

Best Fit Directors Network

REACHING THE TOP OF THE LADDER



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C.E.O Mentor Pty Ptd
21 July 2008

TIPS FOR GAINING NEW DIRECTORSHIPS

HOW WE FIND NEW DIRECTOR ROLES of 'best fit' ...

While at the same time, WE LIFT OUR GAME AS DIRECTORS

Nine tips by

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These tips started as a throwaway line...

I'd spoken too long at a reception for new members of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, in June 2008.

So I left out the planned section on Tips for Gaining New Directors. And, at the end of the talk, rashly suggested I'd e-mail the tips to anyone giving me their business card during drinks.

Walking back to the office after the meeting, I realized, with so many cards in my pocket, I needed to send out something a bit more significant.

That night I drafted out 30 tips and promised to send them out, 10 at a time, a week apart.

Now a month later, the 30 tips have morphed into an e-book of 10 more detailed tips...And in addition, writing these tips has led to setting up an on-line network for directors who'd like new directorships, and to enhance both their personal performance, and that of the whole board.

You're warmly invited to become a member and post your details on line at www.bestfitdirectors.com. Also, please feel free to send these tips to others you know who might be interested in both gaining new directorships. And in joining as a member of BestFit Directors.

Warmest regards

Neville D Christie

Melbourne, 18th July 2008

My strong thanks to [Richard Rendell](#) for translating these tips into an e-book.

While the words are original, of course the ideas aren't altogether so. Most have been taught to me by others over 34 years.

I've written and provided these tips in the best of good faith. They've worked for me. And my hope is they'll be of high value. And work for you.

I offer them with the expectation we will each accept personal responsibility to consider, weigh, accept, reject, modify and tailor at least some of them to our own personal interests, needs, and situations.

While the style is often authoritative, these tips come with no warrants, undertakings, or guarantees.

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TIP ONE**FISH IN THE BROADEST
GENE POOLS...**

Remove any self-imposed limits about potential directorships. Research, find, and fish in the deepest and broadest pools.

GOOD NEWS AND SAD NEWS

First the limiting news. Then the sad news. Then the **good news** about our chances of us finding suitable board roles...

Most high level corporate boards draw their directors from a very narrow gene pool. But there are numerous other board and membership committees which draw their 'directors' from a far broader and deeper gene pool.

In our search for appropriate director roles that suit us well, we do far better to research, look for, find, and fish from these deeper and broader pools

THE LIMITING NEWS

Both research and anecdotal evidence suggest many aspiring directors set their hearts on becoming a director of one, or more, of the Top 200 Australian corporations - listed on the ASX.

There are good reasons for this:

- these companies dominate much of the research conducted on board roles and performance - and hence they dominate our perceptions of the directorial landscape.
- because of the wealth of publicly available data, case studies about them often feature in business and director education throughout Australia, and in the press.
- these companies are seen as 'models'.
- their size, complexity and impact enforces their importance.
- Directors of these 200 companies have high status. They are viewed as having reached the pinnacle.

Little wonder

Therefore, it's little wonder, many of us, perhaps unconsciously, set being a director of one or more of these Top 200 companies as the mountain top to which we should aspire.

Certainly many groups advocating women on boards do.

Limiting our aspirations

Yet, in reality, for 99% of us, our chances of entering that Top 200 directorial world are decidedly slim.

While this is not a reason for us to stop aspiring to such a role, we need to be aware the supply-demand and cultural realities are against most of us.

The realities we face:

- When we include **committee members** of not-for-profits, there are at least 2.2 million practising and aspiring 'directors' in Australia – of which you and I make up but two.
- At around 22,000 members and growing fast, the AICD has 10% of this population as members. Of the AICD membership, 78% are not as yet directors of incorporated bodies.
- Yet, in the ASX Top 200, there are a 'mere' total of 1487 board roles - with some individuals holding multiple seats.
- Women hold just 189 of these seats – meaning for every female director of the Top 200, there are 7 men.
- On average, listed company boards turn over 16% of directors each year. With 2,200 listed companies, this equates to only 350 new non-executive director positions a year. However the percentage of director change has increased in the last two years – creating, perhaps, 400 new opportunities each year.

Top 200 directors are selected from a limited gene pool

“Getting on a board is like being invited into a secret club . . . There's a collegiality that's required, so you aren't going to be invited in unless you've demonstrated that you can work within the system and the club.” Gary Strauss, ‘Good Old Boys’ Network Still Rules Corporate Boards’.

- The Korn/Ferry 30th *Annual board of directors’ study* of 2003, found that in Australia and New Zealand 47% of companies had reservations about selecting a **new director** with no board experience.
- The Top 200 listed companies tend only to take on **experienced** directors whose skills and experience match those required by the company.

CEOs and CFOs top the list

- Former CEOs and CFOs are the most sought after candidates, followed by individuals with accounting and legal backgrounds. Investment bankers and fund managers are also increasingly favoured.

“Like attracts like. Behavioral research suggests, rather unsurprisingly that individuals are attracted to, and more likely to trust, persons whom they perceive to be similar.”

- Little wonder, then, some 80% of these individuals share a similar psychological profile. In terms of Myer-Briggs – see [\[Note 1\]](#) - they are STJ's.

As a sideline, Hilary Clinton is an ESTJ or Supervisor. Barak Obama is probably an ENFP, an idealist, or Champion. And John McCain an ESTP, or Promoter. See [\[Note 2\]](#).

- All directors of these Top 200 ASX-listed companies, both male and female directors, I think, are white. *If I'm wrong about this, please let me know.*

Good reasons for this homogeneity

We do not need to fall back on paranoia to explain why homogeneous organizations tend to replicate themselves with homogeneous successors.

In her classic study of the corporate power structure, 'Men and Women of the Corporation,' 1977, Professor Rosabeth Kanter explained homogeneity is the basis for trust in an uncertain corporate world.

Appointing anyone as a manager, CEO, or director means placing trust in that person's discretion and competence. This trust, she argues, creates certainty.

"The greater the uncertainty, the greater the pressures for those who have to trust each other to form a homogenous group," concludes Kanter.

"Uncertainty [leads decision-makers] to develop tight inner circles excluding social strangers; to keep control in the hands of socially homogeneous peers; to stress conformity . . . and to prefer ease of communication and thus social certainty."

Australia's diversity

Which helps to explain why... though Australia is a diverse, multi-cultural society... And though the shareholders of our listed corporations represent that diversity...

Yet - apart from directorships of community and government boards. - members of Australia's minority ethnic and cultural groups currently stand a mere 2% chance of becoming a director in the community of **company** directors.

Our greatest chance

Overall, we have the greatest likelihood of gaining a directorship of one of the Top 200 listed companies if we are: Male. White. A CEO or CFO of one of the large listed companies.

Or alternatively if we are a high-powered accountant, lawyer, investment banker, or a fund manager. And when we already have at least one other large company director role.

Two of the five feeder lines

As we'll find with Tip Seven, there are **seven** main feeder lines to the board table.

One of these seven routes to the director's suite of the Top 200 corporations, is that of the experienced line executive:

1. Yet the CEO line of the Top 200 has just one female CEO for 33 males.
2. And the crucial building-up executive management experience with profit responsibility feeder line – has 222 out of 1856 – or 12% - of executive management positions held by women.

First the sad news

Therefore, based on this 'near universal' assumption that the Top 200 listed companies represent the summit of directorial aspiration, **the sad news of all of this is** – as Ms Anna McPhee, the Director of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency suggests,

“Women [plus other minorities, and many cohorts of men] remain largely excluded from positions which have significant influence over Australia's business direction, economy, public policy and the community generally”. [\[Note 3\]](#).

Little wonder, then, that response to any advertised positions is high

Claire Braund, the executive director of Women on Boards, says, *“Women on Boards have 3,000 subscribers. We put up one paid board position [on their on-line site] and had 500 hits by the next morning”*

Now the good news. And the good news is, all this is far, far away from the full picture.

Many more vital, important, and powerful, opportunities exist for directorial roles – of an infinite diversity and variety – than are represented by the Top 200 Australian corporations. Far more, in fact, than we can initially get our minds around.

And most of these organizations draw their directors and committee members from a far broader and deeper gene pool.

Restating Tip One

Which leads us to restate TIP ONE: **If we’re wise, we remove imposed stereo-types. We look far beyond the Top 200 companies. And we research the broader opportunity pools for first-class board role opportunities.**

As we will now see, these opportunities cover many different types of organizations, many different types of director roles, and many different areas where directors make their contribution – both paid and unpaid.

Are 700,000+ possibilities enough?

Staggeringly, there are over 700,000 community, sporting, educational, scientific, health and other not-for-profit groups in Australia – many with Boards of Directors.

Most of the rest have **committees** - whose members share similar roles, duties, and responsibilities to those of directors of incorporated Boards.

Incorporated boards the minority

Certainly, of this 700,000, only a minority are incorporated – meaning the legal board director roles are a smaller percentage of this 700,000.

But, for example, 30,000 associations in NSW are incorporated with legally-constituted boards. And of the many sports bodies in Australia – see below – there are 14,600 board roles.

More than enough director and committee member seats!

However, take the total number of incorporated and unincorporated non-for-profit groups in Australia – 700,000. Assume the average number of directors or committee members is 5.

That gives us 3.5 million board and committee member seats! More than enough for all of us to serve our apprenticeship.

Many are unpaid

True, most of these, but certainly not all, are unpaid roles. But they are high in psychic rewards. And are great for building our experience, networks, and CV. While, at the same time we make an important social or community contribution. Which is why the vast bulk of portfolio directors have at least one not-for-profit board or committee in their portfolio.

For a reasonably full list of the 700,000, with a search facility to assist us, and contact details, see [\[Note 4\]](#).

In particular look for the green, third box on the top line – headed BOARDS. Click on that link and we find a range of board-related information – including a board matching service.

A 'mere' 2,220 listed Australian companies

By contrast, to the not-for-profit sector, there are 'only' 2,200 public corporations listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.

And, while many aspiring directors may continue to focus their directorial aspiration on being a director of the Top 200 companies, there are, of course, only 200 of them.

This leaves over 90% of these 2,220 listed companies – or 2,000 for the rest of us to 'mine'. To which we add over 1,627,000 incorporated private companies – all of which require one or more directors – even if they are non-trading companies.

Don't forget the IPOs

Plus, importantly, the new company floats, or IPOs. All IPOs must legally have at least three directors.

Given the current state of our economy [July 2008] many IPOs are on hold. But for a regularly-updated current list, with sponsoring brokers for us to contact, see: [\[Note 6\]](#). As a guide, in 2004 there were 165 new IPOs – creating 1,000 new board roles.

For a full list of ASX listed companies, see [\[Note 7\]](#). And consider subscribing to the Australian Stock Report: [\[Note 8\]](#).

The Business Review Weekly – and especially its various Rich Lists – is another useful source for finding companies that may offer potential director roles. [\[Note 9\]](#).

Where are the opportunities?

In these notes we only concentrate on Australia. Whereas the world's our oyster.

Note, the Company Insight Centre of Business Week [\[Note 5\]](#) allows us to Search over 42,000 public and 322,000 private companies worldwide.

But as we consider the broader Australian landscape of director-led organizations, we see afresh that, apart from the Top 200, opportunities exist for us as directors or committee members in:

Not-for-profits of 700,000 shapes and sizes

“Not-for-profit boards can be a great training ground, as they teach boardroom etiquette and protocol,” suggests Ruth Medd, the founder of Women on Boards.

Sporting bodies

Sporting bodies are a sub-set of the 700,000 community organizations.

The Confederation of Australian Sport [\[Note 10\]](#) represents the whole sports and recreations industry. It has as its members most of Australia’s national organizations – representing 7 million Australians.

For an overview list of the many sporting organizations, with contact details, see [\[Note 11\]](#) and Australian Sports Directory [\[Note 12\]](#).

Companies and businesses

Apart from the Top 200, we can look to over 2 million other businesses in Australia. These include

- The mid-tier public companies over \$ 100 million market capitalization
- Listed companies under \$ 100 million market capitalization
- Large private companies of which 653 account for 42% of all private business sector revenues
- Small to medium private companies – of which there are 1,627,000 Pty Ltd companies. [Many of these are non-trading or trustees of trusts].
- Micro businesses
- Companies that will go public in the next 3 years

Hidden boards

- Hidden boards – or boards in waiting: subsidiary boards, IPO boards, management and advisory boards.

Over the last 34 years I have held between three to seven board positions at a time. Many of these have resulted from a staged process of:

- *First mentoring the founder of CEO*
- *Second chairing a 'hidden' management board or advisory board made up of executives and external advisors*
- *Third, becoming chair or member of a formally constituted board.*

Equity bodies

- Hedge funds
- Private equity funds [\[Note 13\]](#)
- Venture capital funds
- And the companies these funds invest in

Government bodies and agencies

- Federal Government agencies. [\[Note 14\]](#).
- State Government agencies. [\[Note 15\]](#).
- Groups like health and medical boards.

Utilities – both quangos and privatized

- Utility boards – gas, electricity, water, power.

Watchdogs

- Government watchdogs – e.g. ethics, anti-corruption, anti-discrimination, competition, superannuation
- Industry watchdogs – e.g. media, banking, telecommunications, building, finance
- Standards bodies [\[Note 16\]](#).

