Take on Board

Transcript – Dominique Hes, part 2

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, I'm speaking with Dr. Dominique Hes. You probably remember I spoke to her a few episodes ago about an application she was making for a board. And her a good news she's got an interview and in that session she said that when she got an interview that she would be back to have yet another conversation with me around, preparing for the interview, and we are now having that conversation. So welcome, again, to the take on board podcast, Dominique,

Dominique Hes 0:31

Thank you so much. It was been such a great experience, just the writing of the application. And I learned so much from that. So it's a real pleasure to be back.

Helga Svendsen 0:42

And I know I've heard from others that they got a lot from hearing it. And I've referred people to it already, when they rung me to say, can I get some advice about writing a board application? I've referred them to the podcast, thank you for being so willing to shar, because it's not always the case that people are happy to share this sort of stuff online. So if thank you. So update us Dominique with what's happened since last time we spoke

Dominique Hes 1:06

Having spoken to you about government roles I wasn't expecting to hear for a long time. And then I am got an email two days ago saying we're going to do the fit for work, check, criminal history, bankruptcy, all of that. It's like great. Okay, next steps done. I'll wait for that. And then two minutes later, I got an email saying oh now, got a phone call, saying we'd like to schedule a interview with you. How is this date and I was like, Oh, okay. Okay.

Helga Svendsen 1:39

Cool, calm collected as if it was always expected. Inside go. Oh, my goodness. That is fabulous. Okay, so your interview is in a couple of weeks time? I think.

Dominique Hes 1:50

It is. It's on the 19th of September.

Helga Svendsen 1:53

Fantastic. Okay. And so now that you've got the interview, what do you know so far?

Dominique Hes 2:01

So, I know that when I have interviewed people, when I was an academic, I really appreciated if they did research if they came to the interview with some knowledge. And so I spent today, knowing that I was going to speak to you playing the trusted nature website. By playing on there, I look through all of the various elements. I joined the Facebook group, I joined the LinkedIn group, I looked at what reports and what publications and what stories they were telling on the website.

Helga Svendsen 2:42

So I think what we might try and cover off on is some preparation, much of which you've already started, which is fantastic. So thinking about the interview, what you might need to research before you get there. And then of course, we'll have a bit of a talk about the interview itself from what are some of the questions you might expect, and how to approach them, and so on thinking about questions you might have for them. In terms of preparing for the interview, you're doing all the right things so far. And I think the things I like to tell people to think about in preparing for an interview is five different areas, some of which may not apply the trust for nature, but thinking about what is the business performance? How is the organization performing? And where is it placed? I guess, where's the business performance? Secondly, what's the strategy of the organization? And sometimes that's available on their website? And sometimes it's not. But if you have been asked for an interview with it's not available publicly, you can definitely ask for it. If things are not publicly available, I think you should definitely ask them. Thirdly, I think it's good to understand the organization, what it does, where it sits in the world, what other organizations that might work with those sorts of things. Firstly, although for me often it's the one I do first, who's on the board and who are the staff? And who can I talk to, to find out some insights around this organization. And then finally, the kind of industry or sector that are operating in. So as you've already done doing things, but looking at the website, fantastic, you'll find some of that information. Is there an annual report, the strategy, the financials, those sorts of things, but they're publicly available?

Dominique Hes 4:22

So there's an annual report for 2016-17. So I've looked through that, and an annual report for 2017-2018, which I've been looking through, they have a strategy, which is from 2016 to 2022. And as I

read through that, I highlighted questions, that strategy being that they would now be halfway through that strategy or two thirds of the way through that strategy, how they're going with those goals that they put within that. So I looked at those things.

Helga Svendsen 4:56

So the strategy is that is still current. So that's good, although you might want to ask them, if you can access the current and your business plan, and even ask them if there's been any reviews of the strategy, because what was that a six year strategy horizon, which is hugely long, but it's getting to the medium term. So it's possible they've done a strategy refresh in that period, particularly coming to the end of that period. So it might be worth asking if there's been any strategy refresh, and whether you can get hold of it. And for the business plan, and the financials in there?

