

Transcription Board Talk Off the Cuff - Knowing your value proposition

Speaker You're listening to Board Talk Off the Cuff, a new podcast from the Institute of Directors in New Zealand, and I'm your host and producer, Sonia Yeung. This is a pilot episode of a series that delves into the questions that are top of mind for our directors. But there's no planning, no staging, no rehearsing lines or answers. That's right. It's what it says on the can. Candid discussions to find out what makes the people on our boards across all kinds of industries, organizations and businesses tick. Interspersed in the series, we'll bring you insights from our experts and leaders, from the governance community to ensure you stay informed. In this first episode, I head to Auckland to the PwC building at Marsh to attend a lunchtime event. But hang on, I thought directors were busy people with very little time to spare. That's Becky here, manager of the Institute of Directors, Auckland branch can give me the lowdown. What is the event that is being hosted today and how often does IUD hold these events? So this is an Auckland branch event. It's called the Director Accelerator Lunch with the workshops that have limited number of their interactive. And they get to ask questions. So yes, these are the ones who are perhaps are a little more settled in a governance role. Maybe they've got a board role in a not for profit or a couple, and they're looking for a paid role, or they've got a paid role and they're looking to step up even, you know, to an NZ or something. We also have some new and aspiring directors that come along as well. So it's how does one go about that next step and accelerate their governance journey? And who are the facilitators? Because there are about four or five of them. They vary each time. So we usually have a couple of representatives from the Auckland Branch Committee. So today we've got Jonathan Mason who is our committee chair, Sunil Connor as well. And then we have two other usually chartered fellows that also take the sessions for us, step in and and share their knowledge and expertise as well. And how long have you been in this role? Four years now. As in much that's changed while you've been doing the work. Time flies. I enjoy working with the committee to develop the program. We have four thousand just over members in Tamaki Makaurau, including Te Tai Tokerau. It's a lot of people to support in their governance capabilities and skill sets. So we're always looking for a diverse program, be it small to medium enterprises, through family governance, through not for profit panels, through the top end of town. On it goes. And finding that balance across a year. We have fifty seven events on offer this year at our branch. We also have lots of national events that are held here, like chapter zero and other events as well, and webinars online as well. So there's lots on offer. Hi, I'm Karla Britz, I am the Auckland branch coordinator at the Institute of Directors, and I understand that you've just joined. So yes, I've been here for I think, just over four months. What's the biggest thing you've learned about governance so far from being part of these events? How important it is if you don't really know about governance or about people on boards and stuff, you don't really realize how much impact and influence they have on day to day decisions. But yeah, that's my biggest learning is how important it is. Before the attendees arrive, it's time to meet some of the facilitators for IoT. I'm chair of the Auckland chapter, Jonathan Mason, vice president of National Council, who, by the way, has an impressive twenty years of governance experience under his belt. So today is a discussion around value proposition and how to, I guess, take that next step. What's

something that directors often can't identify about themselves when it comes to their value proposition? It's not enough just to be interested in a board. You have to think through and reflect on what you're going to bring. That's maybe not unique, but distinctive to a board. To give one example, you might be really interested in a particular company and you might have a great accounting and finance background. But if the board already has an accounting and finance expert, someone it's possible and even likely that they won't want a second person. But if you looked in at the board profiles and their accounting and finance person is stepping down in the next year, then your timing may be excellent in approaching a board talking about your interest. It's a little bit of a marathon race, so initially you might not hear back from them, but then all of a sudden you're in a process and they're actively considering you on their own journey of self-discovery. Right. My name is Phil Doke. My governance experience is sort of had a couple of different trajectories, one that's sort of been driven off family connections through sport and education, and the other one that's sort of followed my professional career and banking, funds management, wealth management, and now more recently in the consulting space to those sectors. I was told this quite early on. Know your why, what's motivating you, and be clear how your why is going to connect with the purpose of the organisation you're endeavouring to be a part of, and be clear what your proposition is to that, and be