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SPEAKERS

Helga Svendsen, Leonie Morgan

H Helga Svendsen 00:00
Today on the take on board podcast, we're going to talk through tips and tricks to getting on board and how to be an effective board member. I'll be speaking with Leonie Morgan a m. Leonie is a director of film Victoria homes going tape and a founding member and board member of Emily's list. She was previously a board member at seen media, the Australian Center for Research into Employment and Workplace. And she's also been a member of the community broadcasting foundations, fundraising and fund development subcommittee. Leonie works across the private sector for government and in the not for profit sector in Australia and the Asia Pacific, her focus is on gender equality, mentoring and good governance. Her passion is seeing more women in decision making, and much of her work focuses on this. This work was acknowledged by her inclusion on the Victorian women's honor role in 2007. And when she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for significant services to women, welcome to the take on board podcast, Leonie.

L Leonie Morgan 00:58
Thank you very much Helga.

H Helga Svendsen 01:00

Great to have you here. So we know a bit about your bio and what you've done. But I'd love to hear a bit of a story about young Leonie that tells us a bit about how you got to where you are today.

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Leonie Morgan 01:10

Well, a really important thing for me was I was a teacher and I happened to meet the former Premier, John Kerner, before John was in politics, of course. And Joan was very involved in the disadvantaged Schools Program. In fact, I think she might have been the chair of that program. And meeting Joan had a really profound impact on my life. Joan was a wonderful mentor to me. And she taught me to think for myself, she taught me to speak out for myself. And she taught me the importance of making change and political change particularly, she also introduced me to a lot of very key people that I'm still quite close to have been very helpful in my life. John was just such a profound influence somebody and has really made me in a way what I am today.

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Helga Svendsen 02:04

What an incredible experience to have in your life. How fabulous and those lessons around, you know, speaking up, using your networks, meeting people and using those things, great lessons to learn that. And we'll talk about it I'm sure. A part of a listen to you now using your governance experience as well. Yes, I do. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about today was getting on a board. So it'd be great to hear how you got on your first board.

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Leonie Morgan 02:32

Well, I guess my first board was an advisor. Oh, well, Emily's List Australia was my first board in fact, because I was one of the women with Joan and with Julie Gilad, that setup Emily List to Australia,

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Helga Svendsen 02:43

some people might be familiar with that Emily's is an acronym. Can you tell us what it means? Well,

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Leonie Morgan 02:48

Emily's is early money is like yeast, it helps the campaign grow. And what Emily's does is supports progressive Labour Party women candidates, we support them with some money

to grow their campaign. And we support them with a mentor and training and I coordinate the mentoring program in my free time, such as I have. I coordinate the mentoring program, and we have supported about 260 270 women into Australia's parliament. So we're pretty pleased about that. We've been around for about 20 years.

H Helga Svendsen 03:21
So that was your first board?

L Leonie Morgan 03:23
Yes, yes, I was on the National Committee. I was I had no idea that something needed to happen with the numbers of women in our Parliament's and so I'd seen this thing in the US and Emily's list us. And I thought it would be a good idea here. So I went about influencing people to pick up on the idea. And so I was on the first National Committee. So that was effectively my first board. So with that experience of being on the Emily's board, what was your next board, I worked at industrial relations, Victoria in the 1990s, I think, and industrial relations, Victoria, Monash University had a center for workplace training. And they wanted a representative who had them networks into industrial relations and government. And so they asked me to go on their Advisory Committee. And that was, it was a different sort of a board because it wasn't as strategic as the boards that I'm now on. But we had were able to guide the way the center went and introduce them to keep people who might be able to assist them.

H Helga Svendsen 04:25
It's a great reminder, for women, I think in both of those examples, firstly, about, you know, being on the committee of management of an organization that you might just be involved in setting up a bank, but also leveraging your workplace roles into governance roles as well. And then that builds into further governance experience. And that happened to me with the next board that I was on, which was some film Victoria.

L Leonie Morgan 04:50
While I was working at IRV industry relations, Victor I work part time there. And I also work for the Australian Film Commission on a project to get more women into television into senior levels in television. So I had networks there because I worked with the television networks. And so there was a vacancy on film Victoria and because I knew a lot about getting women then into senior levels in the film and television industry. And because I was really passionate about that, I then got a position on film Victoria, which was

government board. And I was on that board for about three years. And my first term was three years. And then I went off that board. And then there I went on to the SYN media board. And seen media is a an organization of young people making radio and TV. And I was the old person on the board. And this is an important thing about getting onto boards. Because with that board, at first, I was co opted onto that board. So I was not a young person making radio and TV. Obviously, I was some interest in the area. And they wanted someone that knew about governance that been on boards, and they wanted someone that had links into government, and they wanted someone that could help them with HR type strategies. And so they asked, they co opted me. And so I was co opted for a period of time. And then I went to the AGM and the members new meeting, and they voted for me. And that's a key lesson about how to get onto boards, because often you don't have to be appointed on a board from the AGM you volunteer or you become co opted and you bring a particular skill as an additional thing. Or you might be on an advisory committee to a board. After that you're appointed to the board because they know you and they know the skills that you bring,

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Helga Svendsen 06:29

can you just explain that co opting process people might not be familiar with what that means and how it works?