Dominique Hes 5:34

They are at a very high level.

Helga Svendsen 5:36

Okay. Is it the current annual report or a few years ago?

Dominique Hes 5:40

It is the 2017-2018 is the latest one. Okay, so again, I'll be asking them for the current annual report. And as much as possible, it would be worth particularly with the financials, pulling out some of those numbers and doing some comparison year on year to the annual reports that are online go back in time as well?

There's only two so is the 2016-2017, and 2017-2018.

Helga Svendsen 6:04

So you might want to ask the last five years of annual reports, and therefore the last five years of financial reports and see if you can look at the figures and do a bit of a comparison of how they're tracking that will give you a lot of insight into their performance. I think I heard in there that you've also looked at their social media fantastic. Worth looking at where they are on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, those sorts of things, and others who are tweeting around them.

Dominique Hes 6:30

Yes, yes, indeed, I, I haven't looked at Twitter or Instagram, I'm not as comfortable with those two platforms as I am with LinkedIn, and Facebook. But I do have it on my list of things to do.

Helga Svendsen 6:42

I confess, I'm not on Instagram, either. But if it's like Twitter, I'm sure you can look through it without having to sign up yourself. Obviously googling the organization and just seeing what comes up on Google. But you can google specifically in the news tab, the Google. So just saying how they've been in the news is always worthwhile as well.

Dominique Hes 7:00

It looks like there's been a lot of good news, I'm getting more and more excited, as I'm reading kind of, I'm not going to be disappointed. But I'm getting more excited as I see the projects that they're working on the sorts of species that they're helping to protect, and how it aligns with my other board role. And my own passion

Helga Svendsen 7:22

Bit of a double edged sword doing all of this research is it often makes you fall more in love with the organization, which is always challenging, when you're one of many going for a role. But one of the key things that people look for in an interview will come through to it when we talk about the interview is passion in our organization. And you can tell in an instant in an interview when somebody has done their research around an organization and when they haven't. So having all of these different insights will be incredibly useful. Now, the other thing is to think about, and I know we touched on it in that first conversation, but thinking about who you know, who's involved in the organization and talking to them, or at least asking if you can talk to them. Sometimes people have a conflict of interest and not able to but at least inviting them, have you shaking down the context tree on where you can speak to?

Dominique Hes 8:10

Yes, so I've spoken to one board member who I have worked with, through the call hub, the clean air and urban laboratory. And I have also through her been introduced to the chair, and I had a brief conversation with him. I've connected to the CEO via LinkedIn. I did that today. That was in preparing the application as opposed to the interview. I will now follow up with them based on the questions that we come up with today.

Helga Svendsen 8:41

Are they similar organizations, perhaps in different states or even internationally, other similar organizations?

Dominique Hes 8:48

There is a national peak industry body. And the board of that I had a quick squiz through the board of that is made up of the CEOs of similar organizations around Australia. That's the extent of the research I've done. But I found that quite interesting. And then I immediately emailed my CEO at Green fleet and said, What's the story with this organization? What are they doing? This seems like a really great organization to be part of, because we're interested in growing the capacity of the sector.

Helga Svendsen 9:19

I\if possible, it would be worth having a look at the strategy of that peak organization as well. And seeing how that aligns with the work of trust the nature in Victoria, and any other, it might be industry publications or other publications Is there anything else you can think of that might be useful to give you that kind of oversight and insight into this organization.

Dominique Hes 9:43

So they have a newsletter, which I have signed up for the newsletter, a series of stories from each of their properties, and the people working on there and the achievements that they've managed to have in those places. So species that have come back number trees planted, events that they've had, the women in conservation breakfast was mentioned.