able to articulate the why for them in terms of having you around that table as part of what ultimately is a team. I guess as you go through your career, you get different opportunities to have people sort of take you to pieces, join the dots again and give you feedback about who you are as a person, your strengths, your weaknesses, and which leads to a degree of self-knowledge over time about what you bring energy to. And sometimes some things don't, you know, aren't a source of energy. They are a source of stress. So unpacking that, I think over time, just through your career and a bit of self-reflection, not just in terms of the skill sets and the domains you've operated in, but also you as a person and what you enjoy in terms of dynamics. So sometimes everyone's so busy, they just don't get the time or the opportunity to necessarily turn their mind to that. I've sought some counsel on that occasionally to help bring a sense of, I guess, clarity to how, at least how I think about it and how do you get energy yourself if you're not interested genuinely in what the organization is about you, frankly, don't be there. Right? Because especially in the not for profits, you're volunteering your time. You're not getting paid for it, right? And so there needs to be an inner connection, I think, to the purpose that you can connect to and you can contribute to. And so if you feel that connection you feel you can actually add value. Then to me that's part of the satisfaction. You know, you draw from that. And yes, you need to go in knowing it's never going to be a smooth sailing at all times. Do you just manage your demeanour and manage all the other things that go on in your life at the same time, like being under stress when things get tough. Does that mean you're in a toxic board environment, or do you just need to find another outlet for that stress? I mean, I've been fortunate in the environments I've been in. There's been a culture around the board table of respect for where people are speaking from and what they bring, that the conversation can be challenging in terms of the the issues, but civil and respectful in terms of how it's the issues that are debated, not the people had to deal with. Uh, organizations, when we've been around the government's table and faced into quite a crisis, you know, I think the leadership of the chair plays an important role and the tone that's set for that. But then as individuals, we're all on a team here, and we need to respect and understand where people

are speaking from, especially in the purpose where people come from different backgrounds and they bring that diversity of perspective, being respectful of that and listening, thinking carefully about how to ask the right questions and good questions. It's a fantastic session. The accelerated lunch. And this is Suneil Sinead O'Connor hearing from a whole bunch of different perspectives, from how much the different directors and how they manage to get into directorships and what they think are the key areas to focus on whilst being a director as well. So I'm keen to hear all their thoughts when it comes down to value proposition though, is this something you've identified in yourself, and is it possible to even pack that down into like three words if you think about your own? I'm heavily finance based, actually, so audit risk and strategy is what I focus on. That's quite typical of accountants and lawyers. That's my key niche. But heaps of other people know their niche and can identify that too. But as a whole person, you know, like that's not just all of who you are and what you bring to the board table. So anything else that you think of that has been an asset for you for such foresight, you know, trying to predict what's happening in the future. And if you're wrong, you're wrong. But asking the questions at least so that it gets the board thinking and talking about those issues. What's been your secret to success? Working hard, just always continuing to give as much as you can, and opportunities always arise before the season starts. It's time to see who's about and what brought them here. I find so much value getting different perspectives from a range of people. Monique Forbes currently sits on the IOD board as a future director, and this past year and a bit, being future director has been incredible. I've got the five months to go, so any insightful tip that respected directors give me, it just adds to sharpening my value proposition. So eventually I want to do full time governance, but I won't be doing that for quite a few more years. However, you know, one really good appointment on a listed board is my ultimate goal alongside my executive career, I'm Christine. How long have you been involved in governance? For about fifteen years. All so far in the social purpose sector. After fifteen years, Do you feel like you need a session like this is something you need? It's more about a shift into commercial governance and the gaps that may exist from an opportunity perspective, moving from social purpose into commercial. And so everything that I can do to accelerate my perceived knowledge of my commercial knowledge notwithstanding also thirty odd years of commercial work. That's important to me. So, you know, I should benefit from a course like this. That teaches me a bit about that and the learnings that such as