

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

To: Competent Boards Webinar Audience

**Subject: Answered Questions From ‘Becoming an Exceptional Board Director Candidate’ Webinar Hosted on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

---

To Webinar Attendees:

Please find below answers to questions posed during the webinar on April 1<sup>st</sup> and feel free to reach out with any further questions.

**1. Question:** *“How do you handle cultural differences where some cultures are more circumspect in self-promotion?”*

- **Answer:** Yes, understood that different cultures have their norms as it pertains to what is viewed as acceptable vs. what is not when it comes to self-promotion. I think of Scandinavian countries as a great example of this. These local factors definitely come into play when deciding on how to market yourself, but I have always found, not matter what region or geography, the concept of *‘inbound content marketing’* works very well. This concept of sharing information and teaching what you know allows you to establish yourself as an expert and trusted source. You are essentially marketing yourself through sharing and teaching of concepts and best practices. Sharing of information ⇒ establishing yourself as an expert ⇒ building of trust in your abilities ⇒ top of mind for opportunities. Check out my article [‘The Once Taboo World of Board Director Marketing’](#) or Chapter 12 of my [book](#) for more ideas and concepts on this topic.

**2. Question:** *“What do you have for a young professional that might be lacking ‘years of experience’ and a senior role, but is looking to provide a unique perspective to the organization. Have you come across a great application from a young person? What stood out?”*

- **Answer:** Great question and quite timely. I immediately think of three areas to fully answer your question:

- Starting Now: Most professionals who have Board Directorship on their minds think that this is for the future and when the time is right, they will get started. I like for professionals to think more *'parallel'* vs. *'serial'* when it comes to this topic – in other words, work on creating your Board Director branding well in advance of when you plan on starting your search. For most, it takes months or even years to get this packaging right, so run these exercises in parallel to your current endeavors. If you want help on where to focus these efforts and condense the timeframe, check out my coaching and advisory program entitled [\*'Becoming an Exceptional Board Director Candidate Course'\*](#) (scroll down on the linked page to the offering with this title). This is the real deal in terms of a candidate *'packaging'* themselves properly for serious Board consideration and can shave years off of the timeline for landing a compensated Board seat. The PDF in this area of the webpage will give you additional details, as well.
- Board-Level Experience: Remember, Board-Level experience includes interaction with the Board in any way, even creating documentation or supplying of data that will be presented by someone else to the Board. At any stage of your career, you have the opportunity to get involved in major initiatives within an organization. Specifically search these out, even looking for those that are being monitored by the Board or are considered transformational for the organization (yes, the Board will be watching these, too...). An article you may find helpful is [\*'7 Steps To Create a Killer Board Document'\*](#) as it has a further breakdown of the Board-Level experience area.
- Project Management: Again, along the lines of getting involved, taking on initiatives, even running important projects, can have a tremendous effect on early-career individuals with future Board aspirations. For more details on this thought process, see my article [\*'Project Management's Tie To Strong Leadership.'\*](#)

**3. Question:** *“If your Board and Board-Level experience is with not-for-profits and government agencies, do you put this upfront into the Board Profile Summary or just in the balance of the document?”*

- **Answer:** Regardless of the entity type your Board experience is in (public, private, or nonprofit), the content inclusion and order should stay the same within your Board Documents. For much more detail on this, see my article [\*'7 Steps To Create a Killer Board Document'\*](#).

**4. Question:** *“What if the executive search firm you work with uses a different approach than your method?”*

- This is a great question and one I get often. My first response is that before an executive search firm is approached by someone seriously looking to land a Board seat, they should first go through their own personal exercise of packaging themselves properly. Why? Because it forces many of the major components of representing themselves properly to be worked out during their own creation of their branding and packaging. It is all too obvious when Board Documents have been created solely by another entity – they simply do not resonate. Additionally, all of the correlations of personal values, personality traits, etc. can be missed when a more mechanical approach to this packaging exercise is taken. The way I see it, when a Board candidate is branded and packaged properly, a majority of the opportunities they encounter will be due to their own efforts, not search firms. In the best of all scenarios, it can be a combination of the two working together, but a savvy Board candidate needs to have their own packaging, ready to fully represent themselves first and foremost.

