



Take on Board

Transcript – Sheila Ronning

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the Take on Board podcast, I'm speaking with Sheila Ronning about using your network and your personal brand to help you get on boards. First, let me tell you a bit about Sheila. Sheila broke the mould in 2002. With the launch of Women in the Boardroom by being the first to form such an organisation with customized executive training programs and networking opportunities. She created a proven program and process to get women their first second or third corporate board seat. Her first board was the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce in the late 90s. And since then, she's been on a range of business industry and not for profit boards. I know Sheila is going to have a lot of wisdom to share with us today. Welcome to the Take on Board podcast Sheila.

Sheila Ronning 0:44

Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm honored to be here.

Helga Svendsen 0:47

Oh well, I know this conversation is going to be fantastic. Sheila before we explore using your networks, your personal brand and so on. I would love to just dig a little deeper. You. So could you tell me what was young Sheila like? And when did you get your first inkling that you'd end up in a governance role?

Sheila Ronning 1:08

Thank you for asking us. That's great question. I mean, young Sheila, you know, I think it's the whole entrepreneurial thing, bug, hit me early. And my mom was an entrepreneur as well. And so, you know, it was really I mean, it's not even that I thought, oh, governance or boards. That's not really what I was even thinking about at the time. My first business, I was sales, marketing and PR consulting, and I ended up creating a really big networking event so that I could really sell the pipeline. And my mentor came to me and said, Oh, my gosh, you're so good at getting people in the room and having these big events and I would love it if you would start an annual event that helps women get onto corporate boards. And so that's really how it started. And I always think that's such an interesting story of how it started because I was in my late 20s Usually 30 you know, we ended up having these really big events in 15 cities across the US and realizing that's really not how one gets onto a corporate board. So you know, plus many other reasons but then we started the the membership programs to do one on one. So, I hope that answers your question. I guess it doesn't

really talk a lot about little Sheila but I just tell us how to drive to work hard that work ethic i think is what really just keeps pushing me to work so hard and so long. It's something where did that come from? Do you think

Helga Svendsen 2:33

Where's that work ethic? And you know, that drive? Where does it come from in you?

Sheila Ronning 2:37

Again, I think it was you know, my Mum and whether it was her only buying us so many different outfits for school every year me and making me go and babysit, or get a side job, I don't know or that was her working so hard to support us. But I just knew that if you know if I wanted something, I was the only one that was going to be able to make it happen.

Helga Svendsen 3:00

Yeah, and I love that you are now using that beautiful. I can do anything gene to help others do also that I can do. That is fantastic. So, Sheila, I know for you part of the work that you do is about encouraging women to use their network and use their personal brand to help get on boards. Where do we start in this conversation? What is some of your tips that you've got for women in this?

Sheila Ronning 3:26

Yeah, well, okay, so that I mean, there's so many different aspects to it, right? Where, one, I'm going to talk about women because as I work with I'm sure men are sometimes the same way, but my focus is on women. And I am. So that's what I want to talk about. So for any men listening, just know I'm sure. Maybe you fit into that same bucket, but we're just focused on when there's so many different situations. Women are not all the same, but we tend to, I don't know, we tend to get in our own way sometimes. Have you ever done that? where it's like, I don't know if I'm good enough. qualified enough for? Gosh, I don't know if I even have anybody in my network that really could help me get into a board or we're making all these assumptions, first of all, and then, you know, we're not really thinking about all those great people in our network. And in you know, part of the reason why we don't even think about those people, is because we're so busy in life and helping everybody else that we sometimes forget about those people in our life that are that, really that influence our connector type person. So and I'll give a definition of those right. So influencers are people who can influence a decision. And connectors are people who are extremely well connected, and they're energized and they love connecting people. That's just who they are. And so when I'm helping our, you know, members think about who in their network can really help them get onto a corporate board. I have them do that organic thought process of like back From the computer, don't look at LinkedIn or, you know, your Outlook or Gmail, wherever your contacts are just back away from your

computer. And really just give yourself 10 to 20 minutes to really think about the people that are in your life, the fall ins that influencer connector bucket, and they don't all have to be serving on a corporate board to go on that list. And I know I just you know, I keep saying corporate board, and I just want to make sure your listeners know too, that this obviously, is nonprofit boards, corporate boards, you know, but really, I created this whole networking process even to help me as a consultant, keep that pipeline that funnel full. It's really thinking about those people and having that thought process and going way back to even when you went to university or maybe you've had children and you've met some great parents along the way or you've been in in different clubs or various things throughout your life where you've met these great people and for whatever reason, you just sent in touch with them anymore. Or you might have even forgotten about them. Because you know what we're human and we forget about people all the time. So it's just good to really just stop and have that thought process of who in my life, right? Have I come across that I could put on this list of influencers and connectors and again, they don't have to be serving on a board to go on that list. A lot of times, if you think about lawyers, you know, or bankers or CPAs, or consultants, a lot of times those people will know when their clients need board members.