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Leonie Morgan 06:34

Well, the co op seat and additional person to the board and they don't go through the formal process, they usually as a co OPT, you would meet with the chair and you would meet with the other board members and you talk about your skills. And from that they would ask you to come along. So you wouldn't be a full voting member of the board. But technically, you are still considered a board member in any very difficult positions. So there's this thing called shadow board members. And so you're considered a shadow board member. Even though you're technically not a full member of the board, you're at the board decisions, you might be able to influence things so but co ops are really good way to go. So if you've got the listeners have an interest, they might like to pursue that interest through the CO option method. So asked to become opted and bring that skill to that board,

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Helga Svendsen 07:22

and is a great tip for people to pursue for those organizations that they're interested in. So for getting on a board, what other tips and tricks have you got for us about how to get on a board?



Leonie Morgan 07:34

Well, the first thing which was particularly crucial for me, and I guess for anyone else, you need to be interested. So you need to think about what are your big interests, what are your passions, and you need to follow those passions. For me, it was a film and TV and training. So I gravitated to organizations that focus on those. So that's the first tip. Second important tip is to know exactly what you bring to the board. Have a look at your CV that you might use for your jobs, boards want different things often. But you can move that around to the things that you can add to the board. For me, it was knowing about government, and how to get things done with governments. So SYN media was funded by governments. So it was great that I was on that board and was able to help them with those sort of things. For me, also, I know about HR. And so I bring always bring that to the board. And I've got a real passion for diversity. So I'm the logical person for the people culture and remuneration committees of boards. And with the two boards, and I'm on at the moment, both Holmesglen Institute and Film Victoria again, I'm concerned about those things with those boards. The other important thing I think, is your networks. It's really important about who you know, because how you get onto boards, or how you get co-opted from boards is that someone you know, will know of you and will suggest you and that happened with me with SYN. It happened with me film Victoria, not so much with Holmesglen. You look around your networks, and you see who do you know that has similar interest to you is on a board and the other people that are really, really important for you. Before you say yes to a board though, make sure you observe the board. So go even as a co-opt, go along to the board meetings. Look at the annual report, you'll find out a lot of stuff there. Because really, you want to make sure that the finances are in good shape before you get onto a board because you're liable for such things as a board member. So you need to really have a good look at the finances, have a good look at the annual report and go to the meetings, make sure you can work with the chair and the other board members. Although you won't really know until you actually get on that board. But you'll have a good first idea. And finally getting on a board you need to train up before you get on the board. You need to know what sort of skills and Helga's is Board Accelerator program is fantastic for that because you learn all about thing on boards. Another good opportunity is the Institute of company directors. They courses are quite expensive, but the Victorian Government has scholarships for those programs. So you might like to consider having a look at the Institute of company directors in their sort of courses. Because you want to know about governance before you go on a board. Because then you know the things that you can bring to the board. And you know the things that you can achieve through being on that board and how to achieve them.



Helga Svendsen 10:27

And I'll make sure I put the links to the institute of company directors, to the Victorian

women's government scholarships and to my program. Thanks for the plug there Leonie for Board Accelerator and for Board Kickstarter, I'll make sure I'll put the links in the show notes so people can access those. So people have taken on your advice, they've worked their networks, they've got their board resume in order, they've done all their due diligence, and they found their first board role or maybe even their second or third board role, it would be great to also hear about what makes an effective board member and what that means to you.

L Leonie Morgan 11:02

Well, the first year on the board is really getting to know everyone and getting to know the lay of the land. So I reckon it's really key to get to know those board members, other board members and the cheer. The way I've done that with my boards is I've gone out for coffees or lunches with them individuals, so really get to know what they like. One good example of that is that with Holmesglen, I had lunch with a board member who's a CPA and accountant you know, funding and finance isn't my forte. We are now great friends and I know that I can give her a call. And she'll answer any questions I have prior to the board meeting on the finances. So another example of that is with film Victoria, I had my nails done with one of the quite influential people on that board. And I've got to know her really well then, and we do have lunches together. And that's been great to see, really get to know the other people on the board.

H Helga Svendsen 11:58

I'm so glad you mentioned getting your nails done, I was going to prompt it if you hadn't, because it's just another way of getting to know people and spending some time together whilst you're doing something else as well. It's a very efficient use of time.