**5. Question:** *“Should a Board Document be max 1 page or could it be longer?”*

- **Answer:** Although it is commonly agreed that your Board Document as well as Board Bio should be *'no longer than two or three pages'* each, what I believe this rule-of-thumb should actually state is, *"one page is awesome, two pages is ok, three pages is debatable, and four+ pages is unacceptable."* In my experience, keeping your Board Document to one page and your Board Bio to one page not only satisfies the requirement of *'readability,'* but also shows that you are inherently concise, able to get to the point quickly, and that you understand time is valuable. (more on this topic here: [7 Steps To Create a Killer Board Document](#))

**6. Question:** *“Do you advise to send out spontaneous applications to land a Board seat?”*

- **Answer:** Having your Board Documents *'out there'* on different placement and recruitment sites is ok, but use this as your backup, not your primary approach. Many of the smaller organizations that claim to get you a Board seat are smoke and mirrors, only looking to get their monthly or yearly fee from you. Remember, you are solely responsible for landing your Board seat, so take the reins on this one. Of course utilize all viable outlets possible, but know that there are many Board candidates that have taken the route of only having their credentials and availability posted on various sites that led to a decade without even a single bite...

7. **Question:** *“Does what you are saying relate to both nonprofit and for-profit organizations?”*

- **Answer:** Absolutely. Although some nonprofit organizations may find this over the top, if there is some sort of vetting and selection process it will likely get you a ‘yes’ to join the Board. For me, I don’t view the once-seated Director time commitment as well as overall commitment to be different whether on a nonprofit, private, or public company Board. Of course there are different requirements and regulations depending on entity type, but a Board Member’s commitment should remain the same. I go into much detail on this topic throughout my [book](#).

8. **Question:** *“For nonprofit Boards, I am increasingly finding that fundraising experience is a top priority and ability they are looking for. I am not seeing that reflected in your presentation.”*

- **Answer:** A twofold answer to this:
  - For many shortsighted nonprofits, the only reason you are in a Board seat is to generate revenue through donations, either through a give, get, or combined ‘*give or get*’ model. These organizations are for the most part missing the point of Board Directorship. Yes, a common additional requirement of nonprofit Board Directorship includes the ability to donate to the organization, but I will take a dedicated and disciplined Board Member, with the ability to generate donations through their network as well as through their succinct understanding of the organization’s mission and strategy, over a ‘*hero*’ Board Member with a checkbook, any day of the week.
  - In my expertise area of Board architecture, there is definitely a need for having fundraising expertise on most nonprofit Boards, especially someone who is versed and experienced to lead the Development Committee. For detailed information on how a nonprofit Board that is dependent on donations, fundraising, and sponsorships can successfully structure themselves, see Chapter 8 in my [book](#).

9. **Question:** *“Regarding organization’s values, when considering applying for a Board position, you often have very little inside view. How can you make your own opinion on the organization’s values, beyond what they say they are?”*

- **Answer:** Typically, other than what is posted, you won’t have much more of an idea of how a Board is specifically ‘*living*’ their values, but it is almost always possible to know what they say their values are (most commonly posted on company websites). The main point of the values discussion is to a) know what YOUR personal values are and why they are important to you, b) look for values that match in the companies you want to serve, and then c) do your research to

see how the values are being *'lived'* by those that are entrusted to protect them – the Board.

**10.Question:** *“Do you find that serving on nonprofit Boards rules people out for for-profit Boards?”*

- **Answer:** Absolutely not. Most Board careers, including my own, have started though the nonprofit kickoff point and can continue to run in parallel to paid and for-profit Boards. This is the easiest way to get some experience to list in the *'Board and Board Committee'* area of your Board Document. I am not suggesting to join a nonprofit for only this reason, as you want to be sure that you are passionate about the nonprofit's mission, but know there is a larger vision of how you can leverage this service for a larger picture.

**11.Question:** *“Do you believe that Board Documents are required as well for Board positions for French companies?”*

- **Answer:** Similar to my answer to question 4, there are two purposes of completing your Board Documents: a) going through the exercise of knowing what you are about and how you want to convey yourself, and b) being able to wow the group vetting you to get the point across that not only do they want you, they need you! Having said this, I say “yes,” proper Board Documents are a must for any serious Board Director.

