



Take on Board

Transcript – Megan Bett

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, where do we another on air strategy session, so I'm speaking with Megan Bett, I'm going to get her to introduce herself in a moment. And also then just introduce what it is we're talking about today. But before I do that, quick shout out to Jackie Cooper, who recommended that Megan, come on the show and explore her challenge for today. So welcome, Megan. Welcome to the take on board podcast.

Megan Bett 0:25

Thank you. Helga, I'm really excited to be here.

Helga Svendsen 0:28

Excellent. So firstly, can you introduce yourself to the take on board community?

Megan Bett 0:33

Sure thing. I am an HR professional or human resources professional. My strength most recently have been in workplace investigations, majority of the tough stuff in HR. But I'm pretty curious and interested in all sorts of things to do with people and the way our minds work. And I work for our local council, where I live at the moment, and I've been there for over 11 years.

Helga Svendsen 0:57

Fantastic. Okay, I can already see there's a bit that we can work on there. And what do you want to work through in this conversation today?

Megan Bett 1:06

I've been in my current role for 11 years, as I mentioned, it's not a management role. But my role largely supports the leaders in our organisation, and I have a leadership role in effect by the influence I can have and what I do, but I've acted in a leadership role before I didn't love it in my current field that I'm in. And I always thought that I would just continue doing this. By nature, I'm a helper, I'm the fixer, a more worker at an officer level rather than a executive level. I guess that's

how I see myself. And that's the roles that I'm in now. But most recently, probably through conversations with the lovely Jackie Cooper he mentioned before, and some different things that I've been reading and listening to, I've just started to get a little bit more curious and open my mind up to other ways that I might be able to fulfill leadership roles in my community, or even step outside my comfort zone a little I guess, which I've been, if I'm honest, reluctant to do in the past. I'm curious about a possible board journey. And I'm really keen to learn if that's something that I could do in the future, or do I want to do that in the future? It's, I guess I'm in a bit of a learning stage.

Helga Svendsen 2:26

Okay, there are so much in there. You know, I'm loving how curious you are about this. And just like, let's live with it, let's play with it. There's no doubt won't surprise you. But I'm always loving talking to good women about getting in the boardroom and what they might get out of it. Alright, well, look. So what do you know about boards and how they work? And what is it that has you thinking that that might be something that you want to explore what attracts you to the boardroom?

Megan Bett 2:51

I don't know very much about boards at the moment. And my, what possibly would be an incorrect assumption. I've seen them to be made up mainly of director level roles, you know, predominantly men, accountants, lawyers, that type of thing. My perception whether that's right or wrong, I'm not sure on this learning path that I'm on. But I thought it was mainly about financial papers, and that element of governance, and then it wasn't necessarily a place where me as an officer or worker, a helper a fixer could add value.

Helga Svendsen 3:31

So maybe if we explore a little bit about what a board is, and then we'll check in again, and if it's still something that sounds of interest, then we can explore a little bit about what type of board you might be looking for, and what contribution you could make in that. So. But let's start with, you know, what a board is, essentially, the board of an organisation. And there's all sorts of different organisations that have boards from the smallest, not for profit organisation, or even the smallest for profit organisation through to some of the largest companies in Australia or the world. And even I would say you work for local council, I would say they don't call it a board, but the council is a board. They govern the organisation. So the council laws govern the organisation and they test and they question and they oversee, and have that kind of responsibility for what the officers of the organisation do. So in some ways, it's like the council. Council sometimes have interesting stakeholder issues and interesting political issues that you don't always experienced on some boards, but sometimes you do as well. Boards can be large and small and can have what I would call the governance oversight. And for some organisations also, again, what I would say get the hands dirty, getting the doing a little bit as well. So if it's a board that is focused on governance it will be