L Leonie Morgan 12:09

Yes, it's really important really, really important to know the people you can depend on on the board. Because if you've got something that you want to get up on that board, you'd want other people to come along behind you and support you. And so if you've been out with them, if you know them quite well, and you can get that done. The second tip I recommend for being an effective board member is to be really prepared for the meeting. So you need to read the papers. I usually read through the board papers once. And then I go back through them again for the things that I've got questions on or the things that I want to know more about. You'd be surprised to hear that some people don't read their board papers before they go to meetings, which Americans are really it's a terrible thing. It's a crime that shouldn't be on the board.



Helga Svendsen 12:51

And you can always tell the people at the meetings that haven't read their papers, you can just tell I think they think they can get away with it. But they can't.



Leonie Morgan 12:58

When you go through those pad is often you come up with questions. And so come to the board meetings with questions with an issue that you want to bring up. If it's a little tricky, certainly go to the chair first, because you don't want any surprises. I think that's really important. And volunteer to go on committees. So I volunteered I you know, as I said before, I'm not a big fan of the finances, although I know I had to read a balance sheet in the piano. But I volunteered to go on the Finance and Audit Committee of Holmesglen because I really want to have an in depth knowledge of what was on that, you know, the figures, the budget figures, people for that was very strange. The finance committee at Holmesglen is all they're all accountants. That was so surprised to have me there and now surprised that when they asked me what was it like and I said it was really good. And really good fun, they were just shocked that someone could think that these figures were good funded. Gee, I learned a lot being on that committee. And I'm no longer on that committee, I'm back on the people and culture committee. But it was great to know I understand the finances in depth. So I've volunteered to go on committees, I think that's a good thing.



Helga Svendsen 14:02

And I always think it's a great thing for the non finance people to the Finance Committee because I asked different questions here. And often put the accounts people through their paces a little bit by asking those different questions. The bean counters as they call themselves - I'm also on the audit committee - and they refer to me as the non beanie. Because I'm not the bean counter there. But you asked different questions and test different things out. So I think it's hugely valuable to make sure you get that diversity of opinion and views and experience in the committee's and at the boards.



Leonie Morgan 14:31

Yes, one thing I found when I first went on a board, and I find it sometimes now, is it's hard to ask those questions. I'm a natural questioning type. And sometimes I think I came away from the board, many I think, have I asked too many questions. But you can never ask too many questions on a board. Don't be afraid to ask questions, to seek further clarification, to continue to repeat those questions until you have the full picture. Because if you don't,

they could be somebody sort of problem hiding there that you're not aware of that's going to come back to bite the whole board further on down the track.



15:06

Have you got other tips for us.



Leonie Morgan 15:08

If you haven't got the time, and you're not giving anything to the board, then I think you shouldn't be on the board. That's my major tip that I think that if you don't put time into being on a board, and they do take a lot of time, there are some people I know that are on like nine boards. And I don't know how they do it. Because I reckon they're not putting in the time. And I think if you're not putting in the time for the board, then you need to get off early. So you need to continually think about whether you've got the time and the passion for the board. And if you haven't get off and get someone else on there. Or that's most important, because when you're thinking about going off the board, it's a good idea to have someone to think about who could replace you. So succession planning is key on boards too.



Helga Svendsen 15:50

just before we get to succession planning, thinking about time on a board, how much time does it take and what sort of things take up your time as a board member?



16:00

with the government boards, Holmesglen, particularly there's a lot lots of time we would probably be going out to Holmesglen to the campus would probably be doing that once a week, not for meetings for various things around the meetings, then, once a month, we will have a meeting and the meeting will go for three or so hours and involved in that meeting before the meeting will be probably about five hours of reading papers and re-reading papers. And then there's time when you catch up with people outside the board meeting so that multiply that by how many boards you're on. And that's that's how much time it takes. With not for profits, people say often it takes less time. But I don't believe that. I think often with not for profits, it takes more time because there's less people often to do the work less paid people. So board members on not for profits end up having to do some of the work, particularly some of the fundraising work. Yep, this often more time if you're on a not for profit board.



Helga Svendsen 17:03

That's great. It just gives people a bit of an idea about what are the sorts of things that take up your time. How do you prioritize your time?



Leonie Morgan 17:11

Well, for me, I work part time. So I have time for boards. But I know people that work full time that that make enough time for boards. I do my board work, usually on a Sunday afternoon. So I make that time that way.



17:26

You we're going to talk about succession planning - when it's time to get off and succession planning.