Professional bodies

- Professional membership bodies like the AICD, AIM, the Institution of Engineers, etc. etc.
- Clubs like the RACV, NRMA, etc.
- Associations and societies. [\[Note 17\]](#).
- Advocacy bodies [\[Note 18\]](#).

The list goes on

So, it's vital we invest time to learn more about the whole opportunity landscape - so we gain a broader canvass to paint with our skills, values, interests, capabilities:

Suggested Action

- Start, for example with the list above. Add to it.
- Highlight those areas of possible interest. Cross out those that don't appeal.
- Then follow some of the web links listed and see where they lead. Start with this link: [\[Note 4\]](#).
- As our ideas crystallize, do some Googling.
- And talk to our friends, peers, associates and mentors about where best-fit opportunities for us might exist.
- Make such discussions both **general** along the lines of the list above. And **specific** - listing specific areas and industries, and the names of specific organizations. For example:
 - Community Organization
 - Dogs and Blind People
 - Guide Dogs Victoria
 - The Consumer Advisory Council (the Council) of Guide Dogs Victoria
- Search company information, see [\[Note 19\]](#).

Increase our chances

The BestFit Directors Global On-line Network has just been launched [July 2008]. It has a long way to grow. But it exists to

1. enhance our chances of finding 'best fit' directorships
2. increase our personal value as an active and aspiring director
3. lift the overall performance of the board as a whole.

You are warmly invited to join. Go to:

www.bestfitdirectors.com

Notes

1. Myer Briggs: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp>
2. Profile of Hilary Clinton, Barak Obama and John McCain:
<http://www.slate.com/id/2184696>
3. Anna McPhee's quote:
www.womenonboards.org.au/pubs/0612aicd.htm
4. List of 700,000 community organizations:
www.ourcommunity.com.au/directory
5. Company Insight Centre of Business Week
<http://investing.businessweek.com/research/company/overview/overview.asp>
6. List of up and coming floats:
www.asx.com.au/research/companies/floats/upcoming.htm
7. ASX companies list:
www.asx.com.au/asx/research/CompanyListed.jsp
8. Australian stock report:
<http://www.australianstockreport.com.au>.
9. Business Review Weekly, on-line:
<http://www.brw.com.au/>

10. Confederation of Australian Sport:

<http://www.sportforall.com.au/>

11. National and State Sporting Organizations

http://www.ausport.gov.au/information/finding_sport_information/topic/national#Non-govt

12. Australian Sports Directory

http://www.ausport.gov.au/about/australian_sport_directory

13. Private equity funds

<http://www.avcal.com.au/html/members/directory.aspx>

14. Federal government agencies:

www.gold.gov.au/quicklinks.php?agency

15. State Government agencies:

www.australia.gov.au/State_Government_Departments_&_Agencies

16. Standards associations: www.standards.org.au/cat.asp?catid=28

17. Associations and societies:

www.library.uq.edu.au/nott/subject_vr.php?id=AS

18. Advocacy bodies: www.caslon.com.au/accessibilityguide5.htm

19. Company information: <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/austcoinfo.html>

TIP TWO

USE MAPS and GUIDES to Get the Big Picture first... then the detail

*As directors we are big picture people, first. Detailed picture people, second.
Not the other way around.*

These 10 Tips focus on a twin voyage of discovery:

- *Gaining new directorships*
- *Lifting our game as directors.*

The tips draw on 34 years of research and personal experience as a professional director and chairman.

In this Tip Two, we outline ways to attend first to the big picture. Then to the detail. We also summarize the broad thrust of all the ten tips to give us a road map for our twin journey.

Big Picture One: We start with the end

With books we start at the beginning and read our way to the end – unless we just **have** to check if the butler did it. With businesses, time management, board meetings, and learning journeys of discovery, we start with the end.

With these tips, these ends are to:

1. gain new 'best fit' directorships - while along the way we
2. lift our game - so we perform well in our new roles.

Big Picture Two: First, say what we're going to say

An old negro preacher, asked the secret of his preaching success, replied, *"Ah tells 'em what ah's goin' to tells 'em. Ah tells 'em. Then ah tells 'em what ah told 'em."*

These 10 tips follow the preacher's method. And it's great if we emulate him later, when we customize and tell our directing story.

See Tip Five: Clarify, grow, and tailor our competencies.

Big Picture Three: We know how to learn effectively

As effective directors we are not only ongoing-learners. We also learn how to learn. With any effective learning journey, like the two journeys we're embarking on, we know how to apply these principles of effective learning:

- Start with our end goal or destination firmly in mind.
- Continue with a road map, or overview of the journey.
- Proceed from the General, the Big Picture - to the Specific, the detail.
- Move from the Known to the Unknown. That is from what we might reasonably expect to know, to what we may or may not know.
- Regularly **repeat** and **integrate** what we've learnt to date. But ensure each repeat is slightly different and enlarged. And the integration is more profound.

Big Picture Four: Ten action ideas give is an overview of the whole journey

Action idea 1. We explore the whole landscape

You'll remember **Tip One** invites us, as aspiring directors – to open up to the Big Picture directorial **landscape**. And not to be limited by our early brain washing.

Action idea 2. We use an action-oriented learning road map

Soon we provide an **Action-Learning Road Map** to navigate us through this larger landscape. This map contains one technique and six actionable themes.

- The technique is the doing-learning process of **think-test-act-review** – or TTAR
- The six action themes flowing through all our 10 Tips are:
 - consider the whole gene pool
 - coach and get coached
 - clarify competencies – map our existing competencies, refocus them to fit directorial needs, and gain new ones
 - connect with our current and new networks
 - communicate indirectly with decision-makers
 - customize our story – generally and specifically.

Action idea 3. We prepare well for the journey

The evidence is clear. We significantly increase our chances of gaining best-fit directorships when we:

- Prepare well
- Use a system
- Get coaching guidance
- Work with and through our networks.

So here in these tips we **think** about these four steps. We **test** them. We act on them. And we **learn** and keep **reviewing**.

*“If a seat on a board is our focus, getting there and staying there is not something that just happens. It is critical we **systematically** do our homework. And that our networks and personal brand are honed to deliver results.”*

The notion of us becoming and honing our **personal brand** runs through every tip. See also Tip 10.

Action idea 4. We travel ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ highways

The ‘insiders’ fast-track highway is where we are a known commodity. See Tip Seven,

The slower and longer ‘outsiders’ highway, is where we are yet to be known. See Tip Eight.

Action idea 5. We use mind maps

Each tip here is self-contained. Each has its own detail. Each has its own structure and logic. Each tip links to other tips.

But a warning sign: DANGER AHEAD!

As we drive our insider or outsider highway, it's surprisingly easy for us to miss the beauty, significance and meaning of what we're doing.

Instead, the rhythms of driving take over. Just like sometimes they do in the board room.

The agendas of any board meeting, driven by a competent chairperson, provide a loose inner structure to each board meeting. Equally as we move progressively through these tips, we find a loose step-by-step logic.

But in both cases the integrating threads get easily lost. As a result, our learning and application easily evaporates.

We become "All read, and no action". Or at the board, "All talk...!"

Therefore, a strong recommendation. Personalize our journey and make it meaningful and practical, by drawing our own road or mind map of this inner structure. And then extend our map, and change it - as we go.

To do this, I suggest we use Tony Buzan's Mind Mapping techniques..

And that we do the same in board meetings. See: [\[Note1\]](#). And Google 'Mind Maps' for a plethora of resources.

Action idea 6. We explore the by-ways of the two high-ways

Mind mapping also allows us to explore interesting and important by-ways. And yet find our way back on track. Then to integrate what we've learnt back to the main highway

A straight drive along either of our highways, can get tedious. Far better to leave the main road, every now and then, to explore the interesting and important by-ways also. Just as board discussions sometimes, or often, wander!

We deviate

To model this point, we deviate **now** for a few moments to:

- Find out why the integrating competency is growing in importance. See Rise of the Conceptual Age. [\[Note 2\]](#).
- Dig below the surface of this blog that's peripherally about dyslexia. [\[Note 3\]](#).
- Check out 7 Secrets of Big Picture Thinking. [\[Note 4\]](#).
- Study this paper about how we can keep a big-picture focus as we're overwhelmed with detail. [\[Note 5\]](#).
- And, yes, before we proceed we learn about mind mapping. [\[Note 1\]](#). We get blank paper and coloured pens, and we start mapping. **Now!** Sorry, but Little Hitler has to breath every now and then.

Action idea 7. We think! We test! We act! We review and learn! We start the cycle all over again!

Thinking, planning, strategizing are essential, to our twin journey. And to every board role. Thinking, **preparing**, planning, strategizing – the same process taking different forms - constitutes the first step of our think-test-act-review technique.

Action idea 8. In addition we test and act!

In addition, we also need to Test. Act. Learn/Review. Therefore, each Tip is actionable in itself. And each Tip moves us nearer to our two end goals.

Action idea 9. We combine big picture with detail

Many thinkers suggest “Buddha is in the detail.” But Buddha is renowned for his patience. So, here we recommend: Attend first to the Big Picture. We dive into the detail later. After all, ONE key competency of effective directors is to **integrate** big-picture, outside-the-box thinking, with **detailed analysis**.

Action idea 10. We increase our chances

We reach home quicker and easier as we activate key networks – including select on-line networks. For example, The BestFit Directors Global On-line Network has just been initiated [July 2008]. It has a long way to go. [\[Note 6\]](#).

However, it exists to:

1. enhance our chances of finding 'best fit' directorships
2. increase our personal value as directors
3. lift the overall performance of the board as a whole.

You are warmly invited to join: www.bestfitdirectors.com.

Action idea 11. We retrace our steps as we act in learning-testing mode

- Re-read our first two tips
- As we do, mind map them
- Think through what these points mean to us and add our thoughts to the mind map
- Add also what testing, trialing and acting they entail

Then move on to the next tips. Which outline the doing-learning model in more detail. And encourage us to do our homework.

Action idea 12. I know I'm a nag. But, don't forget to mind map the rest of these tips as we go along!

Notes

1. Mind maps. <http://www.buzanworld.com/mindmaps/>
2. Rise of the Conceptual Age:
<http://nevilleboardtable.squarespace.com/rise-of-the-conceptual-age/>
3. Dyslexia:
<http://eideneurolearningblog.blogspot.com/2006/11/big-picture-thinking-dyslexic-ceo.html>.
4. Seven secrets of big picture thinking:
<http://www.leader-values.com/Content/detail.asp?ContentDetailID=1129>
5. Keeping a big picture focus:
<http://www.knowledge-communication.org/ICA%20working%20paper%20Big%20Picture%20Problem.pdf>
6. BestFit Directors network. <http://www.bestfitdirectors.com>

TIP THREE

**START OUR OWN ONE-PERSON
BUSINESS**

Start our own one person business - where we ensure we:

- **Are well prepared**
- **Use a systematic approach**
- **Get coaching guidance**
- **Work with, and through, our networks.**

Everything changes

*Typically, before we take up our **first** directorial role, we are part-time or full-time working members of one or more organizations. There, depending on the size of our organization, we have a reasonably wide range of resources to call on.*

As working directors we can be full-time executive directors. Part-time non-executive directors. Part-time independent directors. Or 'portfolio' directors where we have a range of directorships that give us a more-than full-time job.

*Whatever! But when we **first** become serious about becoming a director, what suddenly changes is our access to resources, and the nature of the business we're in. It's like we've gone from being Ministers of the Crown to members of the opposition.*

For unexpectedly we've started our own one-person business.

The business we're now in

Over night, as **aspiring directors**, you-I-we become the proud 'owners' of our own specialized and highly-customized, but poorly-resourced, personal service 'business'.

Later we gain access to more resources as we become **actual** directors.

Getting our first directorship is the hardest. So we focus a number of practical tips in Tip 9.

"Later we learn the more directorships we get, the more directorships we are likely to get. And, paradoxically, we best get new roles by promoting others as directors."

To get us started, we name our start-up solo practice 'Best Fit Director', or BFD, for short. BFD produces and markets only **one** customized product - our growing competency to direct a small, number of director-led organizations.

Work the four key result areas

As we change and see ourselves as starting up our own one-person business, the evidence is clear. The BEST way for us to get new directorships is when we:

- Get well prepared
- Use a systematic process
- Give, and get, coaching guidance
- Work with, and through, our networks.

These keys are vital, so we repeat them. In more detail:

1. **PREPARE WELL** – Do a first run through all these tips. Turn them into mind maps. Add questions to the maps. Do ‘first draft’ actions of what we can. **Then** approach our networks.
2. **USE A SYSTEMATIC PROCESS.** Use TTAL- or think-test-act-review – in all phases of us moving towards getting directing roles, **and** then performing as directors.
3. **COACH AND GET EXPERT COACHING - BOTH.**

This recommendation is counter-intuitive but:

- We learn as we do – and when we can’t do, we learn as we ‘teach’ others.
- Research indicates two or more ‘innocents’ working to question and support each other, actually go a long way to guiding each other. While gaining insights into their own processes at the same time. *“We get, as we question, and we give.”*
- See Mentoring’s many forms. [\[Note 1\]](#). And Peer mentoring. [\[Note 2\]](#).
- This peer mentoring is a psychologically-sound ‘give and take’ relationship.
- Recommending others as potential directors is actually a fruitful path to others recommending us.
- As appropriate, we then top up our P2P mentoring with guidance from existing directors, and expert mentors.