Helga Svendsen 6:34

Absolutely. Auditors are another one that..

Sheila Ronning 6:36

Yes, absolutely. So you you know, you think about all those people, you get them down on the list, you know, I'm a fan of spreadsheets, you have to actually put them on a separate piece of paper or folder or file whatever it is, versus where all your the contacts and the reason why is because you don't want to forget about them again. And you want to make sure that you are you know, you're building this process. It is it's just not a one and done. You can't just reach out to them once and expect to have this amazing connection and they're going to help you get onto a hoverboard. You need to maintain that relationship. But you also need to maintain it in a way where it's not a meanie me. And honestly, most women don't even network like that. So they would feel uncomfortable with that anyway. Yeah. So I know I'm just kind of going on my whole journey of, you know, the networking process. And I you know, I don't know if you want me to play this with questions or...,

Helga Svendsen 7:31

Oh, so I'm hearing in there, identify your people. And I love that identifying the connectors and the influences. And then you just mentioned they're not as long as it's not me, me me around, right? I'm guessing actually, why don't I not guess what I just asked you what you mean by that and about what sort of relationships are people looking for and how can they build them?

Sheila Ronning 7:53

Let's say it's, you know, they've known Sally for a really long time and they're reaching out to her if they haven't talked to them. In a while, they want to make sure that they're approaching that conversation. You know, maybe it's a quick little email just saying, hey, Sally, oh my gosh, it's been forever since we've connected I would love to catch up with you, you're not going into the full explanation and you're wanting to go into a board in that email if you're really reaching out and re establishing that relationship. And then once you're together, or, you know, whether it's you're meeting for coffee, or you're on the phone, it is all about her in the beginning of like, Oh my gosh, what, what's new with you? And, you know, you're obviously very interested in what in what has been happening with her, you know, also thinking if there's anything you can do to help her, you know, so at the end of her update, you know, even if you can't think of anything to help her with you just say, Oh, my gosh, thank you so much for sharing. If there's ever anything I can help you with, please let me know. And then, of course, you're going to it's all going to be a natural You know, I'm helping these members with their value proposition. Write their elevator pitch, if you will, but you don't just go into it and then just shove it down that person's throat, right? You are actually, you know, having a conversation like human beings do. But you are coming prepared, knowing that this person might be able to help you. And you want to ask them in a way where they actually can help you. I always say, listen, our network wants to help us, but we need to help them help us. Yes. And we need to give them the information. So if somebody was looking for a job, and they came to you and said, Hey, I'm looking for a job, you would be okay, what kind of job? And maybe they're assuming that you know exactly what they do, or what they'd be looking for. And maybe you are feeling guilty, like, oh, gosh, I should know this. And I don't want to ask any questions because I feel that I should know. But then you're not going to be any help to them either.

Helga Svendsen 9:55

Being as specific as you can without it sounding like a shopping list, so you know, all of them I'm hearing is there be genuine be authentic? It shouldn't be transactional.

Sheila Ronning 10:05

And it also shouldn't make their eyes gloss over.

Helga Svendsen 10:08

Yes, yes. It's a conversation, not a sermon.

Sheila Ronning 10:14

Know exactly right. You need to be able to clearly articulate what your value add is what you're looking for. And you really need to be able to do that within like 60 seconds.

Helga Svendsen 10:24

So then how do you in helping women to develop that value proposition in 60 seconds? How do you do that with women?