17:30

I think succession planning is really key for boards for an example, with a SYN board because SYN is an organization that works with under 26 year olds. So we were often wanting an enact the constitution at scene said more than half our board members had to be under 26. We had issues around succession planning there. And so we had a great board intern program, where three people were interns to the board for a year, for 12 months, as part of being an intern, they had a mentor from who's appointed from the board, they came to board meetings and they also had projects that they had to do to do with governance. So that was a great succession planning exercise. So as people went off the board, so people came onto the board who'd been through usually been through the intern program. Of course, there was always opportunities for others to be elected. But it seemed to me that the interns had this great experience of being on the board, coming along to board meetings, having support learning about governance, and they usually opted to come onto the board after that. So that was a great succession planning process. As a board member, it's your responsibility to think a little about who would replace you on that board. And I've always done that, particularly with a not for profit boards. Because I think sometimes it's hard to get people that are willing to give what it takes, like it might seem glamorous sometimes to be on a board, it's good because you can say great change, being on a board is a wonderful thing. Because you can change an organization. And you've got a purpose being on that board. And you can meet your purpose through being on the board. But it's also quite a lot of time. So you want someone to replace you that's going to put in the same time has the same passion, and has the same purpose. And so thinking about going off a board is kind of like a 12 month project, I

reckon. Thinking about who can take over from you

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Helga Svendsen 19:22

could not agree more about thinking about who comes in after you. And there are the intern programs, there's a number of them around I think YWCA has one is there's the board observer ship program. I heard recently, Jewish care has a program of interns as well. So there's a number of organizations that do it. you'd mentioned earlier about observing a board meeting before you join the board. So that's a great way of doing that as well, you get to really know the organization.

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Leonie Morgan 19:46

And the skills you learn through being on a board take you to lots of other places. I mean, the skills you learn from being on a board are great for you and your your day to day job. Because you've learned a lot about managing people about thinking strategically about working with both the chair and working with the other board members are working collaboratively, really about working together to bring about your common the purpose that your your organization set up to do. And also the fact obviously, the financial issues and the compliance issues are those that apply in every day, every day work. And the people you meet, when you're on a board people that I've met through my boards on storefront and you know, very friendly with, say meet some great people being on boards.

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Helga Svendsen 20:30

If you're in an organization that has a board itself. Being on the board of another organization also gives you great insight into your own organizational structure and how that board might operate as well. And helps to write those board papers and to report to the board and give an idea of what they might need as well.

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Leonie Morgan 20:47

And also it looks really good on your CV. Yep.

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Helga Svendsen 20:51

We've covered quite a bit today about getting on a board being an effective board member, how to find some of those roles. What are the key takeaways that you want people to take from this conversation today



Leonie Morgan 21:02

will be no lack of Sarah, I think it's a huge honor to be on a board. And it's a great pleasure for me. I've learned heaps from being on my boards, I still learn more every day I learn more every board meeting, I learn more. And I've got some good friends. I'm a firm believer in quotas for boards. And I'm really proud. And place that Victorian Government has a quarter of 50% women on the government boards. And the Victorian Government has made that. So the boards that I'm on or have at least 50% women that I think are being challenged now is looking at the diversity of those board members, particularly in regard to culture, to ethnic background to disability. And age, I think we're all a bit bit the same on the boards. I think we're all kind of older, we're all middle class. And most of us are white. So I think the real challenge is to look at getting a bit more diversity on our board. And I think the other challenge is to make sure that we keep that 50% women, on boards, at least 50% women because I know these things are hard to gain. And they're easily lost. So I think we have two board members and others need to have a need to have a very big overview of the strategies to have more diverse boards and keeping the women the 50% women more than 50% women involved in those boards.



Helga Svendsen 22:26

Maybe in regards to that, or maybe in regards to other things you've mentioned today. But what might be one or two or three things that our listeners can do, what are the actions that they can take to really have some impact around these things?



Leonie Morgan 22:40

Well, I think the first thing is to look around for a board that you might be interested in going on. The second thing is to get your board survey up to date. And the third thing is to network and network network. Wise words,



Helga Svendsen 22:53

that no doubt harken back to your early days of meeting Joan as well. There's some similarities in those messages that from when you first MIT giant



Leonie Morgan 23:00

Oh, and also feel very confident, extremely confident that you can give to that board to any board, that you've got the competence. You've got the intellectual rigor, and you have the experience, will you be able to give and be a valued member of any board. So feeling

that confidence is really important. And that's what Jane gave me,



Helga Svendsen 23:20

Sally only. I'm wondering if you can recommend a resource for our listeners, maybe a podcast or a TED talk or a book that might be helpful for them.



Leonie Morgan 23:28

I think they could do no wrong by looking at the women's power Handbook, which was written by John Kerner and Morena quite a few years ago, but still has so much to say about being active in society as a strong feminist woman. And those books are available from Emily's list Australia. And if you google actual see on your web, they're



Helga Svendsen 23:49

fantastic. I was talking to some women yesterday, who referred to and they couldn't find where to buy it. So that is really useful to know. I'll make sure note for that in the show notes as well. Fabulous. Thanks for Arnie.



Leonie Morgan 24:00

Thank you had you. It's been a great pleasure.