So our three steps are:

1. go as far as we can by ourselves first
2. form at least one peer-to-peer co-mentoring pair
3. add expert mentoring from experienced people really in the know.

Our agenda for all three steps:

1. how to gain clarity around our **competencies** as a director – rather than as a CEO, lawyer, IT specialist, social worker, or whatever. See also Tip Five.
2. how to value, and expand, our resources, i.e our networks.
3. how to locate and explore general and specific possibilities.
4. how to refine and **customize** our story and our ‘offering’ to suit specific opportunities. See Tip Six.

4. **NETWORK.** **Connect** with, **communicate** with, and ‘work’ our networks to clarify our competencies

Later tips deal more with our insider and outsider networks. And with us getting and using peer and expert mentors to provide us with guidance.

By now, we're all clear; effective networking is one of the many skills we bring to our potential and actual directing roles. Aren't we?

Now we examine our portfolio of competencies

“To serve on boards we need competence and connections.”

Thankfully, the **portfolio** of our competencies, skills, talents, know-how, networks, and resources contains many items. Quite likely far more than we're really aware of, as yet!

It takes a change in our mind set for us **really** to see that: **Us.** Our ability to learn, change and develop. And our consciously expanded networks. These are the three key resources we have to bring to our directing.

We repeat: Now we're in our own director-searching business, our three key resources are:

1. Us – warts and all
2. Our capacity to learn, change, develop, and grow
3. Our access to the capabilities, know, contacts, talents, resources of our current networks – and of the networks we will consciously grow.

A slight deviation off the highway – 11 circles

Some American tribes see our relationships form naturally into eleven circles. In the outer circles are the people we don't yet know, and the acquaintances and friends we have yet to make.

In the middle circles are our 'outsider' contacts. Followed by our inner circle relationships. And in the very middle - like the central target of an archery board – we have those small handful of our genuine soul mates.

It's useful for us to perceive our networks being made up of these eleven circles – with some of our contacts being just transactional. Others just relational. And the remainder both relational and transactional.

Another deviation - 6 degrees of separation

We've heard of the idea of 'Six Degrees of Separation.' Roughly the notion is we are separated from every other individual on the planet by no more than six links in a chain.

What it suggests is we can form a chain of personal contacts and get to interact with ANY other person, with no more than six 'phone calls' – or other connections.

Also six degrees of separation suggests, *"If it's knowable to humankind, we can locate any knowledge, or resource, by the same six, or fewer, judicious e-mails, phone calls, or introductions."* Powerful stuff!

Soundly-based

This notion has its roots in serious sociological research. And work is well under way to establish its validity scientifically. Social networks like Facebook, [LinkedIn](#), and BestFit Directors base themselves on this concept.

Therefore our Manta One to our personal contacts becomes:

“I have a strong interest in becoming a professional director of small to medium business [or whatever we’ve decided]. I was wondering if you might assist me with ideas and introductions. Or suggest someone who might be able to help.”

Our Mantra Two is:

“I need to find how to [fill in the details].... Or, I need to be able to [details].... In order to [details].... Can you help me? Or suggest someone who can?”

Some hard preparatory work

*“There are two types of know-how and resources: That which we know and own. And that which we know how to learn, or know how to find out, or access. The second type of know-how and resourcing is **far** more crucial.”*

So it takes a bit of hard work on our part – preferably working with a mentor or two – then with other contacts:

- First, to start knowing, valuing, and ‘working’ our current and future 11-circle networks.
- Second, to tease out the range and value of us as the second major resource in this portfolio of ours. See Tip Five: Clarify and grow our competencies.
- Third, work out what we have to learn, and how we might do so. And, then,
- Fourth, for us to assess the **relevance** of us, Our networks. And our capacity to learn, adapt and grow. To specific clients. *Strange how organizations differ in what they want from our portfolio!*

We target our market

Our chosen market place of director-led organizations contains potential clients of many different sizes, shapes, functions and structures.

So it’s best, based on our portfolio of competencies, if we narrow our focus:

- Perhaps to large, medium, or small organizations.
- Perhaps to businesses or not-for-profits.
- Perhaps to community, social, educational, scientific, medical or government bodies.
- Perhaps to....

We decide our geographical spread

As a one-person, poorly-resourced, though increasingly highly-networked business, our personal time is now the limiting factor of our business. *[Us renting and bartering resources takes more time compared to us owning them].*

We know we can't spread us, and our time, too widely. How broad is our vision? What are our most important interests? How keen are we on regular travel? Would we relocate?

Given our domestics, realistically could we truly operate, administer, and market our business globally? Australia-wide? Or only in Melbourne, Sydney, or Brisbane?

What about Perth? Adelaide? London, New York, Tokyo, Beijing, KL, Singapore, Hong Kong, Paris, Rome?

So best if we use the operational spread of the board as one of our selection criteria!

We think through other aspects

And let's see. What other aspects of the many director-led organizations, go to make a 'best fit' for BFD? What industries would be okay and what not? What about organizational culture – entrepreneurial, bureaucratic, highly politicized? What else comes to mind?

We develop a general client description

Okay, so with these answers under our belt, we're ready to list on one page or two a general description of the categories of clients we think might best fit us....

We keep refining this list as we develop our business. For an example, see best fit clients. [\[Note 3\]](#).

Now that we've got a broad idea of **general categories** of potential director-led organizations that might suit us, we use our networks – and our mentors - to assist us:

- name and locate **specific** clients, and
- how to get their attention!

Need for our services

We're clear that locating specific client opportunities, and understanding how they 'buy' their directors is not easy.

We're also clear that working with members of our networks – both existing and future – is by far the best way to find out.

However, fortunately, our market research indicates some of the many director-led organizations have a need for **our** style and type of directing, and for the contribution we can make. Especially if we practice first with some of Australia's 700,000 community organizations!

Business tasks

Our business tasks are therefore to locate those select director roles where we are a 'best fit'. And to 'make the sale'. Even if the first sale's a freebie.

Firing a blunderbuss

To assist us make such sales, we could act unwisely. Do a mass mail out to the chairman of every company board. Front-up to a director we've never met and baldy strut our stuff. Do a telemarketing campaign. Or use some other **blunderbuss** form of communicating.

But it's us who'll get shot, and probably blackballed for life.

Using a precision rifle with telescopic sights

Far, far better if we call on our network. And together we use a precision rifle. With telescopic sights.

This means:

- We totally avoid mass marketing and 'cold-calling'.
- We prepare well.
- We call on our networks to assist us take accurate aim, and identify specific targets.
- We motivate our networks to educate and inform our potential clients about us as a product.
- We use our networks to introduce us.

This also means we

1. **Communicate** INDIRECTLY to end decision-makers, by communicating DIRECTLY with our networks.
2. **Connect** – in multiple ways – with selected parts of our networks, to assist us.
3. **Coach and get peer and expert coaching** – providing and asking for, and receiving, guidance from specific members of our networks.
4. **Clarify and grow our competencies** – applying the active art, skill and practice of clarifying and building our competencies in gaining and performing as directors.
5. **Customize** our story and 'offering'.

Suggested action

1. Create a system that:
 - codifies and values our various networks
 - reminds us of each individual's value and competencies
 - makes it easy for us to contact each member
 - See the contact facility in Microsoft Outlook
 - Join www.Linkedin.com
 - Join www.BestFitDirectors.com
2. Get us at least one peer mentor to work with and one expert mentor.
3. Revise that changing list of our competencies – see later tips.
4. Think through how we best learn. As part of this do the learning style inventory of David Kolb. See [\[Note 4\]](#).
5. Reread this Tip Three again, mind map it, and note on the map at least five action points .

We're well under way!

Notes:

1. Mentoring's many forms

<http://www.nevillechristie.com/mentorings-many-forms/>

2. Peer mentoring

<http://www.nevillechristie.com/peer-mentoring/>

3. Best fit clients

<http://www.nevillechristie.com/is-your-company-like-this/>

4. David Kolb's learning style inventory

http://www.changingminds.org/explanations/learning/kolb_learning.htm

TIP FOUR

LEARN HOW WE LEARN

And use a map of think-test-act-review - to jump us through multiple learning, thinking, testing, and acting loops.

Don't skip over this tip

Please don't run away from this tip – which is a bit theoretical, we admit. In it we build an important framework for our ingoing learning:

- *learning how to get new director roles*
- *learning how to perform really well*
- *learning how to build new competencies*
- *learning how to grow and be authentic*
- *learning how to build us as our own brand*
- *learning how to enrich our life and work through our relationships and contacts*
- *learning about... – you name it!*

This framework is a simple, but far from simplistic learning-doing, thinking-testing model of **think-test-act-review**.

*As we use this map, we at the same time, build 'new' skills and approaches key to us **being** effective directors.*

*In short – and this is far less goobedoo than it sounds - **we work in parallel universes**. That is, we plan, test, learn and get ready for our new roles **SIMULTANEOUSLY**. A great time saver!*

We might want to take the time to see how important the concept of multi-verses, or parallel universes, is becoming: [\[Note 1\]](#).

Review

In our last tip we claimed as director of our own director-searching business, our three key resources are:

1. us – warts and all
2. our capacity to learn, change, develop, and grow
3. our access to the capabilities, know-how, contacts, talents, resources of our current networks – and of the networks we consciously grow.

Our capacity to learn and grow

In this tip we focus on our capacity to learn, change, develop and grow. And on how we learn how to learn. Later tips deal with our competencies. And with us gaining guidance from our personal contacts, or networks.

It's a tough ask

It's a tough ask for us to start from scratch. And to end up with directorships that really suit us. Especially ones where we **also** suit the organization - that is, directorships of 'best fit'.

In reality, there's **a lot we have to do** and **learn** *in-between* when we first start to find new directorial roles. And when we arrive.

In this "in-between" there lies a fascinating journey of learning and discovery, in which, "*there be dragons*".

Winning Tatts

Now, it's true, someone wins Tatts every now and then. Equally, it's true that sometimes, a directorship 'happens' to us.

But, apart from buying a weekly ticket, I'm **not** planning my life around winning Tatts. Equally, I'm not reckoning on directorships just happening to me. Or to you.

What we need is a systematic approach. And we have one in a think-test-act-reflect model

Reflectiveness – the heart of all key competencies

An important long-term, multi-cultural and multi-discipline study by the OECD provides our rationale for this model. It concludes that reflective thought and action is at the heart of **all** human competencies. [\[Note 2\]](#). Wow!!! Think on that!

The authors go on to explain, in high-falutin' language that this means: We think. We test. We act. We reflect and learn.

As we summarize the report, we see its ties to directing:

- thinking reflexively is a complex process
- it entails reviewing, learning, integrating, and changing

“Having applied ourselves to mastering a particular mental technique, reflectiveness allows us to then think about this technique, assimilate it, relate it to other aspects of our experiences, and to change, or adapt it.”

- it involves action

*“Individuals who are reflective also follow up such thought processes with **practice or action.**”*

- it implies thinking about thinking and learning about learning
- it's also about how we construct experience

*“Reflective thinking is not just about how we think, but also about **how we construct experience more generally.** Including our thoughts, feelings, and social relations.*

“This requires that as individuals we reach a level of social maturity that allows us to distance ourselves from social pressures, take different perspectives, make independent judgments and take responsibility for our actions.”

- And it's about going beyond either-or, to embrace paradox

*“Today's diverse and complex world demands that we do not necessarily rush to a single answer, to an either-or solution, but rather handle tensions – between, for instance, autonomy and solidarity, diversity and universality, and innovation and continuity – by *integrating seemingly contradictory or incompatible goals as aspects of the same reality.*”*

*“Thus, individuals have to learn to think and act in a more **integrated** way, taking into account the manifold interconnections and interrelations between positions or ideas that may appear contradictory, but that may sometimes only superficially be so.”*

Which all leads us to the learning-doing model, which is:

1. THINK, plan, research, **prepare** – and generally ready ourselves to get a director's role
2. TEST, revise, seek out – a range of possibilities that may interest us and be a good fit
3. ACT, to communicate to our network, get leads from them, and follow-up
4. REVIEW, **reflect**, learn from, and refine our progress.

This simple and flexible model gives us four phases

1. PREPARE PHASE: think-test-act-review
2. TEST PHASE: think-test-act-review
3. ACT PHASE: think-test-act-review
4. REVIEW PHASE: think-test-act-review

How we learn

This reflective thinking model is based on a lot of research into how we learn, and into how we learn how to learn.

See for example, David Kolb's learning model – which is close to, but not the same, as our think-test-act-review model. [\[Note 3\]](#).