around setting the strategic direction for the organisation. So they will set the strategy, but they won't be making sure the strategy happens that would be the employees of the organisation. So they will set the big picture strategy and then hand it over, they would engage the CEO and say, Hello CEO, you are responsible for everything in the organisation, and then the CEO, managers, everybody below them, they would be responsible for ensuring that the organisation is compliant. So they have oversight of the compliance, they would be responsible for setting the risk appetite for the organisation, but not necessarily all of the little individual risks that the organisation would do. So it's really that big picture oversight of an organisation they are responsible for you mentioned finance and accounting before, the board is responsible for ensuring the financial health of the organisation that they don't trade whilst insolvent. So they have that oversight, strategy setting some of the compliance, those types of things, that's what the board does, and they let all of the doing be done by the employees. That's a board of governance. Now, in all honesty, some smaller organisations, whether they're for profit or not, for profit, directors will also be expected to do some of the doing, because organisations may not have a whole staff team that can go off and do all of the doing. So there might be expected to I don't know, write the media releases, or set the Human Resources strategy, or the people and culture strategy or metaphorically, or literally stuffing envelopes, whatever it may be. So for you in exploring this, I think it's worth thinking about what sort of board you would want to make a contribution to, is it the sort of organisation where you are, you know, at the governance end, that big picture strategy, oversight, compliance, or an organisation where it might be more about being like on a committee of management, where you're doing more of the doing? My guess would be from what you said before you're a helper and a doer, your comfort zone might be more in the helping and doing, although I also heard in there that you want to get outside your comfort zone. So I would encourage you to think about doing it more than governance. And because my bet is I heard in there, though, you don't take on those leadership roles. My point would be you've got amazing skills that could be used in the boardroom very effectively. If that was something you wanted to explore. Okay, I

Megan Bett 7:40

I think you hit the nail on the head with the detail being my comfort zone, and the worker and the helper level being my comfort zone. I'm a contributor. And a puzzle solvers. So, you know, if a puzzle is so much as looks like it's walking past me and needs my help, I can jump at it before I'm even asked to do it. But I do you want to step outside of that, I think, from what you said, there, it's got me thinking, whether it's through a transition phase, whether a board that didn't require still an element of the doing, but I could dip my toes in the waters of that higher strategic side of things as well, because I understand the concepts from studies and things that we do at work. And I think I do have some of those leadership skills. I'm in a role that I create leadership development programs for our managers, supervisors at work, and I provide coaching and advice to them. Plus, I see all sorts of scenarios when it goes wrong in workplace relations when we're doing investigations. So it's really interesting that you pick that up, you spot you're absolutely spot on now about that being my comfort zone.

Helga Svendsen 8:51

And it's even interesting. They're like where you said, you know, if I say a puzzle, I need to pick it up and resolve it. Being on a board is much like that. I love that analogy in some ways for an organisation and looking at and for the board to set the strategic direction, they need to look at the puzzle. You know, they need to look at the organisation and see what the strengths are they need to look at the industry or sector in which it operates and who else is around as competitors or partners or what the regulatory environment is, what the business model is and whether it's working, what the risks are, what the people issues are all of those sorts of things. That's inverted commas just a puzzle.

Megan Bett 9:27

That's me all over I yeah, I love writing, whether it's possible to do it with staff or something else to do with the business process that we come across. I get a little bit tenacious with that. And I won't stop until whether it's in the piece of legislation or a policy procedure. I have to find the reason why it's impossible solutions. So that's really interesting to look at that.

Helga Svendsen 9:53

Yeah, so it's a puzzle. It's just a just inverted commas a strategic puzzle rather than an operational puzzle. So So the saying for directors, it's about noses in fingers out. So as a board director, you've got your nose in everywhere, and asking lots of questions, but you're not doing the doing. So your puzzle would be about sticking your nose in everywhere. But you don't necessarily have to do all of the doing it as well. You can keep your fingers out. The other thing I picked up in there, because you just said you do a lot of coaching work as well in your role. And I might be a little bit biased because I do quite a bit of coaching as well. But coaches, I mean, you know that a key skill for coaches is asking good questions. You don't need to know the answer. You don't need to. You don't tell people you ask people questions. And absolute key skill for board directors is asking questions

Megan Bett 10:47

Isn't an amazing your perception and what you think a board is and what someone needs to be to be on a board. I think God, you don't have to be an accountant or have all these really great skills. But I know how to ask questions during an investigation or coaching someone, you know, giving advice and guidance to find out my job nine to five, most of the time is finding out what happened. So what happened and what usually happens, and how can we do it better. So