Helga Svendsen 10:09

We are laughing at that, folks, because I had organized a table for the women in conservation breakfast earlier this year. And then through some sort of administrative mess up, my table wasn't booked. So the women that had organized it on that table, we now just make quarterly for our own little not women in conservation breakfast. And it's perfectly wonderful. And possibly a better opportunity for networking. And having gone to the official event, you're in the middle of your research, which is exactly as it should be, you've got two weeks to go for this interview. It sounds like you've got things really well covered off, you're looking internally, you're looking externally, you're talking to people, if you find that there are documents that you know exist, that you can't get hold on given you're about to go for an interview, ask them for, they'll be very happy to provide those sorts of things. Or they'll tell you if they're not I will give you information and be will show that

you're doing your research and that you're really looking to find out more about them prior to the interview. Anything else about that preparation, before we move on to the interview itself?

Dominique Hes 11:11

The main question I really have having, I have always gotten jobs through networks, rather than interviews, and having not prepared for an interview for 14 years. And for the interview that I went for to get the job at Melbourne Uni I didn't take it very seriously, because I thought there was no chance they were going to employ me. So I didn't really prepare for that one either. I have enough interviewed for something for realistically, 25 years. But what do I do with all of this information so that it is useful in the interview, I don't want to have 10 pages of notes that I'm going to rifle through any advice, it would be great.

Helga Svendsen 11:51

It does as it is already doing crew gives you more of that passion for the role. It means that during the conversation, you can probably pepper it with bits and pieces like Oh, so I read in your current strategy that you're focusing on, whatever you know, that interested me for x, y, z reason. So I think you're right, you don't want to list of points that you are definitely going to put into the interview. But it gives you that insight and that coverage of information that you can then just use to have a conversation with them about the organization, rather than it just being a conversation about you. And you generally it'll be used specifically, and how you fit into this organization. So provides you with context. It's also useful. I spoke with another client recently and had suggested similar and indeed, I've done this in interviews where I've sat down and said, well, I've spoken to people who are on your board have spoken to your current staff, your former staff, other people involved in your organization, funders of your organization and what they say is x y&z good. So I'd be interested to hear your insights, it really tells them you are really interested in this organization. Again, when they say well, Dominique, tell us why you would be perfect for this role? You could say, well, I haven't looked at your strategy and I know that you're focusing on these areas, my input can be x y&z or having looked at your financials or I know that you're looking at fundraising and my experiences x y&z it just gives you some context. If we turn to the interview itself, generally speaking, this is not always the case. But generally speaking, board interviews are little more informal than job interviews. As a government role my punt is that it will be a more formal type, more usual type interview, you would expect for a job. But sometimes they are more conversational, because they want to know that you will fit into the group as a board rather than just just inverted commas into a job. So often, the first interview question is around why this board? Why are you interested? And this is a perfect opportunity to bring in some of your research. And I think you outlined some of that when we spoke firstly, but what is it about trust for nature that interests you? Why do you want to be on the board?

Dominique Hes 14:11

I think we need to step up to the role we can have in the world as far as not just healing us but also creating a more resilient future proof system. I think we have the ability, the the knowledge, the skills, the capacity to actually have that contributed role to nature, actually quite interested in asking them what they think of that, because often conservation is about let's leave it alone. Whereas I actually think we actually need to contribute to the system, we need to both heal us and look at, okay, there's climate change coming? What can we do to ensure that the system is able to adapt to what's happening to climate change, and you can't do that by walking away from us. It will adapt in some way. But it might not adapt to the way that is actually contributed to us as well. So I'm interested in asking them that question. Also, I've just completely coincidentally written a paper around how my knowledge area intersects with agriculture. So it's on regenerative development meets regenerative agriculture. And what does that mean? When those two things come together? They sound like they're the same, but they're actually a little different. And it's in the subtleties that the real power is. And one of the things that they're interested in is being able to work more effectively in the agricultural sector. So having just written that paper, I sent it off to the board member and the chair that I have spoken to and said, look, I've just written this paper. And in reading your strategy, I see that you're interested in this, irrespective of the interview, this might be useful, and I'm happy to present to the staff or the board on these ideas. That was really fun doing that today. And going home, my two worlds are intersecting

