

12 Steps to Getting on Your First Board

by Joe Hunt

Finding your first Board seat is the right step in truly accelerating your Directorship career. Recognize your experience for what it is and how it maps to the current marketplace, with the proper credentials and record of accomplishments as absolute prerequisites for consideration. The most often cited requirements include a track record of success, integrity, common sense and good judgment, and the guts to speak out and offer an independent voice for shareholders. However, there are a couple of challenges that you must first tackle to make this goal a reality:



- A majority of all Board searches are still conducted informally, leveraging the network of the CEO and/or other directors whom they have worked with in the past.
- For those Board searches that an executive search firm is retained to conduct, the focus is generally to recruit candidates who have had previous experience sitting on at least one outside public or private Board. This makes it difficult to utilize a search firm if you do not have the requisite past experience.

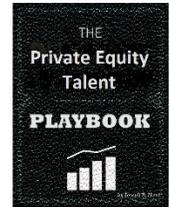
The true key to success is to gain mentors who will help guide you, educate you and expand your personal network. As one of the top retained executive search consultant currently conducting Board and C-Suite searches and Board Advisory work for public, private and private equity and their middle market portfolio companies, I offer the following advice on the personal development steps you can take to most effectively launch your Board marketability and visibility.

12 Steps to Properly Position Yourself

STEP 1 Update your bio. This is not a resume, but a summary of your credentials. Keep in mind that it is important to include all your relevant company experience and successes working with boards, as well as any formal or informal advisory Board experience in the public, private and non-profit sectors.

STEP 2 It's important to learn to become a good Board member before you are one, so begin by making sure you are educated on Board governance and corporate responsibility issues:

- Visit the Board section of our Web sites, www.HuntSearch.com or www.LeaderShift.com, to review studies, thought leadership articles and recommended reading lists.
- If you are already a Director, join the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD), a membership association for Boards, directors, director-candidates and Board advisors. www.nacdonline.org.
- Check other content rich sources such as Corporate Board Member magazine (www.boardmember.com)
- Register for Board school through one of the major universities, such as Harvard, Wharton, Stanford, Columbia or others.



By taking the time up front to become conversant on current trends - what's happening in terms of SEC guidelines, NASDAQ guidelines and other regulatory issues irrespective of your interest in Public or Private Boards - you will be prepared to have productive phone calls with people that might consider you as a director.

STEP 3 Make a list of everyone that is in a position of importance within your personal network. This group should include individuals who sit on Boards, councils, or are CEOs of companies. This group could also include management consultants and major auditor partners who work closely with Boards.

STEP 4 Make a list of at least 20 consultative questions regarding Board governance and then highlight three or four of your favorites that you can use in an initial phone dialogue or in-person interview.

Examples include:

- What is your biggest challenge on your Board today?
- How do you see your Board evolving over the next year?
- How do you define an effective Board?
- How independent is your Board today?
- How do you tie corporate responsibility to governance?
- How do you see the role of the audit committee changing?
- How much does the Board mirror the culture of the company?
- What expertise or perspective have you found to be the most beneficial on your current Board?

STEP 5 Arrange a meeting with your CEO, or other top executives in your organization who sit on Boards, and let them know of your interest in sitting on an outside Board. In your conversation, be prepared to:

- Gain their support by outlining the inherent value of the activity. Make sure to reference benefits such as your personal leadership development, acquisition of new knowledge and expertise, a wider network that may help to increase business for your company, etc.
- Learn how they found their first Board seat.
- Solicit their assistance to be your personal coach.
- Ask to tap into their network and learn who they recommend that you should get to know - people who sit on Boards or are in positions of leadership that might be able to make a great recommendation for you. But remember, never position it as, "Who do you know that is looking for a director?" Instead, always be focused on looking for people that you can talk to and add to your personal network.

STEP 6 Get to know the directors sitting on your own company's Board and engage them in discussions that will help educate you. As you cultivate these relationships, ask them to provide some coaching on how they found their first Board seat, what it takes to become an effective Board member and who they think, within their own network, you should get to know.

STEP 7 Ask to participate, periodically, on your own company's Board. There may be a role you can play in helping to prepare for the meeting, like providing research that would assist the Board with a specific agenda topic or decision.

STEP

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Prepare your presentation. This begins by calling your target list (see #9 below) and letting them know that you have reached a point in your career where you are thinking about taking on one Board seat -- you do not have the time to commit to more than that -- and you are looking for the right one where you can:

- (a) Make a strong contribution
- (b) Learn something that will make you a better leader at your current company
- (c) Work with other very smart people on complex business issues

And you were wondering, in their sphere of influence, what do they see happening with some of the Boards of the companies they are involved with? Who would it be good for you to get to know there?

STEP

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Work the process. Take two hours a month to make phone calls and always ask for referrals. Referrals keep the ball rolling. When you get a referral from somebody, their credibility becomes your built-in vote of confidence for that call. Always ask to have a face-to-face meeting -- maybe buy them a cup of coffee or have breakfast or lunch the next time you're in town. Face-to-face meetings produce the best networking results for Board assignments.

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Make a list of companies whose Board you would ideally like to sit on and those that you think would be most interested in your background and contributions. Identify each of their Board members along with their bios, www.linkedin.com, www.bloomberg.com, www.hoovers.com, are good sources, and check your network against those individuals to see if there is someone within your network that can lead you to them.

STEP

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Identify the nominating committee chairman of each target company. This can be accomplished by calling into the CEO's office and making a direct presentation. Leave a message that you would appreciate the opportunity to talk with them briefly about Board governance issues and the Board at [name of company]. Be prepared in your presentation to talk about the qualities that you can bring to a Board. What will interest them most are specific business models that they aren't in, new distribution channels, technology that they are not familiar with, diversity, finance background and audit committee knowledge and experience.

STEP

12

Take this job seriously. Recognize that sitting on an outside Board does wonders for your career. It expands your network. It enhances your value in the marketplace. Getting on your first Board is the toughest. Once you have accomplished that, you will find that people that sit on that Board will invite you to sit on others.

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