Helga Svendsen 11:14

So in some ways, I'm not sure if others would describe it this way. But I will for this conversation. In some ways the board is collectively the coach and the sounding board for the executive team of the organisation, you are testing you are questioning you are ensuring they've done all the thinking that

they need to do I mean, yes, you are looking at the compliance in the oversight. But even in the finances, it's asking questions. The other thing if I can just plant this seed as well is that sometimes being on a board sets you up beautifully for leadership roles, rather than doing the leadership roles, and then thinking that that sets you up for a board role. So my first board role was about 15 years ago. And it was the board of the YWCA in Victoria, I was very fortunate, I was interested in mission and vision and purpose of the organisation, you know, improving the lives of women to end in equality. And I landed in an organisation that also had very strong governance. So it was a fantastic experience for me as a first time board member. So five or six years later, I'm being interviewed for my first CEO role. So I've done lots of other roles, but I hadn't been the CEO of an organisation before. And my point is, to be honest, I haven't gone back to the interview panel to check this with them. But I could say in the interview, because the board was interviewing me for the CEO role. And I could say to the chair of the board and others on the board, I know what it's like to be on your side of the table. I know what it's like to be on a board. I know what it's like to get good reports, and good information. And I know what it's like to get not such good information and reports. So I understand from your perspective, what it's like, and as your CEO, I will be able to bring that lens to the role. And as much as I can make your job easy as the board. So it helped me I got that role. And I think it helped me to get that role, because I've already had that experience. So that's a long way of saying, You don't have to wait till you've been in the C suite to be in the boardroom. You know, you can do it anytime and make that contribution. And I absolutely wouldn't want people to be joining a board just so they can fill their CV, that is not a good reason to do it. But it does help that as well. It does value add to it. And that's very handy for people's own careers as well.

Megan Bett 13:34

It's really interesting to hear that it can almost work in reverse of what I thought. So my question I posed was, is there a place for me on a board if I'm not an executive, or if I'm not in a leadership, role by title at the moment by my thinking from what you just said, there is that who knows what might be possible in the future if I step into a board role or a committee role, as an officer as a worker, a helper, a fixer now, maybe down the track that might lead to me in leadership roles in the future?

Helga Svendsen 14:10

Absolutely, absolutely. And then the board will help you to look at things from a different perspective. So you'll be looking for that strategic that big picture oversight rather than just the doing. And as you say, it will give you that experience and may will set you up for the future for those roles as well.

Megan Bett 14:29

Yeah, I think even just the strategic thinking component would be really valuable. We say in my current role and my team that I'm in that we need to get out of the weeds and we need to be more

strategic and not reactive all the time. But the nature of our core business is that we are there serve an internal service for the organisation. And I'm hardwired as I said to fix the puzzles. So immediately my default position is to draw This strategic piece of work, whatever I might be working on and get back into the weeds of the operational details,

Helga Svendsen 15:07

Yes. And it would be interesting then in the boardroom, because whether it's noses in fingers out, you know, the board needs to stay out of the weeds, whatever, kind of saying you want to have around that about what the board's role is versus what the organisation's role is. If your day to day is more operational, it will exercise your brain in different ways. You can do your day to day at work, you can do your strategic thinking, in the boardroom. And each of those things will add value to the other. It'll help you get out of the weeds during the day, and help you have some of that more detailed insights in the boardroom as well.

Megan Bett 15:44

That would be so unreal in speaking to, I can actually see that they would complement each other. And in doing that, I might actually fill the gaps of I guess, some spaces that I'm looking to fill in my current role. I still love what I do. But I don't want to get bitter and resentful, or potentially change roles or careers when there's straightaway when perhaps I could find what I'm looking for in that other strategic space in another way.

Helga Svendsen 16:13

Absolutely, they can work together, they can absolutely work together. Just bear in mind which space you're in. So you just would have to test yourself. I'm in the boardroom. Now. I don't need to know exactly all of the details of everything. I need to see the strategic oversight. And likewise on the other side. Okay, I'm in my nuts and bolts role. I need to know the details. I can't just necessarily be satisfied with here's the big picture of you, you also need to delve down. So just remembering which hat you're wearing.

Megan Bett 16:43

Yeah, that's really good advice. Because that was my niggling concern. Even though I'm saying how fantastic that would be. I have this niggling concern of all could I do that? Will I be automatically going down into the detail? If I was to have a ball roll?