Helga Svendsen 15:55

Oh that's great. Great. Okay, so you've got a whole bunch of stuff as to why that would be the case and why you can really make a contribution to this organization. So it's often the opening question is either tell us a bit about yourself, or why are you interested in this organization, and you really want to get across there your passion for the organization and your contribution to the board, which you've outlined beautifully there. That is fantastic. So often in an interview, the first question is, tell us a bit about yourself. I'm such a framework person, have you got a framework for answering that makes shaking her head at me, okay, so I take you through what I often use as a response to that so much. And I'll make sure I put the cheat sheet that is in the show notes. So I've got a kind of framework, and I'm doing inverted commas here, folks for the 60 second introduction. So it starts with 'I'm a' and that's just a word or two, around what you do. So for me, it would just be a consultant. And then I, genearlly three strengths. So I'm a consultant with strength in governance, stakeholder engagement, strategy and planning. So you might want to come up with your three key strengths that fit this role, you don't want to fit them so much that they're not actually your strengths, but choosing the three key strengths that fit this role, then you might talk about your most recent role or your current role. So for me as a consultant, this is where it gets a bit tricky. I often talk about projects that I'm working on. But previously when I've been in jobs or roles that might be my current role is or my most recent role. So for me, my last job, my most recent role was as the chief executive officer of Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker project. If I was doing that, currently, I would talk about a project. But that was my last job. And then we talk about some achievements. So again, if it was for me, in my previous role, my most recent role was as Chief Executive Officer, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker project. And some of my achievements in that role

include increasing the size of the organization, threefold in 12 months, increasing fundraising by 12%, year on year, and steering the organization through a merger with one of the other uniting care parts. So you might want to come up with some key achievements that you have that again, aligned to this role. The next part is my background. This is where you get to summarize a decade or two or more of experience into a sentence. So again, for me, it would be something like my background is as a lawyer, trade union leader and facilitator in sustainability, Victoria, I like to edit my own have also been a board member of YWCA, Victoria Royal Women's Hospital, and so on. And then in summing it up, I'm looking forward to using my strengths on where you go back up to the strength stakeholder and gain governance and strategy and planning to make a contribution to this organization. Yeah, ready. So please, writing these notes down, I'll make sure I send it to you. And also make sure it's in the show notes. so 'I'm a' my strength are my current role or my most recent role. And some of my achievements include blah, blah, blah, my background is. And also, that's what you just put in in the other things like board roles, or even push walking, whatever it may be. And I'm looking forward to using my strengths of x, y z to make a contribution. You might not use all of that in a tell us a bit about yourself. You also might not get asked, tell us a bit about yourself. And once you've got all of this prepared, you can like come on, ask me the question, I've got an answer. And then sometimes I don't ask it. But you will get to use some of those elements in other parts of the interview or indeed, in any networking conversation. I always say to people, it's really useful to have that a bit down pat, and have it a little bit rehearsed in your head. But so rehearsed that it doesn't sound like it's rehearsed. I do remember years ago, walk into an interview and just saying it over and over and over again in my head as I got to it. So when they did ask the question, and hopefully they did, it just rolls off my tongue. And it's the start of the interview. So it just makes you feel comfortable. Because you've got something to say, rather than when they say, tell us a bit about yourself. And you'll look at them like a bunny in the headlights going God, do you want to hear about my family? Do you want to hear about personal stuff? You want to hear what I've done professionally? And you're not quite sure how to answer. Right? Thank you. That's wonderful.

They might then ask you about why you're passionate about the organization or something along those lines. We've already talked about that, then it's likely because it's a government interview, they will probably ask you those beautiful behavioral questions. So Dominique, can you tell us about a time when you insert key selection criteria, you want to have a bit of a look through the case selection process to really think about some of the things that you've done and how that aligns?

Dominique Hes 21:04

Well, if you remember from the application, there was the 4000 words per key selection criteria. So I have plenty of words to look at

Helga Svendsen 21:11

Exactly. So now in answering it in an interview. Again, I like a good framework. When a question is asked tells about a time when you often what they're after is what I call the challenge action result

framework, often its star or car framework. So the one I like to use is challenge action result. Have you got one of the cases mentioned criteria there in front of you?