**12.Question:** *“I am a foresight expert. Much of my work has been part of the anticipatory process for risks such as pandemics, climate change, cyber risks, etc. What value would this bring to Boards?”*

- **Answer:** This is expertise and experience that is hugely valuable, but the importance is how you package it. For example, standalone, I would view this more as a Board Advisor or consultant role solely ...but it doesn't need to be. What you need to do is correlate this skill set and experience to your 1 major and 3 minors discussed during the webinar presentation (page 6). This way you are showing how your experience is packaged within a much bigger viewpoint AND you bring this focused experience simultaneously to the table housed within a Board Committee.

**13.Question:** *“Particularly liked your material Mark on modern strategy. I welcome any further insights on the application of these guiding principles in having the agility and resilience more increasingly demanded.”*

- **Answer:** Being a lifelong student of strategy, I have lots to mention on this topic – too much for this Q&A, unfortunately. If you are interested in having a deeper

discussion, we can further discuss the all-important process overlay. Feel free to reach out. Also, see Chapter 5, *'The Role of Strategy,'* in my [book](#).

**14. Question:** *"How do you position yourself if you've been an executive mostly with pre-public companies?"*

- **Answer:** Your particular positioning is no different than any other background or experience level! When it comes to documenting, let the proper format of your Board Documents drive how you list the content. When it comes to marketing, find the best forums for your inbound content marketing strategy. Much to talk about on this topic, which is why I was almost forced to build my formal Board candidate packaging program (['Becoming an Exceptional Board Director Candidate Course'](#)) - scroll down on the linked page to the offering with this title). Properly correlating your expertise, experience, and proof (certifications), otherwise known as your *'career trifecta,'* for Board leadership can be done with any background or experience level. Also, know that you are not limited to certain size or entity type organizations, regardless of your current industry, industry vertical, or title.

**15. Question:** *"There is lots of discussion on the value of diversity on Boards. However, frequently I hear the comment that we have to make women think and act more like men (i.e. take more risk, etc.)."*

- **Answer:** You do not want to serve on any Board or next to any Board Director that feels this way or openly states this. The whole point of varying backgrounds, experiences, etc. is to foster diversity of perspective leading to diversity of thought, ultimately leading to sound and well-thought out conclusions. Avoid scenarios where you feel this is being stifled as it disrupts otherwise healthy cultures and increases risk to the organization. Chapter 9 in my [book](#) discusses at-length certain approaches Boards can take to architect proper diversity into their structure.

**16. Question:** *"Given the current circumstances, how do you see the role of the Board in terms of crisis management as a strategic activity?"*

- **Answer:** This is a great and timely question. It is without a doubt that in today's coronavirus crisis, the Board's involvement in crisis management AND strategic activity is a must. In fact, the best Boards have always been involved in these areas even before a major crisis, albeit with an understanding of exactly where they fit without breaching the *'noses in, fingers out'* Board mantra. Further to exactly your question, *'crisis management as a strategic activity,'* for me this is an absolute requirement and has ties to both risk and governance for any Board. Many Boards, however, have not adopted this principle and will sometimes state

that “*we cannot plan for every crisis...*” This comment misses the mark, as it is more about the process than anything else. For next month, know that I am currently in the process of scheduling a webinar that will touch on exactly this topic - you may find it interesting. Assuming no changes, registration should be posted within my April ‘*Across The Board*’ newsletter – if you like, you can sign up for the newsletter [here](#)).

I thank everyone once again for joining Helle and I for our webinar and I hope to keep in touch with all of you. If you would like to keep in touch with me and see what I am up to, feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn and also [sign up](#) for my ‘*Across The Board*’ monthly Board Director, Board Advisor, C-Level, and Business Newsletter reaching 26,000+ business leaders in over 70 countries with articles focused on leadership, strategy, and governance topics.

Best regards,

Mark A. Pfister

[mark@PfisterStrategy.com](mailto:mark@PfisterStrategy.com)

+ 1 (917) 710-0803

[www.PfisterStrategy.com](http://www.PfisterStrategy.com)



Read my **Book**: [‘\*Across The Board: The Modern Architecture Behind an Effective Board of Directors\*’](#) - Reached Amazon’s “#1 New Release in Corporate Governance”

See my current **National & International Speaking Tours**:

- [‘\*Building an Effective Board For Your Company\*’](#)
- [‘\*Becoming an Exceptional Board Director Candidate\*’](#)
- [‘\*The Strategy of Strategy\*’](#)

Connect with me on [LinkedIn](#)