Important findings from learning research include:

1. We all learn differently – but there are common styles
2. The way I learn is not necessarily the way you learn
3. Yet I tend to assume the way I learn is the way you do
4. And, we-I-you tend to do the same, when we're communicating with mentors, clients, members of our network, and so on
5. In practice most of us learn ineffectively, i.e. poorly.
6. Why? Because we mainly each have a bias towards working **two** phases of the model well, and **two** phases poorly – inhibiting our learning

*For example, many modern managers think-act, act-think. But rarely test. And even more rarely systematically review and learn. Yet **reflective** thinking lies at the very heart of **all** competencies.*

Not learning from success or failure

*We put this lack of testing and reflective at down to time pressures. But in so doing, we **dramatically** inhibit our innovation, and limit our ability to learn from both success and failure. See an important Harvard University review on the Competitive Advantages of Failing, [\[Note 4\]](#).*

7. However, we significantly **enhance** our ability to learn **and** perform when we **consciously** use all four phases of the learning-doing thinking-testing cycle.

8. The beauty of this model is we can start anywhere and go anywhere. And repeat whenever we need to.
 - Act-think-test-act-think-test-review
 - Review-think-test-act
 - Test-test-test-think-act-review, etc.

9. That is, the model is **'iterative'** – meaning we go over the four phases a number of times – each time getting a bit better.
 - *Iterative is like the snakes and ladders board game we played as kids. Each roll of the dice takes us along the board. As we land on a ladder we go racing up to a higher level. But when we reach a snake we go sliding down to a far lower level.*

 - *We progress to the end of the board through many ebbs and flows. And it takes a surprisingly long time!*

10. As we go through our progressive iterations, we also **exchange key words** in each phase to more accurately reflect what we're doing at that point.

e.g. THINK can become cogitate, reflect, meditate on, ponder – or, plan, prepare, stimulate, research, analyze, create, strategize, decide.

Getting closer and closer

As we do this 'multiple iterating' we get closer and closer to getting a suitable directorship. Or two! I promise!

Fine, but why use a learning-acting model to get us new directorships in the first place?

Four reasons...

1. Learning is at the heart of reflective thinking. And reflective thinking is at the heart of all human competencies.
2. NO-ONE gets this 'right' the first, second, or third time. We just get a bit closer each time. Building in learning to every thing we do is, therefore, **key to us getting it 'right'**.
3. Learning is key to our personal, directorial, and organizational survival

Arie De Geus, when head of planning for Royal Dutch/Shell said, *"The ability to learn faster than your competitors, may be the only sustainable competitive advantage in the future."* [\[Note 5\]](#).

In similar vein, organizational and leadership guru, Warren Bennis, says: *"The organization that doesn't promote learning— especially fast learning— can't expect to compete successfully in the future."* [\[Note 5\]](#).

4. With directing we often go where no-one has gone before. Conscious learning – of new skills, new insights, new know-how - has to be inbuilt into every step we take as directors.

So we gain five hidden ‘bonus’ tips:

- Effective boards are learning boards.
- Effective directors are learning directors.
- Aspiring directors, become actual directors more quickly, by learning more quickly. That’s done by consciously using a learning model like think-test-act-review.
- Actual directors, become Zestful and Careful performing directors more quickly, by learning more quickly.
- When we use proven learning processes and get guidance, we enhance both the quality and speed of our learning.

Which leaves us with four major variables

As we consciously use this iterative think-test-act-review model, **our time, effort, skill and interactions** become the four outcome variables . And as we get Guidance, and ‘work’ our networks, we enhance these four variables, and improve our chances of moving us towards our twin goals. Or any goals!

Don’t wait: prepare.

So we don’t wait to be perfect. We move NOW into the first, phase of thinking, planning, researching, **preparing** for getting new director roles, and for performing superbly.

From here on, we work **iteratively**...and practise our reflective thinking...

As we clarify and grow our competencies, customize our story, and work the insider and outsider highways to new directorships!

Notes:

1. Multi-verses: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiverse>

2. OECD study: The definition and selection of key competencies
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>

3. Kolb learning model:
www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

4. Competitive advantages of failing:
http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/hbreditors/2008/06/the_competitive_advantage_of_f.html

5. Arie De Geus and Warren Bennis, from , 'Learning and competitive advantage'.
<http://documents.crinet.com/CRI-Corporate/Sales-Training/learning.pdf>

TIP FIVE

CLARIFY, GROW, AND TAILOR OUR COMPETENCIES

I sit at the centre of the cosmos

Anthropologists have a favourite word. “Ethnocentric”. It has two core meanings.

First, it defines the belief that our own nation, culture, or group is intrinsically superior to all others. Second, it refers to our tendency to view the world from the perspective of our own culture. We see our language, customs, history, norms, behaviour and religion as at the centre of the cosmos.

And, of course, psychologists use a parallel term – ego-centric. First, to describe a ‘selfish’ attitude or interest confined to our own affairs. Second, where we view our mind, needs, or self, as at the centre of everything.

These two terms lie at the heart of a big 18-point ‘secret’ about us both getting new directorships and performing really well,

That secret is we enhance our competencies, our chances of gaining directorships, and our abilities to perform as a director and human being, when we consciously move away from an ethnocentric and egocentric view. To embrace... what? This Tip tells us.

First, a reminder: six themes run through these ten tips:

1. Consider the whole gene pool
2. Coach and get coached
3. Clarify our competencies – map our existing competencies, refocus them to fit directorial needs, and gain new ones
4. Connect with our current and new networks
5. Communicate indirectly with decision-makers
6. Customize our story – generally and specifically.

This Tip 5 focuses on theme three - competencies

But stop to consider! What do we mean by “clarifying, growing, and tailoring our directorial competencies?”

Here’s one egocentric response: *“It means I get clear about what are **my** personal competencies. I make those ‘old’ competencies bigger, brighter and better. And I add new, extra, ones I do not have as yet. The context is not ALL my portfolio of talents. Only those ‘tailored’ or relevant to me gaining new directorships and performing well as a director.”*

What’s missing from that answer?

Actually the 100% answer contains all the elements just listed. And then some. It’s the ‘**then some**’ that contains a vital, and profound 18-point ‘secret’.

Grasp the secret

When we grasp The Secret, consciously and conscientiously apply it, and communicate it, then we **significantly** enhance:

- our portfolio of competencies
- our chances of gaining directorships, and
- our abilities to perform as a director, and human being.

A huge statement

That’s a huge statement! To enhance the drama, we delay evidencing it for a minute or two. As we define what we mean by competencies.

What are competencies?

“Competencies include skills but are also more comprehensive and elusive than skills.”

Competencies are those talents, skills, abilities, know-how, psycho-social resources, and personality traits **in combination** that enable us to perform in a wide variety of situations.

Our competencies are both general – relating to a wide range of behaviours we manifest as directors, and as human beings. And specific – relating to a specific organization, or a given context.

Not immutable

Generally, our competencies change over time. And, importantly, they change as we shift between organizations, domains, and contexts. *“Change contexts, change organizations, and our competencies change.”*

Core directorial competencies

“Competencies are less what we ‘have’. And more what we manifest.”

Directorial competencies are organization-centric. They include identifiable - and *sometimes measurable* - talents, skills, abilities, psycho-social resources, and personality traits that successful directors **manifest**. Manifest compared to the defined needs and criteria established, or implied, by a specific organization.

They are the ‘required’ behaviours – regardless of how well or how badly individual directors manifest them.

From the perspective of any one organization, directorial competencies perform two crucial functions:

1. They uniquely define that specific organization's values and requirements as expressed through its directors.
2. They form the cornerstone for selecting, inducting, appraising, developing and replacing directors.

Core organizational competencies

Organizational core competencies are of special interest to directors. They encapsulate the areas of expertise an organization does best, and that distinguish it from its competitors.

“Once the core competencies [of an organization] are clarified, the Board can change the executives’ mindset to think of themselves as handling a portfolio of resources – knowledge, attitudes, and skills [etc], - rather than just a collection of business units,” suggests board director and author, Bob Garratt. [\[Note 1\]](#).

Now to the Secret that we seeded earlier when we indicated:

“In our director-searching business, our three key resources are:

1. us – warts and all
2. our capacity to learn, change, develop, and grow
3. our access to the capabilities, know, contacts, talents, resources of our current networks – and of the networks we will consciously grow.”

The Secret has 18 elements

1. **First**, we stop, egocentrically, seeing “our” competences as only those we “own”.
2. Our competencies include those we can buy, rent, access, barter, annex, access, borrow, **manifest** in many ways....
3. So part of our portfolio of competencies is our proven ability to **access and use** these non-owned resources.
4. **Second**, as part of a board, we are a collegiality that covers the whole waterfront of competencies.
5. We don’t need to know, and do, and learn, **everything**.
6. So, part of our portfolio is our ability to read others, assess and access their competencies, and take them into account as we act dynamically as a board.
7. **Third**, our competencies are dynamic, contextual subjective, and interactive – not static, universal, objective, and structural.
8. All the components of effective teams, and dynamic groups, are regularly on show when we meet and interact as directors. And in fact when boards malfunction it’s typically because of inter-actional group dynamics, not shortages of technical, functional and business skills.
9. So, we possess, and can acquire, a wide raft of organizational and group dynamic capabilities. These include leading, dialoguing, listening actively, questioning, probing, facilitating, holding group anger/anxiety, insighting, intervening, summarizing, overcoming group think, calming aggression in others, hearing and articulating what’s not being said, finding the gaps, managing complex egos, dealing with power, managing conflict fruitfully, balancing.... See [Note 5].

Board a group process

“A board is a group process, so interpersonal aspects are also very important,” says Lynn Anderson of Search firm Russell Reynolds.

“Yet this is behaviour we really only see within the boardroom, and it is very hard to assess this skill through an interview.”

10. **Fourth**, our competencies are both actual and potential.
11. As humans we are born unfinished. And we spend our whole lifetime completing the job.
12. So, our portfolio of competencies include such ‘talents’ as learning, creating, frontiering, innovating, synthesizing, growing, changing, transforming, transcending, intuiting, integrating, questioning, going where no one has gone before, structuring, ...
13. **Fifth**, we’ve stressed that as owners of one-person businesses our resources and capabilities include those of our 11 circles of networks.
14. A key competency is how we access, manage, ‘work’ and apply our evolving networks to a huge variety of situations.
15. So, our portfolio of competencies includes the wide range of abilities we manifest around ‘working’ our networks. AND the competencies manifested by those networks.

“As directors we are thought leaders and network managers.”

16. **Sixth**, with the 6 degrees of separation – see Tip 3 – the whole world is our oyster.
17. Conceptually all of the knowings, skills, talents, resources of humankind are potentially available to us
18. So, again how we grasp this potential and make it actual becomes a core competency. Or not.

“This one thing I know. If it’s knowable to humankind, I will access it – given 6 key contacts.”

Some portfolio

Wow! That's some portfolio of competencies for a one-person micro business! But, of course, we knew this 18-part Secret before. Or did we!

In either case, as we work through The 18-point Secret again, we see it's revolutionary!

So what categories of relevant competencies do we, as aspiring directors, bring to selected board tables?

1. Those we personally have that match a specific organization's profile.
2. Those we have yet to acquire.
3. Those that sit at the board table, disguised as other directors.
4. Those that are available within our client organization.
5. Those dynamic ones that sit in the 'in between' of all us individuals, and that cohere us, via creative tension, into a fruitful team.
6. Those around our ability to change, develop, and grow.
7. Those 'belonging' to our current networks – and to THEIR networks. And to THEIR networks. And.....
8. Those related to our ability to fruitfully 'work' those relationships.
9. Those related to networks we have as yet to mine, and
10. Those involved in the ways we go about mining them.

Unique opportunities, unique contributions

“As Directors we are offered unique opportunities to make unique contributions quite different to those we made as an artist, or CEO, or manager, or professional accountant, solicitor or advisor.

*Especially as we **customize and personalize**, our unique contributions to a changing and growing organization. Or more likely, to multiple organizations!”*

Now our life-long task is to live, work, and communicate The Secret! As we codify, grow, and customize our portfolio of competences.

Guidance needed

We need mentors and others to guide us with this evolving and fascinating task. So 'Mapping our Competencies' has become the first project of the just-established BestFit Directors Global Network – see www.bestfitdirectors.com.

Getcha going

That project may take several months. So here and now we provide a few more ideas to get us going:

1. Exceptional boards

Kiel and Nicholson [Note 3] describe a high performing board as having:

- leaders
- visionaries or strategic thinkers
- practical people
- analytical people
- communicators who can deal with stakeholder groups.

Which of these competencies do we manifest?

2. Common directorial competencies

Lynn Anderson, of search firm Russell Reynolds suggests five skills are critical for every director. In their board recruitment assignments they select for them. Therefore, in any interview with Russell Reynolds we wisely make sure we cover off on all five!

- debating and decision making skills
- critical thinking

- the ability to ask both the right, and difficult, questions
- a sixth sense of the agenda behind information
- interpersonal skills.

***The third-time question.** Often when probing executives at a board meeting, the first twice we ask the same question we get a half-hearted, or inadequate response. When we judiciously ask the same question **the third time**, we often yield surprising results!*

3. Special competencies of female directors

We're opening a contentious issue here. But Christopher J. Clarke, president and CEO of Boyden Global Executive Search argues that women bring a number of particular strengths to a board. Above and beyond those brought by men.

