

Guide to your Board Value Proposition



Landing the board seat you want can be very competitive, even for the most seasoned corporate director. For the dedicated and experienced non-profit director, finding your way onto a board with influence on a cause that you care about can involve an opaque appointment process, especially if it's controlled by government. And high-profile charities have a limited number of board seats that open up on an annual basis.

Outside of the 'who you know' networking factor, having a Board Value Proposition (BVP) that highlights the unique combination of skills and experience that only you can bring is a powerful differentiator. While networking may get your foot in the door, it's the clarity, authenticity, and persuasiveness of your BVP that has the potential to get you to the interview stage and beyond.

Your Board Value Proposition

According to Deborah Rosati, founder and CEO of Women Get on Board, a company that connects women to corporate boards, "Creating your board value proposition is one of the most critical things you will do in your board journey."

"Your board value proposition is what you bring to the board table and how you differentiate yourself from other board members and other board candidates."

- Deborah Rosati

Deborah goes on to say, "You should be able to articulate your board value proposition in a 30-second-or-less elevator pitch. And you should include specific expertise, skillsets the board currently lacks, and how you are a leader."

Deborah's BVP is a great example.

Deborah Rosati's BVP -

"I have entrepreneurial, financial and governance expertise with high growth and transformational companies in technology, retail, consumer and cannabis sectors."

Here's another example. Sukhinder Singh Cassidy is founder and Board Chair of TheBoardlist, a talent marketplace where business leaders come together to discover board-nominated female executives.

Sukhinder Singh Cassidy's BVP -

"Sukhinder Singh Cassidy has founded and successfully built and scaled technology companies at the intersection of media and commerce throughout her career."

Your story is your own and has a unique value. You can learn from the structure and content of Deborah's or Sukhinder's BVP – or anyone else's - but don't try comparing your perceived worth to theirs. Your personal BVP is important to the right board.

When asked why you want to be on a board, or how you could contribute to a board's success, it's helpful to have your board 'elevator speech' down pat. It's about the added value you would bring to the board, your unique offering. There is only one you. Let them hear about it.

When your BVP is brief, concise and specific, it demonstrates your ability to make a point effectively and persuasively – a valuable skill for future board meetings.

If your BVP is effective at the front end of your board CV, you may be contacted by the board's governance or nominating committee, or possibly a search firm, to discuss further.

Your board CV and cover letter go on to provide greater detail on your background. Make sure they're designed for consideration for a board role, not a management position. There's quite a difference in focus.

"You will want to build your board CV with your unique value proposition in mind." – The Boardlist

There are some resource links at the end of this guide to connect you with additional information about a board CV.

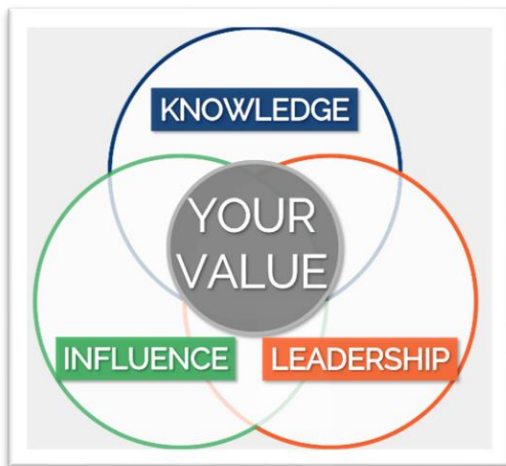
As it says on TheBoardlist website, "Finding your board opportunity is all about fit. The ideal opportunity is where your skills and professional passion match up with a company's needs. This will ensure that your contributions are valued and you are able to make an impact."



