

## Director Skills- Lessons from the Trenches

*So you've seen a really interesting ad for a director role and you're going to apply?*

Recent experiences on board selection committees highlighted what separates applications for director roles – what makes one attractive and another not. People on selection committees will often have wildly different views about what's important, but, just like a board, ultimately they have to work through them to reach a unanimous conclusion.

### LESSON 1 – THIS IS THE “WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?” LESSON

So seriously, why are you looking at this job?

- a. Is it in an industry that you have worked in?
- b. Is it related to an industry that you have worked in?
- c. Is it something that you have been interested in for some time and you have been upskilling yourself in some way to educate yourself about this industry?
- d. Do you have skills and experience in an area of business that are relevant to the industry in general and to the criteria advised by the company in its advertising or through a search firm? Eg, HR, finance, risk management, law, etc.
- e. Know exactly why you are applying for the role. The reason is NOT “I'm looking to transition to a board career.” It may well be, but find a way say it so that it's more about them and less about you.

❖ *LESSON 1 – Boards are looking for what you will bring to them, not what they can do for you.*

### LESSON 2 – THIS IS THE “WHAT DO I HAVE THAT IS VALUABLE FOR THIS BOARD?” LESSON

What does the ad (or search firm) say? Does it say “we are seeking someone with skills and experience in the transport industry”? So, you are a primary school teacher. Getting children on and off the bus every day will not cut it. You'll get the drift.

- a. What sort of company is it? Commercial? Not-for-profit?
- b. What's its business? What does the company do?
- c. What products or services does it provide? To whom?
- d. Does it deal directly with consumers or is its customer base other businesses?

❖ *LESSON 2 – Do your homework. The more you know about the company, the more you'll be able to work out what skills and experience you have that would be a good fit.*

*Thoroughly check out the company. Understand their products and services, look at customer reviews, check the media archives for any recent publicity, good or bad. Check their last audited accounts, know what their turnover is and who their competitors are. Read their strategic plan if available and any other relevant documents you can readily access or request from the search firm or company.*

### LESSON 3 – THE “WHY WOULD THEY CONSIDER ME” LESSON

1. Find out who’s on the board. What are the skills and experience of every single director.
2. Know especially who the Chair is. What’s their background? Is there any commonality between you and the Chair?
3. Where might you add to the existing board? What is that you can bring that they don’t already have?
4. Do you have specialist skills that are related to the industry or the company? Eg, engineering skills and experience for a construction or infrastructure business; retail banking experience for a regional bank; mining industry experience for a mining company. If not, then look for other attributes that you have and that could benefit their business.
5. Why are you interested in this particular organisation? The applications that attract the most attention demonstrate a sincere interest in the industry and the organisation. You have to convince the recruiter/nominations committee that this is not just another board role, it’s something that fits with your personal eco-system, whatever that is and for whatever reason.

- ❖ *LESSON 3 - Identify the skills and experience that you believe you can bring to the role. What qualities or attributes do you have that could benefit the company? Make sure you can substantiate these. It’s not enough to say “I’m really strategic” for example. Try to find something about yourself that might attract their attention.*

### LESSON 4 – THE “AUTHENTIC CV” LESSON

1. Make sure that your CV makes sense. At the age of 23 you are unlikely to have been the leader of a multi-national team with a \$250 million budget.
  2. Include relevant information that addresses the criteria that the company has advised. Listing the names of employers and your job title, even if it’s CEO, is not sufficient. Do not expect the reader to understand how clever or important you were. You have to tell them, and it must be concise and relevant.
- ❖ *LESSON 4 – don’t try to be too fancy with how you construct your CV. It’s not meant to be a best-seller. “Honest, straightforward and authentic” should be what comes across to the reader – short and to the point.*

---

*Prepared by Christine Hawkins for Women on Boards August 2020  
Cinnabar International Pty Limited*

*If you would like further information on this or related topics, please go to [www.cinnabarint.com.au](http://www.cinnabarint.com.au)*