

How Women can Capitalize on Board Opportunities

By Shai Ganu and Suhaimi Zainul-Abidin | 5 March 2020

There appear to be many women who aspire to take up NPO board roles but are unsure of how to go about it. Here are some simple tips:

- **Pick a Cause** (not just any cause): Volunteering your time at an NPO, including at board level, is a significant commitment and there will be trying times which make you question why you are doing it. Make sure you believe strongly in the cause.

“Anyone who wants to serve in the non-profit sector needs to ask why he or she wants to do it. If you have found your calling and if you’re sure of your purpose, then there are numerous opportunities to get involved and help. Ask yourself what you can bring to the team.” – Chandra Mohan Rethnam

- **Get involved at different levels:** Volunteer and participate in activities and committees to gain exposure and start contributing. You may have to start at smaller organisations or committees at first, before progressing to larger roles.
- **Bring your A-game:** Your skills and expertise will be what makes you stand out, rather than your gender or any other demographic differentiator. Be sure to highlight specific skillsets and professional qualifications that can add value.

“At the board level, we are looking for the things that we didn’t think about, something that maybe you can do which nobody else can, or if you have a network, or insight into an allied area that we never thought was allied.” – Lee Tzu Yang

- **Skill-up:** Participate in sector forums and attend courses that improve board skills/knowledge; for example:
 - Singapore Institute of Directors offers a programme specifically for NPO directors.
 - Singapore University of Social Sciences offers programmes for NPO leadership.

“Don’t see yourself as simply female. See yourself as a person who is going to do her best with the experience and know-how that you have. [Being considered for a board role] has nothing to do with being female, just your own ability.” – Anita Fam

- **Make yourself known:** Express your interest to serve to board directors you know and sign up with NVPC’s Board Match.
- **Get advice:** Nothing beats hearing from experienced women directors about their journey and experience.

COUNCIL FOR BOARD DIVERSITY

These tips are supplementary to the article titled “The Importance of Diversity on Charity Boards: Do You Know Who You Need and How To Find Her?”.

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