Helga Svendsen 17:01

Yeah. Look, every board member tests themselves on that. Even if there's people who are on only on board roles, every organisation operates differently. And sometimes you do get down into the weeds. And that's the right thing to do. Even in the boardroom. Like if you're in the middle of a crisis, often organisations will get more operational. And that's the right thing. Whilst we talk about on this side of the ledger, we've got the governance things to do. And on this side of the ledger, it's the operational that the organisation does, there's not a nice, neat line down the middle. That is the same for every organisation. It's exercising your judgment about what is the right governance, oversight you need in that organisation? Can we assume let's say that at least it's something that you might be exploring, but now that I know a bit more about it, that is something I want to explore? Yeah.

Megan Bett 17:50

Yeah, definitely, from this conversation, it's a correct assumption.

Helga Svendsen 17:54

Oh, I'll take that as a win. Excellent. All right, well, then the next thing I'd be interested to explore with you is, what would you say? Are your two or three key skills? Actually, maybe let's not start with your two or three? What would you say your key skills are, let's just start there. Because then from the shopping list, we can determine what the best skills are that you can showcase for the boardroom. Some

Megan Bett 18:19

Of my key skills that I do rely on every day is my memory, I've got really good memory recall, I always say I'm not great at maths, but there's a fairly good chance that I will have remembered something from that meeting about a month ago. Pretty good communication skills. And can usually and I guess, I've talked about being a puzzle solver. So I've got to say that that's on my shopping list of skills. I'm a pretty thorough researcher, and independent thinker, when it comes to the things that I do at work, empathetic, great listener, I'm biased and independent in most everything that I do as well. And I'm, I'm fair, that's one of my core values is fairness, and some pretty fair and measured I'm not a big risk taker, which can have positive and negatives as well. And I'm funny is that I don't know whether you can be funny on a board that funny.

Helga Svendsen 18:20

But you can totally be fun on a board. There is nothing saying that it can't be fun. It's not always fun. But there is nothing say that it can't be fun, at least some of the time. What about for your role? What are your What are your technical skills? What are your hard skills?

Megan Bett 19:39

Obviously, I'm great at report writing, I can write statements, reports, all of that sort of thing as well. So sorry, I didn't mention that before you kind of take it for granted that you

Helga Svendsen 19:50

Well, that's in fact, I think you're probably also taking this for granted, but you haven't take human resources.

Megan Bett 19:57

Oh, yeah, that's the thing I do every day. Yeah. That's right.

Helga Svendsen 20:01

So human resources or people and culture or whatever it's called in whatever organisation these days, again, your bread and butter, you've talked about being a workplace investigator, that's actually a really key skill as well, which does that mean, you've also got some industrial relations experience and skills and knowledge?

Megan Bett 20:17

Yeah, it is. Absolutely. So my core role is industrial relations. So I interpret awards legislation, policy writing, yeah, with that HR. I've done recruitment. I do team building, I've done mediation sessions. I'm not an accredited mediator. But conflict resolution, very strong in as well. Sorry, that was really not an articulate list of skills. Why do we do that we crumble when it's about ourselves, I can't tell you quite clearly and articulately about, what's this process, but I can't say I'm an HR professional, and I got skills in human resources, people management, leadership, development, workplace investigations, industrial relations, policy writing. We're funny creatures aren't we?

Helga Svendsen 21:06

I didn't have to say anything you've got anyone, all of what you've listed, or almost all of what you've listed, is relevant for the boardroom, right. So you know, an independent thinker, being a listener, being fair, all of those things are incredibly useful in the boardroom, people and culture, human resources, industrial relations. So you'd mentioned before about, you know, I envisage the boardroom and it's an accountants and lawyers, there are accountants and lawyers in most boardrooms. But can you imagine an organisation that only had accountants on the board, or only

had accountants and lawyers on the board and what sort of decision making they would do, knowing that the role is that strategic oversight, it would be pretty limited

Megan Bett 21:50

Of course, diversity, were the biggest promoters of diversity in workplaces and life and the benefits that you can get from (exactly), I don't know why I didn't apply that to myself and my experience, and I'm gonna bring to avoid,