Dominique Hes 21:35

Fundraising?

Helga Svendsen 21:36

Fundraising, right. Okay. So when they say to you, so Dominique, tell us about a time when you have raised funds for an organization or you've been involved in the governance of an organization that is raising funds? They're looking for what you've actually done, but you want to give them some context. So the challenge action result framework challenge is giving them some context. Oh, yeah. So let me tell you about, I'm going to put my example into it here. But you'll need to put into your own but let's let's fundraising. Yeah, so I was formerly the chief executive officer of hotham mission asylum seeker project, we received no government funding. So we needed to do all of our fundraising from people that we knew, raising funds around the asylum seeker sector can be challenging, because there are people who feel strongly in support of the sector. And there are some people who feel strongly not in support of the sector. So building some of those relationships, and making sure we can raise funds is really important. So that's part of the challenge. So you want to talk to them about what the challenges around that particular area, then you move to action. So what I did was, for me, so what I did was, I made sure I went to the different groups that were involved in the organization, I made sure that we were telling a story, not just for me as the CEO, but other people in the organization, we're clear on the story and had different stories of some of the clients that we were supporting. And we were doing both written and personal communication, we ran events and all sorts of things to connect people to the organization. So that's the so what I did, and then results, and what that resulted in 12%. Yeah, exactly. So 12% year on year. So it gets you to that result part that you use in your introduction, you don't do the whole part in the introduction, but it brings you around to that part. That's the type of framework that they are likely to be listening out for, when they ask you questions tell us about a time when you and they might not use those exact words, but you can tell when they're looking for an example. So again, I'll make sure I send you a bit of an outline of that. And I'll make sure I put a link to this in the show notes. What I suggest to people is think about all the things you've done, you've already done the application. So you've got a million different examples. But I always think it's worth having a bit of shopping list of achievements of your career. And I always suggest to people that you break it into those three areas. So just have the hitting around what it means. And then what was the challenge? What did I do? And what was the result? And if you take that shopping list, you can just pull it out this sort of interview and go, yep, I'll use number one, seven and 12 to this interview.

Dominique Hes 24:20

Yep, I can see a table.

Helga Svendsen 24:25

That's right. I did have a client, once you put it into a spreadsheet, it did look beautiful. I'm not that good with spreadsheets that so I've mine is a table. But it's worth having it there. And it just reminds me before you walk into the interview, so start pulling that together, as well. They may ask you questions about, you know, what do you see are the challenges for our organization? What do you see the opportunities for our organization, those sorts of things. And again, that's when your research and then the organization will be will come to the floor. If they don't ask you those things, it's often a good thing to have in your questions to them. Because this is a really important part of the interview right at the end, they will undoubtedly say so. Dominique, do you have any questions for us? Yes. What sorts of things? Are you thinking you might ask them?

Dominique Hes 25:12

So the first one was around the concept of conservation, and whether it's a hands off, or an active participation and contribution to the system? Fantastic. There's several questions, and I can't quite bring them to mind very quickly right now. But as I read through their strategy, they had certain things that I felt that I need some clarity around, there were a lot of words, but there weren't a lot of specific. So okay, you're going to do X, how we going to do X? Right? And some of that I'm finding as I'm reading the annual report, and finding the answers to those. But as I read the strategy, I noted questions that I could ask if I couldn't find the answers anywhere else.

Helga Svendsen 25:53

Often you'll find during the conversation, some of those questions will be answered. Generally, in an interview, I literally have a sheet of paper with me with questions. And when when they get to that part, I pick it up and go, Oh, yeah, prevented that. Yes, we've answered that. Yes. Oh, he's one we have an answer. Can I ask you, blah, blah, blah. And if they don't ask you about what are the challenges and opportunities for the organization, it's a good opportunity for you to then ask them you know, it might be some of the challenges I see it x y&z but I'd be interested to hear from you what you think the challenges are, or the opportunities are or whatever it may be. One other thing that I like as a final question, so when they turn to you and say, so Dominique, any questions for us? One other thing I always suggest to people, and everyone takes me up on it, but I like it as a question is saying, Look, just before we go to the questions, can I just check? Is there anything that you've asked that I haven't sufficiently answered yet? That I might need to go back over? It just gives them an opportunity to say, yeah, you know, what, you didn't actually answer this one, can you give us a bit more, or it gives confirmation that you have answered all their questions, efficient way? And then you can move into questions.

