to potential clients with a different mindset of providing valuable support and solutions to problems they have vs. "selling" my services. I am also more confident in leveraging the executives in my network for potential board opportunities as I continue to grow my visibility through speaking engagements and other external contributions."

How about you? Is it time you leveraged your network and expanded your opportunities?