



## Board Interview “Do’s & Don’ts”

Successful board interviews take time, introspection, and thoughtful preparation. Here are tips to guide you on your board journey and help you be well positioned to secure your next board role. Good luck!

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## **1. Be Ready. Be Inquisitive. Always Be Prepared.**

Fundamentally, the role of a Board Director is not being afraid to ask tough questions. If you walk into an interview without great questions you'll risk sending the wrong message. And that means doing your homework. The Girl Guide motto: *"Always be prepared"*, is an excellent guiding principle.

Coming in armed with insightful questions is an indication of your interest level. That becomes a definite competitive advantage when the board is meeting with several candidates who are all highly competent at what they do.

At some point in your interview, you can count on being asked: *"So, what questions do you have for us"*. Don't ask about meeting dates and committees at this stage in the process (and definitely not compensation!). You want to demonstrate a strategic mindset, not tactical. While those questions are logistically valid, this is not the time and place. Some good examples include: *"What are you trying to accomplish with this addition to your board?"*, *"What is the most pressing challenge facing the organization right now? Biggest untapped opportunity?"*

Back to homework. The internet is your new best friend, next to your networks. Leverage both for insights. Research everything you can get your hands on. If you have thoroughly researched every aspect – company – leadership – board – industry – and prepared properly, you'll get a good sense going in of the organization's challenges and how you can bring value to solving those challenges. Put simply, your

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job is to match yourself up with what they need, and ensure they're a good match for you. Asking thoughtful business-oriented questions as well as sharing your observations through framing questions will lead to a much more productive dialogue.

Once you understand the company and broader industry, do some digging on the interviewers or panel – not only their professional backgrounds but also their personal. Make sure you know who will be interviewing you and learn all you can about them. 'Google' them, and do some digging on LinkedIn and other social media. Some form of personal connection will be key to assessing culture fit. Because ultimately, culture eats credentials for breakfast.

## **2. Practice Telling Your Story.**

You'll also inevitably be asked the question: *"Tell us about yourself?"* It's typically at the outset of the interview, and I've observed many people struggle with that question. Your interviewer(s) already have your Board bio and have likely done their homework, so don't read it or recite your 'elevator pitch'.

Be your authentic self, balancing professional and personal. Focus on a brief overview of your industry and functional expertise, highlights and a bit about you as a person. This should be five minutes or less.

During the interview itself, the key is being able to convey your story well enough that you don't need notes and are still able to speak with confidence without seeming rehearsed or scripted.

Understand your audience and read the room. Try to make eye contact with your interviewer, and each of the panel members in a group interview. While I always advise candidates to have notes in hand,

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don't be constantly looking down at them or reading from them. Stick to bullet points.

In the covid era of virtual Board interviews – and Board meetings – it's critical to be camera ready. Test your technology beforehand, and consider investing in a ring light or green screen. Try out your background and make sure your presentation is professional (at least from the torso up for virtual interviews!). Then comes practice. On-camera mock interviews with a mentor, advisor or friend are a great idea.

I would also highly recommend a public speaking course if you haven't had a lot of recent exposure to executive or board presentations. One candidate recently told me she took an improv workshop to help her think on her feet. What a creative idea!

Don't rush, but also be succinct with your answers because there will be time pressure (just like a board meeting), so get to the point! Be articulate too, which is another reason why preparation is so important.

### **3. Put Your Director Hat On**

For first time board candidates, or those who may not have interacted with a board previously, you may not be able to draw upon your governance expertise. So play to your strengths and invest in your education – WGOB Mentoring and Getting Board Ready programs, panels, thought leadership through online resources like [NACD](#), [ICD](#), [BoardEx](#) (my personal top 3) – to

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understand the most pressing governance and business issues facing the board. Be a sponge.

Remember that boardroom dynamics are different. Leverage your networks to understand the boardroom dynamics of the boards they're on as you prepare for your interview. It will be helpful to understand some the challenges they've experienced, whether it's the business or the board culture.

Every board member brings a specialized career skill set, whether it's finance, human resources, technology or compensation, but boards are looking for candidates who can contribute more broadly. Even if you bring a highly specific set of experiences – cybersecurity, ESG, M&A, digital transformation – you don't want to be pigeon-holed, and that's not what boards are looking for.

Not only do you have to wear two hats, contributing that functional expertise, but you have to convey that you understand the bigger picture. In a board interview, you'll have 30-60 minutes to convince your audience that you can shift from operational mode (your 'day job') to governance mindset. Being prepared and ready to ask the right questions will help you be ready to put your 'director hat' on when you enter the room or log in. That preparedness and perspective will mean you can clearly convey your value proposition and that you can think like a director. That can put you ahead of the rest.

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## Stanton Chase – About Us

Based in Toronto, Cathy Logue is Managing Director and Global Practice Leader with Stanton Chase, one of the Top 10 retained executive search firms worldwide.

Stanton Chase is committed to building best-in-class and diverse Boards and management teams for our clients, securing exceptional leaders and providing organizational solutions to enhance competitive advantage. We bring long-term client relationships built on experience, insight, partnership and teamwork. With over 75 offices in 46 countries, we can deliver the right executive talent around the globe.

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