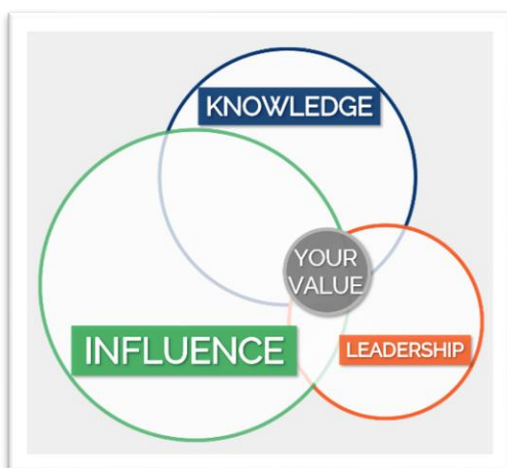
The value you bring

Once you've joined the board, it's the value you bring to the boardroom that matters.

Think of your value as a Venn diagram with three concentric circles - your knowledge of the issues, the influence skills you've honed over time, and your leadership that lets you know when to lean in and when to step back.. Your value is at the intersection of the circles.



Everyone has times when they're off their game. Have you ever returned home or gone back to the office after a board meeting asking yourself, "Why did I say that?"



Chances are one or more of the intersecting circles had shrunk or grown or became somehow unbalanced.

Your Knowledge

As a director you have a responsibility to the board as a whole, and to your fellow board members, to make sure you're prepared for anything that comes your way. A complete understanding of matters before the board will help directors make sound decisions whether they're about how money is spent on important projects, which policies are most effective, or what technology investment would best serve the organization's needs.

Researching the topics that are going to be discussed at the meeting provides you with the confidence to collaborate with others. Having that knowledge in your pocket gives you the courage to disagree if need be, and helps you build consensus to take action.

As a board member, be on the lookout for skill gaps you may want to work on, and stay alert for areas where you might share your own knowledge and experience.

Your Influence

There's nothing wrong with wanting to influence your board - that's why you're there. Influence can come from position, personality, or both. Regardless of the source of your influence, it's best to exercise it carefully.

A good way of influencing the discussion without raising anyone's hackles is by asking insightful questions. Listening carefully to the responses and re-framing conversations allows the board to move forward toward a decision that will work best for everyone.

When offering opinions, doing so with subtlety and tact ensures that your input will stand out for quality without taking away from others whose voices need to be heard as well.

A board director's work is challenging, but with the right skills - both hard skills and soft skills - it gets easier. We all need to find that balance between being subservient or dominant. That's how you can ensure that not only is your voice heard, but your views are given serious consideration.

Your Leadership

In their seminal book, ['Boards That Lead'](#), author Ram Charan and his colleagues describe various scenarios when boards need to take charge, partner with management, monitor performance or simply stay out of the way.

As a director, think about the hard skills where you can demonstrate leadership in board discussions - systems thinking, the big picture view, risk management, and general business acumen.

Not every board member has to be an industry expert but, as a leader who wants to encourage innovation and new ideas, you have a role to play in cultivating a culture of inquiry. It can take courage to ask tough questions in uncomfortable situations. But it's in those moments that true breakthroughs occur.



Knowing how and where you can add value helps you be the most effective director you can be. It gives you the confidence to engage actively with your peers around the board table (or on the computer screen).

Your director's challenge is to remember where you can best add your own unique value in the heat of the moment, when discussions become intense.

Your takeaways:

- Your BVP is a concise description of the value you would bring to a board, your 'elevator speech.'
- Test your BVP with a colleague you trust. It's not unusual for us to underestimate our own value.
- Updating your BVP regularly is a smart thing to do.
- Be mindful of where you can add the most value to a board meeting. Think about it ahead of time.
- Know where your knowledge, influence, and leadership intersect.
- Be alert to opportunities to pursue additional director development.

Resources:

- [How to Get Yourself on a Board: Position Your Board Offer](#). Women Get On Board.
- [The Boardlist](#).
- [The Path to the Boardroom](#). Egon Zehnder.
- [7 Steps to Create a Killer Board CV](#). ExecuNet.
- [What Is Your Director Personality?](#) by James Beck, Better Boards Newsletter - July 8, 2014.
- [The Three E's of Effective Board Leadership](#) by Stanislav Shekshnia, INSEAD Senior Affiliate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Family Enterprise

This guide is adapted from The Savvy Director blogs ['What's In Your Offer'](#) (posted December 6, 2020) and ['The Value You Bring'](#) (June 27, 2021).