this, that I've been participating in, there are different perspectives on the different learnings. So if you're talking about, for example, a specific discipline within a business, then the governance perspective on that discipline can be quite different, you know, from the operational perspective. And so understanding those nuances a bit better is really important. I'm finding that out to a lot more in the last year, when the social services sector has been so challenged that we've had to think a lot more commercially. And I've picked up on my commercial knowledge and gone, we need to do this, this or this. Whereas before, when things were better, not so much women being on board, you know, having to fight to have a say, like, do you think that there's more equality in that space now? And, you know, like even as people started coming in the room, I was like, oh, maybe women are going to outnumber the men here today. Well, I think that's possible. I think the perception around women on boards has definitely changed. I think it's very advantageous to be a woman. But I think the answer to that is yes, there will be more women on boards, but there is still also a tendency on some boards to select people they know or whose reputation

they know. So if you know. So the network for me personally, for example, my network is what is going to be my ticket to meeting my objectives around governance plays a massive role. I was in eight years with a listed company as their marketing director, and all of our work was global. So when I came out of that company, it was Auckland founded business. But when I came out of that company, my network was really, really rusty. My network was offshore, so I had to sort of start from scratch, building a network again. Once I'd figured out where I thought I wanted to go in targeting the people that I need to talk to, if I'm going to have enough influence to be considered for a board. I think that is very real. It is necessary, I think, with contented bellies the session is in full swing. The directors are seated across four tables where a range of conversations are taking place. There's a difference in tone and energy at each one, naturally. It feels appropriate to hover around the noisiest, where there are discussions going down on how to nail board appointments and be noticed by recruiters, and whether a role is even right for you. I had a flight to Wellington, where I sat next to Christopher Luxon when he was CEO of Air New Zealand, and I was the head of people at MetService, and we had a fantastic conversation. Subsequently put me in touch with various other people. You don't know what doors is going to open. It's always worth saying hello. I guess with these events, it's always a really good opportunity to hear from other people who are wrestling with the same problems that I am. There are always really diverse opinions in the room and really diverse experiences. And for people who are building a governance career, it's very easy to look at individuals who have a portfolio of directorships and who are managing to make it a full time job. I think those people tend to be in the minority, and it's actually most of us are balancing directorships with other activities as well. I'm trying to understand how to make that work is always a challenge, so there's always useful insight from these kind of events. What's the biggest issue you feel like you're facing now as a director, and what types of board roles do you have now? I'd sit on a couple of not for profit community boards. The biggest challenge that I'm hearing from clients, as well as in the board space, is really around the global situation, the rising concerns around what the global situation, geopolitical, economic situation means for New Zealand. It was still not entirely clear. And you know, we hear that today with potential OCR rate cut. What does that mean. So I think uncertainty. So being able to be confident and resilient in the face of uncertainty. And I think it just brings into focus the importance of that governance role in terms of looking to the horizon. And part of the key governance function is are we future fit? What are we doing today to make sure that our organisation is going to be able to cope with the challenges of not just next year, but the next ten years or beyond. And part of the session is on like value proposition. How much of that do you feel like you've figured out for yourself? That's why I'm here. Yeah, I wish I'd figured it out more. I feel reasonably confident around my value proposition. What I'm not clear about is how that gets received for would be boards who are looking for individuals, because in my particular case, I'm a generalist and I see a lot of boards asking for very specific skill sets around things like finance or HR, or marketing or AI, for example, technology. And as a generalist with a broad swathe of experience, my nervousness is I don't know how to position myself in a way that's attractive enough. Back to the sessions and this conversation with plenty of back and forth as kind of troubleshooting around the do's and don'ts and maybes of what to do after an interview with a board recruiter. Listen up. I wonder how many how many unsuccessful people actually reach out. Look, I think a lot. You get the sorrow. You're. You're unsuccessful and some lovely AI