Dominique Hes 27:03

Great. That's a great suggestion.

Helga Svendsen 27:05

All right. Now, again, because of the government board, I often say to people to do a bit of follow up afterwards, just to remind them that you exist, and you're excited about the role. I certainly don't rule that out for government board. But because it's such a secret, mysterious process, it may or may not make any difference, but it's still a polite thing to do.

Dominique Hes 27:25

I will at least follow up with the two people that I know once I know who's going to actually be at the interview, I guess.

Helga Svendsen 27:31

Yeah. Great. So is there anything else anything else about the interview that we can cover here? That would be helpful?

Dominique Hes 27:39

I hate interviews.

So I think what you've given me and how prepared I will be walking into it, I will be a lot more confident. But I need to enter the conversation from a How can we contribute to each other rather than being on show or being judged or so nervous I can't do it. So any tips around being present and not so worried about the whole thing that you don't say the things that you want to say in the right way would be great?

Helga Svendsen 28:17

Okay, I think treat it as a conversation, and remember that the interview panel want you to do well, you know, it's a conversation, they really just want to hear from you. And they're there to help you out. So if in the middle of it, you know that you're stumbling on words, or can't quite think of something, just say, what can I just take a minute, and think about that and take a minute, it'll seem like nine years to you, as you take your moment, it will seem like a nanosecond to them as they gather their thoughts and take some notes. So feel free to take your time. I recall in an interview I was in fortunately, I've got this job in the middle of it, I felt faint. And I had to say to them, Look, I'm really sorry, I feel a bit faint and had to just take a moment and drink, have a drink of water, then felt

okay and charged on with the interview. But I seriously thought I was going to pass out for no particular reason it low blood pressure, I sometimes feel that way. They're there to help you out. It's okay to other things. One, if you can do practice, interview with somebody, sit them down, even if it's somebody you know, we'll run through it, you'll feel like an idiot. But it is well worth it to feel just get the opportunity to run through some of this stuff. And thirdly, I will say to people, let me just ask the question. So you've done the interview, you've walked out? What are the three things you want the people in the interview to look at each other and go, Dominique, she's something something and something, what are the three things you want them to look at each other and really think that you are highlighting?

Dominique Hes 29:56

Probably passionate, organized. There's one thing we haven't talked about, and that's network, and that they can see how I can contribute and don't know how to put that into a word.

Helga Svendsen 30:09

Those three things before you walk into write them in your book, or have them on a post it note, have them in front of you, passionate, organized, the word I wrote was networked. That should be enough to remind you of what you mean by that. Remind yourself of that just before you walk in. These are the things I want to showcase have them front of mind it to be in the conscious mind, but in the unconscious mind so that you can really showcase that when you're sitting in front of them that when you walk out there just look at each other and go oh, Dominique, she's incredibly passionate and organized and network and will make a real contribution to this organization.

Dominique Hes 30:50

All right, so I will try and report back

Helga Svendsen 30:55

Look, some of the compensation we've had here and now shows me that you will do that inherently your got such a contribution to make. And I would love to check back in with you after the interview. We might do another five minutes at the end of this podcast after the interview and then put them together for how the interview has gone.

Dominique Hes 31:14

Okay, perfect.

Helga Svendsen 31:16

Yeah, you go you good thing.

Dominique Hes 31:19

So many useful useful tips. Thank you so much.

Helga Svendsen 31:22

Absolute pleasure.

Dominique Hes 31:24

For any interview, not just boards - really wonderful.