Sheila Ronning 10:33

Well, I actually do it pretty well, because I do it all the time. I know I You set me up for that one. But absolutely, I typically and you know, they're always so scared of that call, right? Because they're thinking, Oh my gosh, we're gonna come up with my elevator pitch my value proposition. I mean, I think I'll do it for myself and I you know, I'm not excited about it. I mean, that just kind of makes me feel queasy and uneasy about it right. But loves you, they know that we're going to get on the phone and I'm going to say, Okay, I'm going to ask you some questions. I'm going to take notes. I want you to just sit there and answer my questions. And it's really going to just be a yes or no. And then I'll go into something where I'm saying, Okay, now, I want you to tell me a few stories, right? Where I'm wanting you to tell me what are some different types of situations that a company might be going through, where you would add tremendous value. And there I will find my little nuggets. So I'll be taking notes as she's talking to me those stories. And of course, you know, when you're a board member, it's eyes in and fingers out. So I'm focused on having her tell me those stories where maybe it is okay, you know what, I'm really great at scaling a business. I am a digital disrupter. I am great. With you know, transforming a business if they're analog into digital or really the whole cybersecurity and making sure that whatever risk they're taking aligns with their strategy, or maybe it's a, you know, pre IPO before they go public, or I'll bring up different examples of situations that they could talk about, and help steer them in that direction. And then, because I do this all the time, I'm very quick at, you know, putting it all together and reading it to them.

Helga Svendsen 12:31

I love that you do it in that interactive process, and just draw out those little nuggets in there as you're having the conversation. And for people who are listening to this, they could do some of that thought process themselves.

Sheila Ronning 12:44

None of this is rocket science, right? You can do all of this on your own for sure. And we'll probably get to this a little bit later. But like even the networking process that I've created, I mean, I haven't,

you know, recorded on a webinar and all of the stuff On webinars, so you can certainly just, I mean, we're wanting to help women. And yeah, of course, we'd love to have you become a member and have us, you know, let us help you. But you don't have to become a member. Right? You can do it on your own and, and hey, we even have every single tool on a webinar to help you do that by yourself.

Helga Svendsen 13:19

Yeah. And it's, you know, again, what I'm hearing in here is take the time to think about it. Take the time to think about your network, and who are the influences. Think about who are the connectors, think about what your value add is. And, you know, if we're fortunate enough to be able to sit down with someone like you, Sheila, to pick out those nuggets of gold, that is awesome. Yet even to prepare for that conversation. I would hope that women are, what is it that I've done? What is the value that I can add? So have you got an example maybe of one of the women that you've worked with, where you've worked on that with her and what she's done with it?

Sheila Ronning 13:56

Yeah, absolutely. Well, you know, the whole thing is to it's networking and it's also your your personal brand, right? We I mean, you can't go to your network and be asking for this if you don't have a great reputation if you don't have a great brand. So a couple of different stories that I can think of is one, I mentioned earlier, we had done those, those really big events, you know, in 15 cities across the US. And during that time, we had all of these extremely experienced, you know, mainly women, Corporate Directors that were sharing their stories with our attendees. And it was, it was amazing. And it just so happens that when I you know, shifted everything into the more one on one, the membership platform, several of those women have actually joined now as a member because they were having a hard time getting into their next board. And they knew that I had this, that I've created that networking process where it was really helping women get on to their next sport and you know, because you all share that rumor too. Like once you get on to your first one, your phone starts ringing. And that simply is not true. Is it easier to get on to your second one? Yes, but that doesn't mean your phone starts ringing. So Ellen signs up. And, you know, I go through the whole networking process with her. And Ella is kind of one of those people who we listen, she's been serving in corporate boards, like 2030 years and, and she knows a lot. And I'm not taking that away from her at all. But I know how to help her get on to other boards and new boards. And so it was just kind of this dynamic, right? But she really just listened and just gave into this process. You know, we checked in a few weeks after she started really using it. And she goes, I cannot believe the ROI just changing up how I'm even talking to people or, you know, instead of just picking up the phone, calling someone or sending them a really long email. I can But like I've just made little tiny changes to how I'm reaching out to them and what I'm saying and how I'm getting such a better response. And she said right now I'm actually, you know, the finalists for three different boards. Wow,

Helga Svendsen 16:16

What was some of those tiny little tweaks or changes that she made about how she presented and who she presented to?

Sheila Ronning 16:24

So a lot of times what we're doing, we're reaching out to people, we're like, you know, it's like such a long email, and we send it during their busy day. And it could be someone who's really, really wanting to help us but Okay, so I always use the story of Carla. Carla comes to me, she sends me an email. And it's a really long email and I can tell that most of it is a copy and paste. She didn't reform at all of it right. And it starts out with oh my gosh, Sheila, how are you? Oh, it looks like everything that went in the boardroom. Doing great, I have a favor. And also it goes into this really long email, you know, it's like she's she's written this book and she was wanting me to read some of that and then write something for the book. And I'm so honored, and so lovely. She wants to write something for this book. And she needs it in two days, huh? Oh, yes. I like oh, shoot, I got a separate in this email. And I have to get on to, you know, the schedule call with one of our members. I'm busy, busy, busy. Work, Work work. And in my emails, the way I have it set up is that there's 100 emails on the very first page. And if I get an email from you know, a member right or something that I you know, I know I need to quickly take care of, I will star them like with a red star so that I don't forget about them or I'll flag them somehow. Carla's email wouldn't get a flag because it's lovely and nice. But I, you know, I'm not going to, you know, I mean, it's not a paying member. And so what happens though is, you know, because I have the Email Setup where there's 100 on that first page. Once you get to the second page, I think we know what happens, right?

