

# Planning Your Journey

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They say a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but if you're planning a long and successful journey, you should also have a strategy.

That's definitely true if you are on the journey to a board seat.

As you know from our introductory articles, women who are pursuing a seat on a corporate board are often at a disadvantage.

Board seats tend to go to men and to those on the "inner circle" – a situation that tends to leave women out. That's why The Athena Alliance was created. CEO Coco Brown and her team present women with a path to a board seat, and it is a journey that begins not just with a single step, but a strategy.

They call it the Journey Planning Strategy. In today's issue of the Journey to a Board Seat Series, I want to share with you my personal experience with the Journey Planning Strategy – a benefit offered by The Athena Alliance that instantly gives women on the journey a great start.

## **Orientation**

Starting the journey to a board seat can be daunting.

- You've never done it before.
- You don't know what's involved.
- You have no idea whether you're qualified.
- You don't know what gaps you need to fill to be qualified.
- You wonder if you can be successful either way.

How much easier it is to start a journey if you have a guide.

At the Athena Alliance, your guide is your Member Success Manager. Member Success Managers serve as a "Personal Chief of Staff." Athena Alliance Members are encouraged leverage these partners to access the full value that Athena can offer, from coaching and

events to meaningful connections to other members, and it all starts at the beginning of the journey.

When I was first introduced to my Member Success Manager, she did two things for me.

First, she gave me an overview of the stages of the journey I'd be taking. To review these from our last article, the six steps on the journey are these:

- **Step 1 – Planning Your Journey Strategy**
- **Step 2 – Creating Your Executive Brand Package**
- **Step 3 – Developing Voice and Presence**
- **Step 4 – Identifying Thought Leadership and Presentation**
- **Step 5 – Personal Positioning and PR Strategy**
- **Step 6 – Network Leverage and Enhancement**

She introduced me to The Athena Alliance website, [www.AthenaAlliance.org](http://www.AthenaAlliance.org), and shared with me their considerable resources, including a library of relevant articles and dozens of other women on the journey, many of whom were open to conversations with me and some of whom were seasoned board members willing to help me on my way.

Having given me the map and assuring me I could get in touch anytime, my Member Success Manager launched me on Step One – Planning My Journey Strategy.

### **The Strategy Sessions**

Planning my Journey Strategy again sounded worrisome. How could I plan a strategy for a journey I'd never taken? Where would I even begin?

Again, The Athena Alliance is designed specifically to guide women down the path with experienced experts virtually leading the way. My Member Success Manager handed me directly into the care of my first coach: Chief Journey Advisor Nancy Sheppard.

A seasoned board member herself, as well as an Athena veteran and executive coach, Nancy had the skills and the system for helping me discover what it would take for me to get a board seat.

In our first meeting, Nancy got to know me and asked a series of questions.

- *Why do you want to be on a board?*
- *What kind of a board interests you?*
- *What qualifications do you have, and what do you need?*

She read my bio, explored my social media profiles, and asked about my references and connections.

In our second meeting, Nancy presented me with a Plan for my Journey Strategy. By the time our conversation was over, I had her honest assessment about what assets I had that would make me successful in obtaining a board seat and where I needed to fill in some blanks.

In other words, she answered all of those questions I had at the start of my journey. I knew now that even though I'd never been on this journey, I was in good hands. I understood what was involved; I knew where I was and wasn't qualified; and I had confidence that by taking the Athena Alliance Journey to a Board Seat, I could be successful.

You can hear how other members experienced this thorough launch of their journey by listening to them describe their experience in this phase:

*"I had a wonderfully motivating journey planning call. I am grateful to have been paired with someone in an active leadership position in [my specific] sector. She tailored the journey overview to focus on helpful tips for me to get the most out of my journey. I wasn't sure what to expect out of the first call, but our time certainly surpassed anything I envisioned. She injected such well-crafted role-playing exercises to more deeply explain the goals and purpose of my network and visibility session. I left feeling energized and ready to take full advantage of what the Athena program has to offer."*

Erin DeCesare  
CTO of ezCater

## **Next Steps for You**

If you haven't already visited the Athena Alliance website, take a moment to explore: [www.AthenaAlliance.org](http://www.AthenaAlliance.org). There you'll get a sense of the resources they offer, from research to services and events. Even if joining a board is a distant dream of yours or a new interest, you will begin to discover what's ahead on this journey – and what's ahead may be an exciting adventure in your career.

And an expert tip: you may not yet have a Chief Journey Advisor like Nancy to build your plan, but by comparing Member Profiles and reading through The Athena Alliance website, you can ask yourself the same kinds of questions Nancy asked me and start sketching a plan for your journey to a board seat. You already have a lot of the pieces – just take some time to put them together, and you'll be able to lead yourself down this path.

## **Coming Soon**

Watch for our next article in the Journey to a Board Seat Series, in which I will share with you how to package yourself as a potential board member with your Executive Board Package: The Four Must-Haves of Your Personal Brand.

P.S. Here again is the website for The Athena Alliance: [www.AthenaAlliance.org](http://www.AthenaAlliance.org)

As always, I send my best to you. If I can help you in any way, or if you'd like to network your way into success, please reach out anytime! I'd be delighted to hear from you.