

Three “Lanes” on the Road to a Board Seat

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If you've been on this journey from the beginning, you know that the road to a board seat has at least six steps:

- 1 – The Journey Planning Strategy
- 2 – Your Executive Board Package
- 3 – Voice and Presence
- 4 – Thought Leadership and Presentation
- 5 – Personal Positioning and PR Strategy
- 6 – Network Leverage and Enhancement.

We've talked about all of those steps, and you may be working on them as you move down this path. It really is a journey; it takes time, and you don't have to do it alone. Remember the Athena Alliance is there to guide you. Their processes are uniquely designed to help you be successful. You can explore membership opportunities here: www.AthenaAlliance.org

Now, though, as you move along the journey, we need to explore your experience from a couple of new angles.

Coco Brown, CEO of the Athena Alliance, believes there are three big themes on this journey to a board seat. You might think of them as "lanes" on the path – three areas you can move into while simultaneously moving forward. Those three themes are:

1. You
2. Your Network
3. Your Learning

To date, we've been focused on YOU – specifically by stopping at the six points you've learned so far and doing the "inner work" needed to be ready for a board position. Walking this path has meant truly and deeply connecting with who you are – the stories you tell, the way you think about yourself, and the way you want to present yourself. Perhaps until now, you've thought of yourself as climbing a career ladder, but now it's time to think about yourself as an overarching steward of business. You need that perspective to be successful in board service, so you can operate across an entire company. You have to think about yourself differently now and how you bring yourself

to that space. You have to understand yourself differently. That is all a journey of its own.

But there are two other “lanes.”

What we need to do next is look at your network, and then we’ll look at your ongoing learning and what else will shore up your readiness for a board seat.

Ready? Let’s switch lanes.

Traveling Companions – Your Network

On your board journey as in life, the road may sometimes feel long, but you don’t have to go it alone. You have traveling companions.

This is your network.

Of course, you have a professional network. You’ve cultivated it for years. You have relationships with peers within your company, function, industry and areas of expertise. But even if your network is rich, deep, and varied, it may not be the network you need on your journey to a board seat.

When you are looking for board positions, you are connecting to a different world.

Here are some of the people you may now need to add to your network.

- **Mentors.** Many executives discover that as they grow up in their careers, they move from being mentored to becoming a mentor. But if the journey to a board seat is new to you, it’s time to be the one getting mentoring once again. This is one area where the Athena Alliance excels – it is filled with a network of experienced board members and other leaders who are walking the journey to a board seat with you. Talking with them can give you the insider knowledge you need to find the shortcuts on the journey – or to navigate the challenges, sustain yourself as you go the distance, or keep up the pace.
- **Board Members.** In your network, you’ll want to get connected with more board members in general – not just for mentoring, but for connections.
- **CEOs.** Many leaders seeking a board seat are also seeing the need to expand their careers by taking bigger positions. Executive committee positions. C-level positions. Having CEOs in your network can help you see new opportunities and grow yourself in new ways, as well as connect you to the executives who know what’s needed on a board and can advise you on your journey.

- **Investors.** Especially if you are seeking a board seat in start-up companies, you will want to become versed in the world of venture capital. Adding investors to your network will help you do that.

Remember: in order to get into a board room you have to network with a different ecosystem. Give yourself the chance to get connected – stop thinking you have to take the journey to a board seat alone, and build your network along the way instead.

Taking the Next Step

Whether you are simply exploring the journey to a board seat or racing down the path, a good exercise at this point is to stop and take stock of your network.

How many people do you know who fall into the categories above?

How might you start expanding your network?

Start a collection of names and ideas. Think about different roles, companies, industries and levels of people you might want to know – and whom you want to know you. In our next edition in this series, you will learn about three specific kinds of relationships to build with your new and expanding network.

If you'd like to see our next article in this series, "Journey to a Board Seat," [click here](#).