Helga Svendsen 22:05

Exactly. So your work in this space. You know, all of the research shows that diverse groups make better decisions. And that applies just as much in the boardroom as anywhere else. So boards need people and culture, boards need technology, boards need, you know, I did an interview just this morning with somebody talking about ESG, environmental, social, and governance issues, boards need people who know all of these different things and have a whole range of different skills and attributes. So people and culture is a hot ticket at the moment for the boardroom, I would say the three hot tickets for boards at the moment, people and culture, technology, and ESG, environmental, social and governance, so you're holding one of the hot tickets, and showcasing

Megan Bett 22:53

That would be fantastic to even be at a meeting or with a group of people, because I'm also passionate about sustainability and the environment. Personally, you know, in my professional, my personal interests don't always blend that well, either. But that's so great to hear those three hot ticket items that they could come together to even be exposed to people like that with that expertise would be fantastic.

Helga Svendsen 23:18

And I would say once you start looking for board roles and organisations, look at who's on their board, and if it is filled with lawyers and accountants is that the board, you're going to make it the best contribution is that the board that's going to get the best out of your skills. Now, of course, they might be looking for different people, because they know exactly they've only got lawyers and accountants in the boardroom. But test that you want to know you're joining an organisation that values diversity in decision making, and has their culture that is inclusive. So really, because you can't just have diversity without having inclusivity. Because otherwise people left out. So check with the organisation's that they have that. Let's imagine you totally sold that you should be in the boardroom. Sounds like you've definitely sold on exploring more, which is great. Let's imagine you've done your thinking around these are my key skills that I can add to the boardroom? What's the type of organisation that you would envisage yourself being part of? What's the sector? What is this

organisation doing? And maybe think about? Is it a big organisation or a medium sized organisation or a small organisation? Is it in startup mode? Or is it an organisation that's quite mature? Or is it an organisation that's undergoing business transformation? So those are the sorts of things to think about? In what sort of boardroom do I want to be in? Now and I've done that super quick, what might that prompt for you? What sort of boardroom could you see yourself possibly making a contribution to

Megan Bett 24:53

My initial thoughts? I think what comes to mind to start with would be a maybe medium size business. Although my role my day to day job is largely compliance based and human resources, my poll, I think would be to look at community boards or potentially environmental. Yeah, well, depending on what was locally around here, I guess my thinking around that is, there's some things that I'm passionate about personally, as well. But then I also have another train of thought that I'm thinking is to find an industry where I might be able to do more of the doing on that board. So potentially, education or recruitment or something were closely aligned with the HRM. In every business has HR policies and practices or should do? Yeah, I'm sorry, I don't think I'm being really clear there. I'm not talking at all that loud, as as I'm thinking about that sort of a startup would be exciting. But I don't think I'm there yet to offer much value to a startup board,

Helga Svendsen 26:06

I suspect you could to be honest, every organisation should have those things in place, you just said often startups don't. So sometimes that can be handy. But it's worth thinking about. And it is it's a lot for me to put you on the spot to think about that. But I can hear you're starting to think through. And now that, you know, you've thought a bit about what it involves that big picture governance, strategic oversight, compliance, oversight, all of those sorts of things, you've had a bit of a think about the skills, and the value you can add to an organisation, people and culture, human resources, questioning, constructive thinking, all of those sorts of things. The next part is what sort of organisation do you want to make that contribution to? And a lot of that will just be having a look around, like starting to look, you know, women on boards has an excellent listing. So you might want to look on there and just see what sort of roles are being advertised. You might just ask around who's on boards? And can you have a chat to them about their organisation? So it's just starting to think about that. And it will come to you. That's the next stage. It's like, yeah, okay, I think I want to dip my toe in the water. I think I've got the skills for it. My next step is to really explore what sort of board to be on.

Megan Bett 27:19

Okay. Yeah, I'm a researcher. And I like to, I'm quite curious. I like to do that. And so that women on boards website, you mentioned, sounds fantastic. I did write very recently have a conversation with a beautiful woman in my network. She is my former manager, my former boss, and a great mentor

to me, and now a very dear friend. And I hadn't told many people, I was having this chat with you yet. And she was one of the people I did tell. And she's at another organisation now. And she said all we're about to call for names for a committee, I assume that's like a subcommittee of the board. And it's a people and culture committee, people on that committee will be required to contribute to reviewing their policies and procedures, and so forth. Grant wasn't I do want to do what it was this has come up, sit, look, send me some more information. I'm only just starting to, to look at this. I'm not sure yet.