Helga Svendsen 18:19

Nothing happens.

Sheila Ronning 18:21

Yeah, nothing happens until you know, a couple months later. I've got a couple extra hours. Oh, I should probably Oh, I should probably go look at that second page should probably go look at that second page of emails and see what's there. So I see Carla's email there. And I've just feeling so guilty, just that. At the bottom of my stomach, I'm just, Oh, I feel so bad. And I just oh my gosh, and the phone rings again. And I forget about Carla's email again. And two or three months passed by again, go look at that page too. I see your email. I start feeling guilty but Now, I'm annoyed with her, because she's making me feel guilty. And you know what? She should have sent that email to me. She shouldn't have sent that really long email to me. And oh my gosh, she sent that to me on a Tuesday during my business day. Oh my gosh, you know, I'm so sick of feeling guilty about this and I delete it.

Helga Svendsen 19:17

Ah, right.

Sheila Ronning 19:19

And now I'm going to start avoiding Carla.

Helga Svendsen 19:24

Don't be Carla, be Ellen, who's got her short and sharp emails who's building the relationship who's clear on her value add?

Sheila Ronning 19:34

So instead what she did, Ellen takes that you know, situation. And what she does instead is she sends Hey, Sally, it's been a while since we talked let me know if you have time for a cup of coffee or a phone call over the next couple of weeks. And she sends that email that very short email on the weekend because you know what? We're all really busy during the week. And even if we get a short, you're just going to get a better ROI on the weekend.

Helga Svendsen 20:04

Oh, that is so interesting to hear Sheila, I confess, I actively avoid sending emails on weekends, a lot of the time not not entirely. I will definitely send personal emails on the weekend, but not business I'll type ones, but maybe I'll need to do my own little experiment and just see how it goes with some of those things. That's interesting.

Sheila Ronning 20:25

Right? Well, you think about it. So Friday comes along, right? And everyone's like, Oh, I can't wait to go to work. Can't wait to stop reading these emails. Saturday, you know, their family from errands, whatever. But I guarantee you Sunday comes around, and they're going to be like, well, I really need to see what I got coming up this week. Hmm. Yeah, email is going to be at the top of the list. And because it's so short, sweet and easy to respond to. It doesn't have multiple layers or multiple questions or multiple things that respond to is oh my gosh, great to hear from you would love to catch up.

Helga Svendsen 21:06

Yes. Yeah, I love that that easy to respond to it is you often see those emails, don't you? Where you just have to say yes, that would be great or Yeah, yes, give me a call and we'll make a time whatever it may be, you know, when you end up that net back and forth with people about what about Tuesday living? No, that doesn't work me blah, blah, blah,

Sheila Ronning 21:24

Well, then it's also on, you know, whoever sent that email to once they get that to say, Okay, here's seven different times for a phone call, right? Give them time. And if you're in different time zones, make sure that you're figuring out their time for them. Make it easy for them to respond. Our network wants to help us with to help them help us.

Helga Svendsen 21:47

And it's interesting, isn't it? I think I often speak with women similar things about reach out to your network. Oh, I couldn't do that. You know, Sally, let's use Sally because we're already talking about her. Yeah, he's too busy or Sally's too important or Sally? Wouldn't want to hear from me. And yet every time you turn it around to, in this instance, Ellen, Ellen, what would happen if somebody reached out to you? Do you feel Oh, I'd be so chuffed that they reached out to me. Oh, I would love to hear from Sally.

That's okay.

Sheila Ronning 22:15

So maybe that's not even with Carla. I wanted to help her. Yes. But she, you know, it was just, yes, I was so busy. But she shouldn't have sent me that really long email and only have you know, given me two days, right. But then also, she shouldn't have sent that really long email and a really long email during my business day.