In his article, "The XX Factor in the Boardroom: Why Women Make Better Directors," Clarke lists these seven special qualities that women bring to a boardroom:

- superior evaluation of people
- managing ego
- calming aggression in others
- team maintenance skills
- communication skills
- a female perspective on products, services and the marketplace
- balancing short term corporate objectives with wider societal issues

4. Our own unique list of competencies

Our personal list of competencies will blend:

- functional competencies in the core areas of all businesses and organizations – management, finance and accounting, legal, supply, distribution, sales & marketing, innovation, technology...
- process competencies – strategizing, planning, organizing, analyzing, sensing, creating, evaluating, deciding, controlling...
- critical competencies – including those from Lynn Anderson's list
- our uncommon competencies – environmental sustainability, entrepreneuring, competencies drawn from Christopher Clarke's list, etc..
- elements from the The Secret.

See also: the AICD list of key director competencies. [\[Note 4\]](#)

5. What all this means to us is, “*We find ways to learn*”...

- what our current competencies and our The Secret competencies are
- what are the broad range of essential director competencies
- what the range of competencies required in different director roles are
- how we rate
- what’s missing
- what we do about filling in our gaps.

6. Get a mentor or coach

To gain personal clarity about precisely how, where, and why we can add value as a director, we work, if necessary, with a mentor or coach.

- are our skills sets strategic, analytical, administrative, managerial, operational, what?
- would we seek mainly to add our expertise as an accountant, lawyer, engineer, human resources?
- what broad generalist skills do we have which cover most aspects of any business or organization
- where do we have a unique ability to add value?

7. Next

Then, given our growing awareness of what sorts of organizations best suit us, and we them,

- we reformulate our story
- revamp our CV
- customize both to each specific directorial opportunity.

Which point segues us rather well into Tip Six: Customizing our ‘new’ story.

Notes

1. Bob Garratt, 'The fish rots from the head – the crisis in our boardrooms: developing the crucial skills of the competent director,' Profile books, 2003.
2. OECD report. 'The Definition and selection of key competencies'.
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>
3. Kiel, G and Nicholson, G (2003) *Boards that work: a new guide for directors*, Sydney, McGraw-Hill.
4. AICD list of key competencies
<http://www.companydirectors.com.au/Policy/FAQs/Selection+Appointment+And+Remuneration/Key+competencies.htm>
5. Group dynamics. Margot Cairnes, "Boardrooms that work – a guide to board dynamics," AICD.

TIP SIX

CUSTOMIZE OUR 'NEW' STORY

Is all that work really necessary?

This Tip is a “Wow, that’s a lot of work, is that all really necessary?” Tip. But we can relax! It entails more thinking than grunt work. And no one expects us to do it all straight away - or in one sitting. Working on this tip might even take a life time!

At the end we gain a sense of the high potential pay-off that makes the hard thinking more than worthwhile.

No regrets as Downer quits

Under this ambiguous heading, ‘The Australian,’ of 1 July 2008 outlines the thoughts of Australia’s longest-serving foreign minister, Alexander Downer, as he quits politics and takes up a new post as UN special envoy for Cyprus.

Cyprus, now there’s a lateral leap for a politician. Or Director!

Downer warns that the Liberal Party has lost the ability to sell its core message/story on individual freedom. It needs to construct a “broader narrative’ to compete with Labor,” he suggests.

“What they need to do, which they have not very well so far, is develop a better narrative. Both a negative narrative about the Rudd Labor Government. And a positive narrative about the Liberal party. They need to build policies around that narrative... The Liberal Party does not have a story to tell at the moment. Just a bunch of ad hoc comments.”

Comments apply to us

Downer's comments apply equally to us as aspiring directors:

- In our previous roles – as managers, ceos, executives, IT specialists, lawyers, accountants, entrepreneurs, or whatever - we've been in power, we've had influence, and we've performed well.
- That past story of ours is still **partly** relevant to us getting a new role as an Executive Director, Non-Executive Director, or Portfolio Director. *Maybe even in Cyprus!*
- After all, our managing, executing, ceo-ing, lawyer-ing, advising, IT-ing, or whatever-ing have all prepared us for directing.

Directing is not managing or executing

But directing is different from all our past roles. And our personal world changes once we focus on being a director. We suddenly move into our one-person business. And like the Libs, we're no longer in power. Yet!

Buzzing

Equally, after working our way carefully through Tip Five, hopefully our mind's buzzing – with a **much** bigger view of the competencies, resources, and possibilities we bring to the board table or committee meeting.

- Therefore, our current CV, and our 'story,' are old hat. Partly relevant old-hat, yes. But still old hat. With a focus that's no longer relevant.
- Simply regurgitating our curriculum vitae, reciting our past achievements, tossing out a bunch of ad hoc comments, is plainly not adequate.

Reshaping our story

Rather, from the elements of our **past** story, and our CV, we now shape a **different story** with at least some of these elements.

- A story that starts with the needs, interests, competencies, challenges of the potential clients we've selected.
- A story oriented around the organizations where we most add value. And about how we make a difference.

- A story that starts from the future – of us as a highly competent, performing-conforming director - and walks **back**.
- A story of our one-person 'Best Fit Director' business interacting with a larger organization in a fruitful way.
- A carefully scripted story about our eleven 'circles of competencies' and of us changing, growing, evolving, learning.
- A story about **directing**. Not one of managing, executing, or whatever-ing.
- A story that answers three questions:
 1. Why should we be elected or re-elected as a director?
 2. What specific and unique contributions do we, or can we, make?
 3. What's the evidence?

Before those points overwhelm us...

We remember, as people, we and our never-ending story, are **works in process**. Like JR Rowling who designed and wrote the fabulous Harry Potter series over 17 years, we're evolving our story – iteratively. Over time. As we learn. Get guidance. Develop. Think-test-act-review. Change. Even transform!

In fact, when we think about it, creating our real story is our life's work. We don't do this in one, or two, or three sittings.

Just one chapter

The story we're working on for our new directorial roles is just one chapter. Or better, a draft of a chapter. But even drafts take lots of think-test-act-review reflective thinking, and reworking.

Our ongoing task is to draft parts of our evolving story. Discuss the drafts with mentors and key contacts. Put the drafts out into the market place. Act. Grow. Learn. Then revise them.

Start with our goals

There are some complex motivations behind why we're interested in directorships. A great starting point for our story is to sort them out. For example, the highly useful community register site suggests these as possible motivations of why we might join a not-for-profit board. [\[Note 1\]](#).

- Do we want an intimate, hands-on role or a more bird's eye, hands-off role?
- Do we want to expand our existing skills or develop new skills that could help in our career?
- Do we want to add another facet to existing interests, or develop new areas of interest?
- Do we want to learn more about a particular issue?
- Do we want to fix a problem or shake things up?
- Do we want to make connections and expand our networks?
- Do we want to meet new people and expand our social life?
- Do we want to make a difference to the lives of people less fortunate?
- Do we want to give our self more to do or keep our self busy?

Use the AICD registrations as examples to improve

If we're already a member of the AICD Director registry we'll find there countless examples we can build on, and improve.

If we're not yet, as we start the joining up process we'll note how the format of the questions straight jackets our answers. Same with everyone.

But we can look at some of these other entries. Then later, when we've learnt more, redo our initial, getting-us-started entry.

Reviewed Tip One

Hopefully, by now we've reviewed and worked through Tip One. By ourselves. With our mentor. With some of our network.

Therefore, we now have ideas about the sorts of organizations, types of industries, scope and size of organizations that would best suit us. And us them:

- do we prefer a not-for-profit, a business, a government body, a professional association?
- are we happier with lo-tech, no-tech, or hi-tech organizations?
- would we jell with a start-up, an organization undergoing major change, one in decline, or growing fast?
- Or?

First draft commitment

Okay? Then it's time we approximated a first-draft commitment about these potential clients. So we can start framing up our story – with input from select members of our networks, And with the specific guidance of one or more mentor-coaches,.

Client-focused framing

We begin by framing our personal story around our clients as much as around us

- What are some of the key elements of our broad social-political-cultural-economic-technological environment that impact on the futures of the sorts of organizations we're gravitating towards?
- What needs/demands are apparent? What threats? What opportunities? What possibilities? What trends and directions? What issues?
- What are the typical and specific mission goals of some of our potential clients? [These are available often on the net. Or from a direct phone call to the Organizational or Company Secretary].

- In the light of these goals, what directorial role might we play in moving our 'chosen' organizations towards these?
- What are the every day activities and functions that these organizations must attend to - to maintain and improve their performance?

Highlighting the differences that make a difference

- What key differences can **we** make to the future of one or more of the groups of organizations we're considering as clients? In what ways - generally, specifically?
- What of our past provides evidence we can perform well in our anticipated future role as a director?
- What of our past is not relevant and is best left out?
- What changes do we need to add?

Next

Then, given our growing awareness of what sorts of organizations best suit us, and we them,

- we reformulate our story
- revamp our CV
- customize both to each specific directorial opportunity.

Three versions

And we redo our story and CV in three versions. A written version. A briefer oral version – our elevator pitch. And a web version. Each with different formats.

Okay, so time for another iterative round of hard thinking!

1. What do directors of 'our' organizations do? Mmm that's actually a hard one. Good idea to do some Googling on this.

2. Given our current environment what **else** might these directors do?

For example, care and action for our total environment is now a strong imperative for all organizations - and households, and individuals.

Yet few organizations have departments or executives taking on that responsibility. And even fewer boards have directors charged with that enormous responsibility.

However the issues and costs of climate warming, carbon footprints, pollution, energy, water, food, migrations of people, transport, packaging, recycling, new technology, reinvestment, disinvestment, risk management, transition are starting to impact significantly on the viability, roles, strategies and directions of every organization.

3. What competencies do these two questions imply for 'all' directors? Or at least for a balanced board, as a whole?

Marshalling evidence

As we think, test, act, review, we're also growing clearer about the relevant competencies we have, **or we can acquire through our networks**. So, what **evidence** can we marshal we have these competencies? Here, of course, our past, and immediate present, are highly relevant.

Mapping and Bridging the gaps

As directors we perpetually inhabit a learning universe.

Therefore,

- how well do we match the overall board competency set?
- where do we fall down?
- in what ways, using the rest of the board, and our networks, might we cover these gaps?

Here's a vital input...

In the light of what we're teaching ourselves about our competencies, networking, story-telling, and the gaps in our track record, we can choose to think-test-act-learn differently right NOW – before we get that next, or first directorial role..

Fill in the gaps rather than just waiting

By acting now, against the background of what we're discovering, we can fill in some of our experience and competency gaps. In so doing, we enhance the evidence of our ability to perform as a director. And we create an enhanced story.

This is not faking it till we make it. But making it as we make it.

We see that parts of our story are incomplete. We've not yet got the new role. So, instead of merely waiting, rather in a focused way, we complete a few of the incomplete bits – assuming by now we know what the missing bits are!

This is an important, vital, subtle tip. It's worth thinking about. Dialoguing about with our mentor. And acting on.

So we repeat it:

"In the light of what we're teaching ourselves about our competencies, networking, story-telling, and the gaps in our track record, we can choose to think-test-act-learn differently right NOW.

And by acting now we enhance the evidence. And create a better story.

Going for the jugular

Now we're getting ready to do a redraft

- As a potential director what do we stand for? What do we believe in? Value? What's our credo?

- In what way are we an 'unusual' director? How might we distinguish us, differentiate us, from other directors?

For example, are we directors who:

- are **intuitive**, and in touch with our gut-ometers?
- are concerned with exploring alternative futures?

- are **as much** opportunity-oriented as problem-oriented?
- embrace care for the environment?
- display strong dollops of emotional intelligence?
- evidence an interest in the wider community of stakeholders?
- want to add a philanthropic aspect to our business involvement?
- are creative artists or who see business as an art?
- embrace the global village and are internet savvy?
- belong to one our society's minority groups – rather than the broad white Anglo-Saxon male cohort which has dominated our traditional large company board rooms?

What are our special competencies, our unique potential to add value?

- Specifically, what are 3-5-7 key elements we can add to a specific board?
- In telling our story, what might we choose to highlight?
- And what to downplay, or admit as a non-competence?

Not a bad outline for our story. Though wow! That's an awful lot of hard work! But do you know something?

Our preparing process mirrors directorial processes

As we go back over this whole tip, and mind map it. And as we select out each question asked, and change the wording slightly, we find outlines of many a board agenda – in relation to our organization. We have created many of the implicit and explicit agenda questions directors worry about, and through.

So, as aspiring directors and 'owners' of our own one personal directorial business, we're acting out being a small version, of the larger entity we are soon to direct. A rather good effort!

Notes

1. Motivations for not-for-profits

http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_article.jsp?articleId=1318

TIP SEVEN

TRAVEL THE INSIDER'S HIGHWAY

Travel the Insiders Highway

*The quickest way to gain a new directorship is as an insider, **consciously** working the insider track. As insiders, we are appointed because there is a need. And we are a 'known and acceptable commodity.*

We might not be a 'best fit'. But we are at least a 'good and adequate fit' because:

- *we work, or have worked, for that organization, in some capacity, full-time or part-time*
- *our skills, personality and style are seen as appropriate*
- *we have formed a special relationship with key decision-makers, and*
- *we've built up enough "brownie points" to ensure our appointment.*

*As the right person, in the right place, at the right time, we've **earned** our new role. Ah yes. But all this doesn't occur by mere happenstance, as we will see.*

Two highways to the boardroom

Think about it! We gain new directorships because we travel two highways. First, the 'insiders' fast-track highway as a **known** commodity. Second, the slower and longer 'outsiders' highway, where we are **yet-to-be-known**.