written rejection letter. But how many of those people then actually bother to reach out and make that connection? And it might actually be less than less than you think. And they might actually think, oh, this person's actually bothered to reach out. Yeah, maybe they're worth spending. And if you were absolutely a terrible candidate, they'll say no. But if you had something there, they might sort of think, well, you know, if you're if you're reaching out, they remember you and it starts that relationship and you've got that secondary touchpoint where another role comes up on two or three years and they'll go, oh, I'm on two. Not for profits. Been on them for quite some time. So it is more of a question of thinking about what your next steps are. And when you get too comfortable in any position, then you always need to think what's there for the future and what's your background because you've got a bit of an accent. I'm originally from Namibia, a small little country in Africa, but born and raised, born and raised and then studied in South Africa. went over to Ireland for ten years and I've been in New Zealand for fourteen now. What brought you to governance? Why governance? I'm one of those people that feel you can't complain if you're not voting, for example, or if you're not there being an active part of it. We're definitely in times where we need to consider more what's happening. There's a greater impact of external factors in New Zealand. We're not a small little island. We're definitely branching out through a lot of change. We talk to people. Why? Why was this board dismissed? You know, again, personalities, um, to try and find out where the gaps were, whether I could. Drifting around the room with microphones in hand, one comment stood out. What do I do when I go for an interview now? And people say, what is your value proposition? And mine's always, I'll be the bad guy for the right reasons. The one who doesn't just nod and smile and agree on everything that challenges aboard and asks all the hard questions. Which is interesting because let's face it, Kiwis aren't always the most direct or up front. So how does that go down with fellow board members? Kiwis I found since moving here eight years ago from the UK are particularly nice. And that's it's an amazing thing coming from the UK where if you work in London it's quite cutthroat, very opinionated. So I've maybe transposed some of that way of working over here, and I know I had to calm it down slightly and figure out how to kiwis it. Essentially when I go into meetings, because you can't come across abrasive, you can't come across cold, but you do need to come across with an opinion. You know, I always say to my customers and my colleagues, you know, I can spend three weeks with a fluffy answer or I can spend three minutes with the direct answer. So we always end up at the same place, but we can get to one a lot quicker. Um, so for me, I kind of like to, you know, gather the opinions of my team or my customers and kind of go, what is it that we need to say that's not being said? And if no one else is wanting to say it, I don't mind saying it because I think it's the right thing. So like I said before, it kind of sometimes it's being the the bad guy for the right reason. It does help the collective then, but you just have to have that confidence that you can say that and you're comfortable saying it, and you know the reason why you're saying it. Ah, yes. But what's the tactful approach to being more up front? Should you say to the board, look, this is the new me, I'm going to tell it like it is from now on. Or maybe not. Set the premise when you start the conversation, you know, say, you know, I've said before, look, this is going to be unpopular and I'm not trying to upset anybody. So that, you know, it's a bit like saying respectfully, but it's putting that foot forward but kind of going, there's a reason I'm here. I'm passionate about driving us forward and, you know, supporting things. So let me give you a really honest opinion of maybe what some people are saying in

the background that aren't saying or, you know, say, I want to do this because it's the right thing to say and the right thing to do. Thank you so much. It poses a question about culture and the New Zealand environment that directors are operating within, and what an international perspective can bring. Nice to meet you guys. I sit on a couple of not for profit boards. One lies in the education and wellbeing sector. Mate Ritika Singh, another not for profit board in the local council, local government sector and we look after council controlled facilities and their assets. And I also sit on the on an advisory board for a university, for a business entity of the university. And what brought you to governance in the first place? I've had a long journey, and it was unintentional to begin with because for about eight years I was chair for the academic board. I used to work in education to begin with, and that was my first flavour of governance. I was very young and there was a lot of learning, but I actually really enjoyed what we were trying to achieve and the macro level that we were looking at things, you know, the high level. Actually, when I exited that executive role, I realized that I wanted to remain in governance in some shape or form. It's really interesting when you mentioned, you