Helga Svendsen 28:25

But it is a great way of building some of that governance expertise is to join a committee. And the other thing I loved hearing in there is just telling everyone, you know, I want to join the board of an organisation where I can focus on that governance and strategic level. I want to be in a board room that is diverse and inclusive, the skills that I can contribute, in addition to my critical thinking, and questioning and curiosity, are around people and culture, human resources, workplace investigations, those sorts of things. Let me know if you hear anything

Megan Bett 29:03

I'd love to get the recording of this and play play you saying that? Hell yeah. That'd be fantastic.

Helga Svendsen 29:10

You can send this around as your, you know, to people who are considering you for the board. It's like, well, here's my initial interview.

Megan Bett 29:18

Here's one I prepared Oh, hell yeah. prepared earlier, that would be fantastic.

Helga Svendsen 29:22

And once you've done some thinking about that, the next thing I would say is yes, tell everybody and prepare a board resume. It's a different resume to your normal resume. I've already done a podcast about that with somebody. So listening to Episode Six with the fabulous Dominique Hess about doing your board resume, even if you've never been on a board before, you can still have a section about your governance experience. So yeah, that would be the next thing that you want to pull together as well. So we've had a bit of a play around with boards. I'm wondering what's your fresh thinking from the conversation we've had and what actions are you taking away

Megan Bett 29:59

So I might tell you there is so much fresh thinking going on in my mind at the moment, my perspective is shifting about what a board looks like, and what an MDC could look like, and whether I could actually sit or proudly stand and actually contribute to that. So my first thinking is that I'm gonna keep exploring, um, today, I thought, Well, look, we'll have this conversation, and maybe I'll get an idea of whether I want to start looking into it more or white. So my first thinking is, I want to keep exploring this board path. And that there could be a place for me people and culture, and the skills that I bring could be really valuable. And I could be the fixer, the puzzle solver. And that was a really great analogy that you used, that I shouldn't keep this secret. Now that I'm thinking about exploring this, I need to confidently stand and tell people that I am thinking about this. And maybe those doors of growth will open even if it's not for a board role tomorrow, but I'll actually be able to get more curious and find out more information. And that inclusion pays and the diversity that I can think that was the biggest aha moment for me today was that our diversity, of course, the skills that I bring would actually add a layer of diversity to a board. So my actions from here, I actually, I don't think it's enough just to get curious, I'm going to do this, if I actually want to look into it more. I have to dedicate some time each week, almost pretending like I'm on a board at the moment. Because I know that would be a time commitment, and afternoon or an evening each week and dedicate time to researching the boards in my local area. And looking at that women on boards website and having a look at the way that they advertise board roles. I think as an initial action, that's what I'll do. Possibly leading into doing board CV, but if I'm realistic, that's probably another step down the track.

Helga Svendsen 32:16

I think that's exactly right. Oh, I love that. And the other place to look at I think you did one of the programs, either recently or coming up with the Institute of community directors.

Megan Bett 32:26

Yes, it's in March, I'm so privileged, it's coming to my local area, now being online instead of face to face.

Helga Svendsen 32:34

So they have a good listing as well, they'll no doubt go through that with you in March. Although the other thing if I can also just prompt you know, given where two years into the pandemic, don't just limit yourself to local areas. Boards are much more flexible these days about location of people, you know, we're all used to this environment now. So feel free to stop there. But don't limit yourself to that.

Megan Bett 32:56

Yeah, great. That's really great. I hadn't thought of that in terms of having terms of remote working for, you know, in employment conditions and so forth. But not for a board. That's really

Helga Svendsen 33:06

Fantastic Megan, I would love to maybe in six months time or something or maybe before the end of the year, I would love to get an update from you if that's okay about where your thinking has landed and where your actions have landed, and maybe even by the end which boardroom you've landed in.

Megan Bett 33:20

Yeah, absolutely. I would love to catch up again. So who knows where I'll be or what I'll be doing by then I'd really appreciate that. There's such great insights in what we've talked about today. And it's really opened my mind up to the possibilities of a boardroom, not just for an executive. But maybe for me.