Different rules

Each highways has its own **road rules** for us to learn and apply.

Insider route first

As learner drivers, in this Tip we drive the Known 'insider' route first. Then the Unknown 'outsider' route – in Tip 8.

Seven feeder roads

Put us in a room, and we'll think of more than seven 'feeder roads' that lead onto the two highways. But we focus on just seven 'feeders':

Two feeders for the insider highway

1. as a member of the 'family' – driving a solid 'family-type' petrol-driven sedan
2. as an entrepreneur - driving an innovative hybrid.

Five feeders for the outsider highway – see Tip 8

3. centres of influence
4. recruiters – both on and offline
5. online social networks
6. select members of our personal contacts
7. contacts known to our contacts.

For all routes, we ask the same seven questions.

1. Are we swimming in an appropriate pool?
2. To what extent are we a best fit?
3. Who will make the appointment?
4. Who influences the appointment and how do we get noticed?
5. What are the implicit and explicit rules?
6. How do we increase the level of comfort?
7. How do we get the role?

HIGHWAY ONE - THE INSIDER 'FAMILY'

"Being elected to a corporate board of directors is simple: You need to know the right people. It's all about the Old Boys' Network and, to some extent in recent years, the Old Girls' Network.

"Certainly, a woman needs to be competent, respected and have the necessary skills, just as a man does. But without the right connections she will never be considered," asserts Tucker Hart Adams, president of the Adams Group. [\[Note 1\]](#).

1. Are we swimming in an appropriate pool?

Think: Most 'insider' directors are from the known pool of:

- family and relatives
- friends
- CEOs and other line executives
- advisors, consultants, mentors, coaches
- brokers, lawyers, accountants, engineers
- investment banker, trust fund managers
- investors or shareholders in the company
- members of the organization
- strategic partners –including key suppliers, distributors, and customers

“There are a number of paths to the boardroom, but one of the common ones is through consulting for an organization, “asserts Dr Nicki Crauford, NZ CEO of the Institute of Directors. [\[Note 2\]](#).”

Another reminder of the ASX Top 100 gene pool

Research conducted in 2006 by Australian Council of Superannuation Investors found the stranglehold on directorships of the ASX 100 companies is tightening.

In 2005, almost 2/3rds – or 61% - of newly appointed non-executive directors of ASX 100 companies, **came from the boardroom of another top 100 company**. That represents a significant jump on the 27% of 2004. These 'insider' appointments occurred at a time of considerable change of board membership of the top 100 companies - almost double the turnover rate of the year before.

Belonging to the club

Phil Spathis, the executive director of ACSI, said that while **appointments from within** might show boards were trying to stock up on experienced and talented directors, it could also indicate they were looking only within the club.

"I am still not convinced companies are looking hard enough beyond that shrinking gene pool," Mr Spathis said. "You can find people with skills across a range of sectors, and people with the right values from both within the gene pool and outside the gene pool also."

The research shows women continue to be under-represented in boardrooms of Australia's biggest companies, underscoring the lack of diversity in the top directors' club. But the study also shows that once a woman has broken through the glass ceiling, she is **much more in demand**. And typically she holds many multiple seats. [\[Note 3\]](#).

Homogeneity breeds – boards elect themselves

"To the extent that homogeneity breeds homogeneity, director homogeneity contributes to executive homogeneity because directors control the appointment of executive officers.

"In addition, director homogeneity perpetuates itself in two ways.

"First, the corporate executives appointed by the board make up the pool of the firm's inside director candidates and also dominate the outside directorships for other corporations.

"Second, and more directly, incumbent directors choose their successors.

*"In most situations, shareholders in public corporations do not in any realistic sense elect boards. **Rather, boards elect themselves,**" write Margaret M. Blair & Lynn A. Stout, in their, *A Team Production Theory of Corporate Law, 1999.**

Test the highway: We list, say, **ten** such organizations we have worked for, and/or where we have a relationship - where we are family, closely-related, a friend, a line executive, an advisor, an investor, a member, a strategic partner:

- 1.
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Plan to act

Okay, for each of these 10, where we are a known commodity

1. how acute is their need for a new director?
2. what are their triggers?
3. who do we know who might 'put our case'?

Triggers for setting up brand new boards include:

- takeovers and mergers
- IPOs
- rapid growth
- management buy-outs
- management buy-ins
- investment of new equity
- restructuring
- change in majority ownership
- change in generational ownership and/or leadership

Triggers for new directors being added to 'old' boards:

- rotation of directors as outlined in the 'constitution' – maybe 1/3rd of directors at each Annual General Meeting.
- end of statutory service period – often 9 years with government appointments
- retiring age defined in the constitution – now often 75
- performance issues
- internal conflict
- change and transition
- economic and business cycles

New directors for new cycles

“I’ve spent a lot of time with Richard LeBlanc the author of “Inside the Boardroom”. He argues that boards need to reconfigure according to the stage of business – the same people shouldn’t necessarily be staying there year after year through cycles of boom and bust, competitiveness and deregulation, and challenges like moving offshore... Transition periods are often the times when boards are more open to women [and other non-traditional directors].” Wendy Simpson chair of Westray Engineering and director of Allomak. [Note 4]

2. To what extent are we a best fit?

Since we are insiders, the key decision-makers within the organization already have their perceptions of our strengths and weaknesses. And some idea of our suitability.

However:

- These perceived qualities may or may not approximate what **we** feel we bring to the table.
- They may or may not approximate what we **do** bring
- What we bring, may not translate well. *“Mary is a great accountant, a strong contributor, and we like her a lot, but I’m not really sure she’s totally suitable director for this board?”*
- Our ‘suitability’ may be made of factors outside our knowing – e.g. our relationships with the founder’s spouse, our religious beliefs or lack of them, whether or not we’re prone to swearing, our dress code...

Good enough fit, not best fit

What we have working for us, as an insider, is research findings into ‘satisficing behaviour’ which indicates when decision-makers reach a ‘satisfactory’ outcome, they stop searching for a ‘best-fit’ outcome. A good enough appointment may well be okay. So our appointment might not very overly competitive! *Which is not to suggest we may not be a best-fit as well!*

Performance doesn’t guarantee appointment

What we may be working against us, is the old chestnut that, *“If I work hard and well, I will surely get appointed as a director.”*

In reality high performers are often overlooked for new roles and are left to perform where they are. While far less worthy performers are appointed instead.

There are many reasons for this. Just three are:

1. If we are a head-down-bum-up person, and do nothing else, we leave the impression that's the role we are best suited to.
2. The transferring of learning from one situation to another often has to be facilitated. We know people in one context. We meet them in another and we don't recognize them at all.

Transferring our performance...

Similarly, we're known as an excellent performer in this context. But transferring that insight about us into a different, directing, context doesn't occur automatically.

We, or far better, a primed personal contact of ours, need to facilitate that transfer. *"Not only does Angelo perform well in this, but he'll perform well as a director because..."*

3. Psychologists talk about 'end goal behaviours'. Meaning the end goals we set determine the ways and means we employ to get there. No surprise in that!
 - If our end goal is overt performance. And promotion is only an implied or consequential goal. Then our behaviour and the communication signals we send out convey, *"I really want to do this, not be a director."*

- By contrast when our end goal is also **explicitly** a clear focus on getting a directorship, in many subtle and overt ways our behaviour manifests this. And provided our communication around this goal is not overtly gross, we enhance our chances.

I once was director of a think tank where one member attended every working session late and made sure he was noticed by the whole meeting.

Conspicuously and unnaturally in front of him, he always carried a large folder which screamed the name of his research business. This was the equivalent of wearing a sandwich board into a board room that yelled, "Appoint me as a director." Just a tiny bit unsubtle! And absolutely counter-productive. Not to be recommended.

What this means to us as insiders

1. We set our desire to gain an insider directorship as a clear, explicit up-front end goal, and we write it down.

A bit corny this quote, but it delivers the message: "Write our end-goal down. Written goals have a way of transforming wishes into wants. Cant's into cans. Dreams into plans. And plans into reality. Don't just think it - ink it!"

2. We make the end goal as specific as possible. *"I want my next directorships to be in a fast-growing, medium-sized digital media or entertainment company with sales under \$100 million, which operates globally, but where the head office is Australia's eastern seaboard,"*
3. Sure we need connections, competencies, a customized story and consummate performance. But, equally, we also need to **explicitly** communicate our desire to gain director roles to select personal contacts.

4. In so doing, we make constant judgments about when and where we communicate our director interest directly to the decision-makers. But in the main we go indirectly – through our network of personal contacts. See, however, Tip 9, *Get our first board role*.

Review: staged progression

Sometimes, we're best to plan a two or three step 'insider' process to move us into the board room, over several years.

For example, one of the most fruitful ways I have gained directorships over the last 34 years is:

- *First, to mentor the owner-founder of the business*
- *Second. To chair or be a member of an advisory board of internal executives and external advisors.*
- *Third, form, or join, the corporate board.*

3. Who will make the appointment?

That's a key question for us to research, and to work with our mentor and network, to find the answer.

4. Who will influence the appointment and how will we get noticed?

And how might I best communicate my interest and my tailored story and capability to these influencers – using my network of personal contacts?

When Naseema Sparks resigned as MD of M&C Saatchi, one of the top 10 advertising agencies in Australia, to focus on her board roles, she declared:

"Networking is part of the gig. Women are typically good at networking among themselves, but they also need to network with men as they are often the ones making decisions about board appointments.

*"There are issues around boards selecting directors in that a number of people are put forward and **the selection is influenced as to whether they're in 'the network'**.*

"The point is that women [and men] need to improve the quality of their networks so that they are known."

5. What are the implicit and explicit rules?

With all elites there are rules and processes to bring 'desirables' in. And keep undesirables out. We need to know and work the rules and procedures of 'in and out' groups.

Groucho's not for us

Not for us the Groucho Marx maxim: *"I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member."*

In the past, membership of most Boards was strictly limited to those who were already members of a specific elite group. This is gradually changing due to membership, community and legislative pressures. However, the male, white Anglo-Saxon cohort still dominates the bulk of all corporate boardrooms, at least. And their need for 'like' directors dominates the recruitment and selection process.

Not using selection criteria

For example, a limited survey of 60 chairs and Company Secretaries revealed that rather than using selection criteria, the main process for identifying prospective board members is **referral by existing directors** (78%) **or the chief executive** (57%).

Compatibility with existing 'board culture' was key in selecting names to put forward to shareholders. [\[Note 5\]](#).

6. How do we increase the level of comfort?

“People are invited on to boards, and the people doing the inviting have to anticipate a level of comfort with the way the board functions,” says Wendy Simpson.. “They use past experience as a predictor of future behaviour – and men feel they know men better.”

7. How do we ensure we get the role?

See other tips

Summary

1. Organizations where we are ‘insiders,’ or where we can become ‘insiders’ are a great place to start in our search for new director roles.
2. We still need a ‘new’ story for this organization – which makes credible the new contribution we can make in a new role., and the competencies we bring.
3. We need to customize that story for each organization.
4. And despite our insider status, we’re still best – in the main - to ensure our case gets put by others.

AN ALTERNATIVE: THE PROACTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL FEEDER LINE

“Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, while others wonder what has happened.”

As we carefully work through these tips, we:

- get our objectives and motivations clear and explicit
- work out in clear detail what sorts of director roles we'd like – and not like
- get our dream team network in place to assist us
- work out our story and how to customize it.

Now what? Reactive and active? Or proactive?

The main mind set of becoming a director is reactive - we join an organization set up by someone else. And we respond actively to their need.

Another route is the pro-active mind set – setting up an organization, alone or with others – where we become a director rather than CEO or manager. Either an executive or non-executive director. And either full or part-time.

We and our Dream Team have five ways to go:

1. Start a new business or not-for-profit from scratch
2. Buy, or takeover, an existing business or organization
3. Set up a joint venture with an existing business or organization
4. Merger a number of businesses or organizations together
5. Take existing businesses and inject significant new elements

We can build on this fact...

The years immediately following War 11, saw a boom in babies in many western countries from 1946 to the early 1960s. Many of these baby boomers established business. Many are now aged 60 or over – and considering retiring.

So of the 837,000 actively trading businesses in Australia, 22%, or an astonishing 184,000 will be sold, handed down or over, or closed down over the next 5 years

Proactively, what new directing opportunities can we create from some of these 184,000?

Where does this lead?

As we see in Tip 9, getting our first board role is the hardest. Starting entrepreneurially is one way to overcome this. And we can build into other board roles from there.

But also interestingly this proactive route to getting other directorships means we engage in the process of finding and 'promoting' others also as paid or sweat equity directors. Believe it or not that makes a considerable difference to our future roles – we tend to get what we enable others to get.

Sweat equity is where we and others gain equity in an enterprise in lieu of fees. In addition directors may also contribute part of the initial capital.

Changing perceptions

Also, fascinatingly, our actions in getting out in a market place of our choosing and putting together a new enterprise with others, changes many perceptions of our suitability as a director or other organizations.

Why not try it!