know, like, how do you make that sort of like entry point to even conversing with people to become, you know, part of the group, or you go to an event and you're kind of still outside of that. Yes. Because, I mean, I've been attending these events for a few years. I'm a member of the idea, but it's always challenging because governance is such a close knit community. Fair enough. That's you know, it's for very good reasons that I think when you're relatively new, it's quite hard community to break into. And so it does take time and effort. And even as you progress through your career, while you might have your own networks and your own groups within governance. You want to constantly be cultivating new groups and new new networks as well. That's the only way you come across new opportunities and other development. So there's never a point where where you can be comfortable in the number of connections, the relationships that you have, because you constantly have to be proactive around building new connections. So that was where the question was coming from, you know, how do you keep doing that? And at some point does it become intrusive? Did you get any clarity on that? It's an ongoing effort. And probably if you ask even some of the most experienced directors, they'll say they still work on building their networks further. It's just doing more of what you've already been doing, which is attending the events, being in the right places, meeting the right people, and tapping into people that you may not have thought of before. Who could make introductions for you? We're in Auckland. It's very diverse. Do you think there are any cultural barriers? I was saying to Phil before, I've been attending the IOD events for a few years now, and the first few years I wasn't a member because I really didn't feel like I belonged in the room. The room didn't look anything like me, and a few years ago, I think the IOD put in a conscious effort into changing that and becoming a lot more inclusive and actually looking at the future, the succession and the future talent. Which inevitably made the room diverse in lots of different ways. Have there been barriers because of what I bring to the table, along with just the perspective and the skill sets? Sometimes, yes. I made a comment around, you know, when you're in the interview, one of the things I try and look for really hard is that this is not a tick box exercise, that I'm not being hired just for the way I look and sound and where I'm originally from, that I'm actually being brought on board for the skill sets because it does happen. People do tend to just go, this is a token hire. At the moment I have a marketing agency as well as a recruitment agency. But when I originally came to New Zealand, I spent

ten years in aviation. So I've worked in a very male dominated environment. So, you know, being the minority isn't new to me. That's just something that I've dealt with for a very long time. But as you get into governance, you start to realise that actually your perspective isn't just your skill set, it's also your lived experience. And that counts for a lot when you're sitting at a board table, especially, for example, in community well-being, when you're trying to build communities, the demographic of Auckland, for example, and New Zealand is changing so quickly that you absolutely need to have differing perspectives and different lived experiences at the boardroom table. But what do boards do you think need to understand about how to help people? Whether it's people of color, those with disability like rainbow communities into this space and feel included? I think a lot of people who are diverse or represent diversity in some shape or form, perhaps lack the confidence to enter these rooms in the first place. So there has to be a mechanism where these people feel welcome, and that they're confident enough to walk into these rooms, represent themselves, and have those conversations that are really required. Oftentimes, people get welcomed into a room for their diversity of thought or diversity of experience, diversity of opinion. And then there's always a risk that they fall into the trap of sounding like everybody else. So my hope is that, yes, bringing diversity means that the outcomes will also represent that if people don't fall into the trap of sounding like everybody else who's already there, which happens quite a lot because everybody wants to fit in, right? Everybody wants to belong. People need to feel confident that they can be their authentic selves, that they can actually represent what they stand for and that they don't need to change that at all. They need to psychologically, they need to feel very safe to be able to do that. Otherwise, it defeats the purpose of bringing diverse opinions in the first place. Thank you. Well put. And that brings us to the end of our pilot episode of Board Talk off the cuff. I'm your host and presenter, Sonia Yee. Thank you to all of the participants in the episode, including our fabulous session facilitators and our Auckland sponsor, Marsh for holding the event. And to Becky O'Hare, manager of the Auckland branch. If you'd like to find out more about the Institute of Directors, or for access to free board kits, tools and resources, head to our website. And keep an eye out in the months to come for more episodes.