Notes

1. Quote by Tucker Hart Adams
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2. Quote by Dr Nicki Crauford, The NZ Herald, April 08, 2006.
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TIP EIGHT

LEARN THE OUTSIDER'S RULES

It's colder and bumpier on the outsider's highway

Learn the Outsiders Rules

*We've seen that two cars drive us on **the insider's highway** to the board suite. The sedate extended 'family' sedan. And a more jazzy entrepreneurial hybrid.*

*However, driving on the **outsider's highway** is colder and bumpier. But, when we say it, it's obvious - to get a director's role on this highway we still have to **move towards** becoming 'insiders'. And towards being a more known commodity.*

The milestones we have to pass remain much the same

1. we have to belong to a pool recognized as appropriate
2. we have to be seen as appropriate – *in this case, it's far more likely we'll need to meet more defined, and stricter, criteria*
3. we have to get the attention of those who recommend directors
4. we have to get known and into the mind space of those who appoint directors
5. we need to understand and follow the rules and procedures of the game, and
6. we need to be **seen** to be following the rules of the game.

One of the rules is to work the five feeder roads of the outsiders highway

1. centres of influence
2. search firms and recruiters – both on and offline
3. online social networks
4. select members of our personal contacts
5. contacts known to our contacts.

Shared dilemma

The Board of XYZ has worked out unusual and specific criteria the future director will have to meet. For example:

- high level contacts in government
- ability to work through all the carbon footprint issues
- experience and competence in taking a company through an IPO
- CEO who's taken a manufacturing company global
- high competence in e-commerce
- investment banking experience of significant depth.

Exhausted the insiders route

No one they know meets their criteria. So they agree to search for a director who's an outsider – someone they don't know.

Now, both the board and potential recruits face the same dilemma – how to find each other, get acquainted, assess each other, and build adequate trust and comfort levels. When neither knows each other.

For both, the answer is the same. Go through intermediaries

Typically, the board searching for outsider directors will work with, and through four intermediary groups:

1. Centres of influence they know, who are in regular contact with potential directors:

- accountants and lawyers
- investment bankers and share brokers
- professional membership associations – like AICD, Australian Institute of Management, Institution of Engineers...
- high level executive training programs – Mt Eliza, MBA programs, Harvard, etc.

Any corporation or other organization that produces an annual report will normally list **some** of their specific centres of influence – and particularly their accountants, lawyers, bankers, investment bankers, and brokers.

So we are able to identify, and contact them.

2. Professional search and recruiting firms – on and off line.

- For a wide range of such search firms around the world, see Association of Search Executives [\[Note 1\]](#).
- And see also searchfirms.com which lists a number of recruiting associations around the world. [\[Note 2\]](#).
- See also BestFit Directors global network – where on-line resources are beginning to be listed. [\[Note 3\]](#).

3. On-line social networks

Social networks are proliferating. And BestFit Directors is one of them. But the most likely network for the Board to consult is [LinkedIn](#) – with its listings of 20 million professionals world-wide. [\[Note 4\]](#).

Listing our profile on [LinkedIn](#) is worth considering – see below.

Less likely, but not-for-profits and smaller companies, might also use seek.com. [\[Note 5\]](#). Or one of the other on-line recruiters we mention below.

4. Trusted insiders who they feel may know appropriate people. Such insiders may or may not be known to us.

Make the same contacts

So clearly we need to contact, get known, sell ourselves, and leave appropriate 'marketing collateral' with the same four groups – plus a fifth: contacts known to our contacts

1. centres of influence
2. search firms and recruiters – both on and offline
3. online social networks
4. select members of our personal contacts
5. contacts known to our contacts.

We cover groups 1 and 4 above and in other tips. So a few more notes on recruiters, online social networks, and contacts known to our contacts.

Search firms and recruiters

“The professional recruitment process for directors is basically the same as for a senior executive,” says Lynn Anderson, MD for search firm Russell Reynolds in Australia. *“We start by defining the requirements of the company and the board, and then assemble a broad list of people who could do the job.”*

“We have a large database of executives and non executives who are either already on a board or are at that time in their career when they’re likely to be looking to become a director.

“We also talk to knowledgeable sources [centres of influence], and the board itself may have suggestions. Then we work with the board Nominations Committee to whittle this down to a shortlist of two or three.” [\[Note 6\]](#).

Note, Lynn Anderson is signed in to [LinkedIn](#). – where we can find his bio

Recruiters or no

As you’d expect opinions differ on whether contacting recruiters is worthwhile. Apart from its own Register of Directors seeking new roles [\[Note 7\]](#), the AICD recommends registering with search firms.

Contrary and contradictory advice

However, this advice from John Lucht of Netshare, Inc seems to contradict itself. Netshare, Inc is a confidential, membership based service providing job listings, networking opportunities and career management resources for the \$100K+ executive.

But a close read shows it follows the advice of these tips

- Most board appointments follow the insider’s highway
- In which case search firms are rarely used
- But where the board is seeking rare skills or to diversify away from vanilla, search firms may be used
- In which case – if that’s us – by all means register – taking care to highlight our unique characteristics.

Don't bother

“Don't bother sending letters and resumes to recruiters asking to be considered for their board searches. The fact is that they have - if any at all - exceedingly few such assignments. Moreover, in the rare instances where recruiters are called in, they're given very narrow specifications”

”Face it. Board positions are usually filled by people already known and trusted by the CEO, or by another board member. No recruiter is needed. The only exception is when someone who is NOT a carbon copy of existing directors is sought. Then a recruiter will be called.

“If you are a woman or a minority- highly positioned, able, and prominent - an elegant letter and a compelling resume to the right search firm at just the right moment ... may conceivably work for you.

“The rare board searches usually seek a flavor other than plain vanilla. If that's you, go for it! Otherwise, take a more pragmatic approach.” [\[Note 8\]](#).

On-line resources

1. Social networks are growing at an enormous rate. Some of the most-widely used are [LinkedIn](#), MySpace, Facebook, Skyrock Blog, StudiVZ, Orkut, Bebo, Hi5, Friendster, Couch Surfing.

[LinkedIn](#), with its 20 million professional members, with profiles on line, is possibly the most useful for director roles.

If you're not familiar with [LinkedIn](#) – and even if you are – get a slight flavour of its usefulness by following these four steps:

- Go to www.linkedin.com
- Find the Advanced Search box at the top RHS with the box titled People: Type in the name of someone you know – or perhaps Lynn Anderson. Once you find a member, read their profile for a while.
- Return to the Search box. Press the small down arrow and select Jobs. Enter the word Director in the box. Click on Search. And be amazed at the list of over 50 pages of roles on offer with the word Director in them. However most of these are permanent executive jobs. And the vast majority are in the USA.
- Now while still on the Jobs page look down to the blue box where it has Jobs Home and Advanced Job Search. Click on Advanced Job Search. Fill in the boxes to match your interests. Press Search.

2. Access 5,000 search professional world-wide in one hit

The Association of Executive Search Consultants is a world-wide association of 5,000 individual search professionals in 70 countries.

Through its Blue Steps program, we as senior executives, directors and would-be directors, can lodge our story on-line for a three-level fee - provided our current remuneration exceeds \$US100,000 – or its local equivalent.

In the right-hand column, the site lists the global search firms which access the data base. Depending on our goals and executive experience, registration is worth considering. [\[Note 3\]](#).

See also the www.searchfirm.com list of recruitment associations – which within them provide many specialist industry recruiters. [\[Note 2\]](#).

3. Resume Director. While again this site is very US centric, and focused on non-director roles, Resume Director does allow us to post our resume. And gain access to 90 role posting sites including Monster, HotJobs and CareerBuilder.

Contacts known to our contacts.

The clearer we are of the sorts of organizations where we'd like to be a director. The easier it is for us not only to 'mine' our direct contacts as a source. But to mine their contacts as well.

A dialogue might cover this territory – more subtly

“Claude/Johanna given my keen interest in getting a new role as a director in aorganization, I was wondering five things:

- *Do you know organizations that need a director?*
- *Would you be willing to refer me onto them – or allow me to use your name as an introduction?*
- *Do you know anyone else you know who might be able to assist me?*
- *If so, whether you'd be okay about introducing them to me, or again allowing me to use your name?*
- *Also as I approach interview would you be okay about acting as a reference for me, if needed?”*

Summary

We clearly see the outsider highway is harder and bumpier to travel. But it particularly suits us if we are an 'unusual' director, with 'unusual competencies' which special companies and organizations require,

In which case the outsider highway, becomes a great way for us to seek and find that small space in the directorial world where we can make an uncommon difference.

That is, provided we have our customized story well-prepared and we work the five feeder lines:

1. centres of influence
2. search firms and recruiters – both on and offline
3. online social networks
4. select members of our personal contacts
5. contacts known to our contacts.

Notes

1. Blue steps program of Association of Executive Search Consultants
<http://www.aesc.org/>
2. searchfirms.com
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TIP NINE

GET OUR FIRST BOARD ROLE

Like begets like. And, us getting our first board role, begets more roles. This tip on how to get our first board role summarizes suggestions dealt with in other tip. And adds more.

1. Do our homework

- Do our mind maps of all these tips – adding our thoughts, questions and actions as we go
- Consolidate our contacts into a system which makes regular contact easy
- Systematically develop and grow ‘old’ and ‘new’ networks relevant to us being a director – making, say, three new contacts a week
- Consider the whole gene pool of potential directorships
- Then increasingly define and refine ‘our’ directorial space
- Clarify and map our competencies, but see them against The 18-step Secret
- Then refocus them to fit directorial needs, and work on gaining relevant new ones.

2. Plan and test, then act

- Coach and get coached in working both the insider and outsider highways and seven feeder lines
- Connect with our current and new networks, so we
 - Customize our story – generally and specifically,
 - Develop our ‘marketing collateral,’ and
 - Communicate through our ‘old’ and ‘new’ contacts to board decision-makers

3. Work on that independent spirit

Boards combine individually-minded people in a collegiality.

However the thing that may hold us back from getting our first board role is our independent spirit. It may be so strong we are neither joiners nor networkers. Where this is true, it's worth us reconsidering our position, because...

4. The most likely way we'll get our first board – either as an insider or outsider - **is through our adroit handling of our personal contacts**

"Who is most likely to take a chance on putting you into a sensitive position with serious potential impact on his or her own status and livelihood? A complete stranger?"

"No way! In fact, the exact opposite is true. The person likeliest to nominate you for a board position is someone who already knows you very well and greatly respects you for your insightful thinking, your deep and relevant experience, and -- most critical of all - your excellent personal characteristics."
[\[Note 1\]](#).

5. Get joined up and joined in

We have developed our story and resume in three versions – printed, oral, and digital. Now we register, on line, in at least one of these seven ways:

- With www.linkedin.com
- By developing our own page – using LinkedIn copy - at www.bestfitdirectors.com
- Answer the questions, and develop our profile with the AICD Directors register at www.aicd.com.au

- Create our own web site **around being a director** and as a place we iteratively build our story and grow our relevant competencies.
- Also, we do that on www.bestfitdirectors.com where as a member we have our own page to add copy, blogs, photos, articles, links, videos. Our own [LinkedIn](#) and Facebook combined!
- Women may find it worthwhile to register with Women on Boards – www.womenonboards.org.au
- As high flying executives and directors earning over \$US 100,000 a year we consider the Blue steps program of Association of Executive Search Consultants. www.aesc.org.

6. Prepare and practice our 17-word elevator pitch

In working through these tips to this point, we've done a lot of our thinking and hard preparing work.

Now we encapsulate all that into our 17-word elevator pitch. Elevator pitch? That's a 'prepared sales pitch' we easily make to a stranger in an elevator, or at party, or other social event.

In a wide range of such social situations we're asked "*What do you do?*" This is an ideal chance to open a wedge into a possible opportunity. IF we combine what we do now, with our intent. In 17 words or less. And, especially if our answer stimulates easy dialogue that opens up the possibility further.

Why 17 words? Because research suggests that's the maximum of words we can readily remember. Can state with believable impact. And which the 'other' can remember.

Try these on for size

It's important we develop of our own 17-word pitch. But try these on for size. Read them out loud. See if we could say them, or something better, tailored to us. With integrity and ease – **while maintaining solid eye contact.**

Keep creating, modifying and revising our pitch until we can give it readily, eye-to-eye.

- I'm a business mentor looking for my first/next director role with a small to medium business.
- I grow businesses and people. As a mentor. And company director.
- I'm in the business of directing companies.
- Potentially I sit on several boards. Now I...
- I'm a professional company director – in waiting.
- I'm a serial entrepreneur, and business mentor, looking for my next challenging board role.
- Three things. I mentor CEOs. Create new businesses. Sit on boards.
- I'm in transition – looking for an engaging part-time director's role.
- I'm gainfully employed looking for a new/my first directing role.

Self-conscious

Interesting how those pitches that look okay on paper are SO hard to **say** easily, with integrity, and without looking away self-consciously!

It's the oral version, not the written one, said with strong eye-contact, that matters.

7. Prepare our three filter questions

Over and over in these notes we've suggested: Whether we're driving the insider or outsider route to the boardroom we communicate **indirectly** to the board decision-makers through our network of 11-circle contacts.

We affirm again that advice. BUT

- Opportunities to socially affirm our goal of a directorship do arise 'naturally' at parties, events, seminars, lunches, and the like
- Best-fit directorships are those where we are both offered a directorship and WE decide it meets our criteria. We need to be clear what **our** criteria are
- And at some point we will go through a dialoguing-interviewing-mutual selecting process.

Gain focus and save time

Therefore, we gain focus, lay the basis for clear communication, save our time, the time of our contacts, and the time of anyone searching for new directors when we have three very clear filter questions in mind.

These three questions have one aim – to discover: *“Is this person a possible clear conduit to a directing role for me?”*

Ask naturally

These three filter questions are questions we ask 'naturally' in any social situation. Getting the three is difficult. So, for example, I have three different sets of questions depending on the answer I get to, *“So, what do you do?”*

As a guide, here is ONE set of my three questions.

My goal is to be a director or chair of fast-growing small-to-medium public or private companies under \$100 million market capitalization.

I've just been told the 'stranger' leads her own business

1. *Great, so how many people work with you?* [This is a very rough surrogate of size, length of time in business, growth prospects. And likely turnover, if we multiply the number of people by \$150,000].

2. *How do you manage your business? Do you have a CEO? Board? External advisors?*

3. *Any interesting new developments under way?*

8. Set up our contact referees early

Setting up our contact referees early is an fascinating bit of advice. We quote at length an old hand at the directing game:

"Tom, I was wondering if I could take a few minutes of your time....

"I'm beginning to think about outside directorships. Nothing suggested so far has been very attractive. However, a few fairly reasonable suggestions are beginning to come in.

“Even if it takes a year or more, I’m not going to jump until it’s a company I really respect. Sooner or later, however, I’m probably going to need references, and I haven’t yet served on a board.

“Could I possibly suggest you as someone to talk to? You head a board and know what’s important in a board member. You also know me quite well and could discuss how I might measure up. Would you be willing to talk with someone, if and when there’s a need?”

The pendulum swings from ‘No!’ and ‘Why not?’ to ‘Yes’ and ‘Why?’

”See what you’ve done? You’ve changed the entire discussion from negative to positive. The answer you now get is an affirmative: *“Of course, I’ll be glad to help. Let’s think about what I should say.”*

A super galactic-powered all-purpose tool

“Ask for a reference instead of a job” is an incredibly powerful strategy in ordinary job hunting. It becomes even more powerful and indispensable when you want to be visualized favorably in a role you have not yet occupied.” [\[Note 4\]](#)

9. Be prepared to serve an apprenticeship...but!

Already we are rich in experience and competency in our chosen fields. But just as when we moved from the top class of primary school to the bottom of secondary school, as directors we start at the bottom again – as we learn our craft as a ‘junior director’.

An effective board is a learning board, and an effective director is a learning director. Thus for our first role, we may find it useful to go for a non-paying directorship and build from there. This role can run parallel to our full-time paid role. And we can start at any age.

However, hear these stern words from a high-flying USA corporate director

“Women are always advised to seek positions on nonprofit boards as a path to paid board positions. But if you have so few contacts and so little relevant experience that you need that route to meet people, you probably aren't corporate board material.” Tucker Hart Adams, president of the Adams Group. [\[Note 5\]](#).

10. Create our own practice board

- Mentoring, or consulting, or being part of an **advisory board**, can be a great apprenticeship. Many 22-34 year olds and under, are running great companies and benefit from adding one or more professional directors to their team. Often, though, without the formal appointment or title

Right now I mentor 3 young entrepreneurs aged between 26-32 year. They've all started, and are growing, great companies. With them, I also chair an Advisory Board - which I recommended -, made up of these entrepreneurs and their external advisors, Eventually we'll form a formal Board.

Over the last 34 years, apart from my own businesses, I have played a NED-type role with over 120 companies. But only around 50 of these have been formal, legal appointments.

- Consider going the entrepreneurial route of creating our own company – with others. Initially we meet as a practice board, or Dream Team – to find and create together the opportunity. This might take 2 or three years of meeting once a week before we create the ideal opportunity.
- As the dream becomes reality, we move from being a practice board to a real executive board. And ultimately to a board of non-executive directors.
- We've created a great platform from which to get other director roles.

11. Promote others

As we've seen, the not-for-profit sector includes advisory boards, industry associations, arts bodies, medical research organizations and educational bodies. As a general rule, the not-for-profits seek more diversity in their director than does the commercial sector.

The key is to become known and to develop a track record as a useful board member. In practical terms, this gives us exposure to how boards work, what works best, what not to do, etc as well as extending our professional network.

It is also a chance for us to promote others to suitable board roles – and to build our own inner Dream Team. Who in turn, over the years, promote us into roles, and/or act as referees.

12. Be and get a mentor – or two

In addition to being a professional non-executive director, I have also been a professional business **mentor** now for over 34 years. I also chair both a network and an organization of mentors.

But I still find I need to call on three mentors to assist me in my role as a professional director. Even now!

In addition, I also belong to a small group and network of fellow directors who meet monthly – and who under Chatham House rules [\[Note 6\]](#) mentor, advise, and support each other.

So, in addition to us being active in AICD. I encourage us to form, or be part of, a small self-supporting group of fellow directors. And to both BE a mentor. And get us a director mentor. Or two. Or three.

13. Go where the fish are

Fishing can be fun, anywhere, anytime. But if our goal is also to catch fish, there's little joy in fishing where there's no fish! Or fishing for flathead if we love trout.

So consider joining and attend the functions of *relevant-to-our-search* **peak** business and not-for-profit organizations. We listed many of these in Tip One.

Useful **peak business** organizations include:

- Australian Institute of Company Directors - AICD
- Australian Institute of Management – AIM
- Business Council of Australia – BCA
- Committee for Economic Development of Australia - CEDA

By attending events, and seminars, and joining sub-committees of these organizations, we learn lots. We also develop our contacts and build relationships with decision makers.

When the opportunity occurs, we make known our interest in best-fit board roles.

We also enquire how our contacts found their first board position. And ask who else they know who might assist us.

For example, look at this profile of AICD membership:

- 31% manage or direct organizations with over 500 employees
- 69% manage or direct organizations with under 500 people
- 38% manage or direct organizations with between 21-500 employees
- 31% manage-direct organizations with fewer than 21 people
- 30% of organizations overseen by members have turnover between \$10m and \$100 million
- 31% of organizations overseen by members have turnovers in excess of \$ 100 million
- 39% have turnovers under \$10 million. [\[Note 7\]](#).

14. Network our networks

We've said more than enough about 'working' our contacts. But we can also **work our contact's contacts**:

Ask each member of our network

- Does this brief seem to fit the bill?
- What changes would you recommend?
- Would you like me to leave the brief with you?
- Who do you know who might be worth contacting?
- Would you feel okay to contact them on my behalf?
- Or would you prefer if I contacted them and used your name?

15. Go where no one has gone before

It's easier to **gain stand out** when we know where, how, and why we stand out – that is, where we go, but none, or few, have gone before!

One way to consolidate this idea is to develop us as our own brand – which leads us to our final tip – about being our own brand – based on our own enduring integrity.

Our final tip is written by Michel Hogan

This tip's been written by Michel Hogan, a member of the BestFit Directors network. And an expert in personal branding. [\[Note 8\]](#). Michel works both in the USA and Australia.

Michel's called the tip Find your brand 'Id'.

So I'll sign off

Do seek and find that first small space in the directorial world where you can make an uncommon difference. And where we can have a lot of fun.

Stay in contact. Go well

Neville D Christie

Neville D Christie

Company chairman-director. Business mentor. Web publisher. Serial Entrepreneur. [\[Note 9\]](#).

Notes

1. Adroit handling or personal contacts
<http://netshareinc.blogspot.com/2005/05/outside-directorships.html>
2. LinkedIn. <http://www.linkedin.com>
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8. Personal Branding expert, Michel Hogan
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9. Neville D Christie. <http://www.nevillechristie.com>

TIP TEN**FIND YOUR BRAND 'ID'**

by

Michel Hogan

Principal of Brandology, working with individuals and organizations to find their authentic brand.

www.brandalignment.com

Which board would be a fit for you and you for them, which ones should you pursue and join? What skills and knowledge do you have that would bring value?

The answers to these questions can and should be influenced by your personal brand. This tip will get you started on the journey to finding your Brand “Id”.

Brand myths

Let's start by dispelling a couple of myths. First, brand is not just about marketing. Now I know for many of you that will be old news, so secondly it is also not just about perception and what your “customers” think of you. One is veneer and one is outside in – both ignore the critical piece of the brand equation. YOU.

Quite simply (or more accurately quite complexly) your brand is the result of what you believe and what your actions show. *So why does that matter for individuals generally (and board directors specifically)?*

How will we know best-fit when we see it?

Picking up from Tip One, about the wealth of opportunity out there for prospective directors – how will you know what will be the best fit for you? Where will you have the greatest chance of a successful and fulfilling directorship where you bring value to the organization and gain personal fulfillment?

One answer is by knowing your personal brand, or Brand “Id”.

Brand “Id” is the definition of the core brand elements of your promise, beliefs and story. It is a basis for the expression of who you are, and a foundation for the perception you create by your actions and decisions.

A bit more about Brand

Brand is what you believe and what your actions show.

This fundamental truth is no different for your personal brand than for an organization. When what you believe is reflected in your actions and decisions – across the board – then you will have a strong brand built on trust and reflected in your reputation and the perceptions people hold.

A marketing skin?

Too often brand is viewed as a marketing skin, applied on the outside and having small to no impact on the inside day-to-day.

- a veneer facing the market to try and elicit a certain response
- something separated from the whole to be changed at will.

But here is the rub. It’s just not true.

Consistent and authentic

Your brand needs to be authentic and consistent, **a reflection of who you really are**. You can't manufacture it, use it to find opportunities and then expect that you will be successful when the reality doesn't match up with the false expectations.

You only have ONE brand. Inside, outside, customer, partner, colleague. One set of values, one set of actions, one thing you promise.

What you believe?

There are two core belief elements that are part of your brand. Your promise and your values.

Your promise

Your promise is not expedient, framed or driven by circumstances. It isn't temporary, a trend, or flavour of the month. It is not what you do – your products or services, or how you do it – your policies and processes.

It is that one thing that will always be true about who you are. A promise is about what was always true, what is still true today and what will be true in 10, 20 or even 30 years.

Deeply personal

It is a deeply personal thing. It should have room to grow and change and should still be as relevant in 10 or 20 years as it is today – to the people you work with, the people your work for and to yourself. It is the unifying concept for everything you do.

So what's your promise?

Your values

Your core values are the enduring guiding principles you hold which provide you with a moral compass, a framework for everyday actions and decisions.

They are what you believe and it doesn't so much matter what they are, as long as they are true and not an aspiration or even worse something help to fit a specific situation or need.

In the words of 'Good to Great' author Jim Collins, "If circumstances penalized you for holding the core value, would you still hold it? If you can't honestly answer yes, then it's not a core..."

In other words, if your values aren't inconvenient at times, then they probably aren't authentic or core.

Knowing your values

So do you know your values? And more importantly do you live them (every day)? Without a clear understanding of what they are it is impossible to know your brand and even more impossible to align your actions and decisions.

The truth is that even if you don't really know what your values are, the people you work with bump into them every day. And while your authentic values might not read like a list of the most wanted, at least they will be something that you can live up to.

There will be other ideals that change with time and opportunity, but these aren't CORE values.

How do you know if your values are core?

Taking Jim's advice and asking if they are ever inconvenient, is a great beginning!

What do your actions show?

What you do and how you do it is the "business" end of your brand.

The common mistake is to think of brand as just a message or a look. Marketing is definitely a way to communicate what your brand is about, and the ways you do that are an important piece – however they are just that, a piece.

How about the other 90%?

Some other less talked about places that brand shows up for individuals include - in no particular order:

- Who do you choose as partners and associates? Do they share your beliefs?
- Do you judge your opportunities against your brand **before** you undertake them?
- What does the message on your voice mail or your email signature say? Why?
- Are you deliberate about your communications - all of them (even invoices are a form of communication)?
- What does your office look like? Do you have one? Do you need one?
- What do you put under your name on your business card? A title, a label, a description?
- What about the contracts you use, will someone need a lawyer to understand them? Could they be simpler?
- Do you do what you say you will? Every time, even on the small stuff?
- And hundreds of other things that either strengthen or undermine your brand.

There are no right or wrong answers to any the above points. Only what is right or wrong for you and that is exactly the point:

Your brand is about you it is what you believe and what your actions show.

Do you know yours?

For more information about your Brand “Id” visit www.brandology.com.au and download **Brand “Id” Checklist** or email michel@brandology.com.au to start a conversation about your personal Brand “Id”.

About the Author

Alignment is Michel's passion! She has spent her career helping organizations, people and projects build greater alignment between who they are, what they say and what they do.

A brand advocate, writer and thinker, Michel first discovered the importance and value of integrated thinking working in museum design 18 years ago. Today, that thinking continues to evolve and drive her work as principal of Brandology and Brand Alignment Group - brand practices located in Melbourne, Australia and Denver, Colorado respectively.

Working with an eclectic client-base, ranging from individuals and start-ups to mature companies, Michel builds understanding of, and implementation programs for, authentic brands. Brands that create deep impact inside and out and don't just act as a veneer for the marketplace.

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