Helga Svendsen 22:37

yes. And in fact, just out of interest (I'm losing track of people). Carla, it was Carla. That sent a very long email, wasn't it? Yeah. Did she follow up with you at all? Was there any follow up at all? No, there was no follow up. Mm hmm. Because that's the other interesting thing, isn't it? Yeah. You know, maybe a week later, Carla had said, Look, I know I said I needed this but two days later, just thought I'd check in. Don't worry about it now I've got somebody else, or I'd still love to catch up that most of them let you off the hook

Sheila Ronning 23:06

Exactly like oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I, you know, I meant to get back to you. If she would have said, You know, I am so sorry, I only gave you a couple of days or please don't worry about I haven't talked to Karla sense and that was that is a true story. Her name is really Carla too. I always keep thinking I should change it but it's just an ordeal. So okay, well, there's another gal talking more about the whole personal branding and talking to her about Listen, you as an expert in you know, this area. I can't remember exactly what her value add was, but she definitely needed to make sure people knew and everybody does right that they're an expert in whatever they are an expert in. And that's you know, another thing too with women is like, I don't want to say I'm an expert. If you have worked more than 10,000 hours at something you are an expert I'm not making that up. Right? So it's anyway so she needed to really put herself out there and let people know how great she was at this and and you know, really we talked about getting out there and speaking and she really just was like, Oh, I don't know if I want to do it. Okay, fine. I'm going to go to this conference. She went to this conference spoke at it. there happened to be Rosetta Stone public company in the audience. And the Rosetta stones person came up and talk to her afterwards. Carolyn went on to the Rosetta Stone board.

Helga Svendsen 24:33

Oh my goodness. So getting yourself out there and, you know, defining your brand and getting it out there. It can be one on one coffees with people it could be reaching out via email, it can absolutely be getting on the speaking stage. And then bang, come to your

Sheila Ronning 24:52

You know, doing podcasts doing blogs, right. I mean, there's so many great ways to get yourself out there. You really need to Make sure that you're letting people know how amazing you are.

Helga Svendsen 25:04

Let people know it, and then really work through that networking process for some of that. More one on one, type connections and relationships.

Sheila Ronning 25:15

Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 25:15

Oh, Sheila, I want to keep talking. But I know I cannot believe how quickly the time has gone. We have touched on so many fabulous things today around personal brand and networking. What are the main points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Sheila Ronning 25:32

Well, there's just so many isn't that well, one, I always loved the whole our network wants to help us but we need to help them help us right. So you need to know what your value add is and you need to be able to clearly you need to let them know what you're looking for what you want. And just don't assume you're going to that that whole job conversation right? where someone telling you Hey, I'm interested in getting a job. That's, that's assuming that they Know what your value add is? And of course, if you don't ask you don't get. So you need to make sure that you ask. I mean, I was talking with one woman one time, and it just happened that I was in. I was in Barcelona, and these women from Norway, were in the audience, and they were telling me afterwards, we just can't ask, that's just not our culture. And I said, Well, just so you know, I am half Norwegian. I said, even though I have not been to the motherland Sorry about that. I said, but I completely understand. Because, you know, half my family, Norwegian Liga grew up like that, I get it. Well, what I did say to them, I said, Well, okay, if you're not going to ask, and it's not a bad thing, by the way to ask for what you want. I said, Do you think that they can read your mind? And they just said, No, they can't. And I said, there's a way to ask And really it's like it's kind of frustrating when you're on the receiving end. And you're like, I know you want something, but you're really just not asking me for it.

Helga Svendsen 27:11

Which means that often you're not clear on what they are actually asking for.

Sheila Ronning 27:15

Yeah. And also, you can take another step on that too, like, well, if you don't even going to ask me for, for this. How can I possibly refer you to somebody?

Helga Svendsen 27:26

Absolutely. You're clearly a connector as I am. Often I'm finishing conversations with so who can I connect you to that would be helpful and you're absolutely right. You need to know what it is they want so that I can connect them to the right people. I don't want to inverted commas waste my network on the wrong connection as well. That's a waste of everybody's time. So I want to be sure that I'm connecting people that there will be a value add for both sides of that conversation.

Sheila Ronning 27:52

Yeah, and it's your brand if it's not exactly.

Helga Svendsen 27:55

Oh, fantastic. So Sheila Is there a resource you would like like to share with the take on board community?

Sheila Ronning 28:01

Absolutely. Well, I mean, I just want to make sure that women know, you know, the whole networking process and you don't have to become a member of ours for us to help you. Right. I mean, we have so much great information on our website that we have this, the networking process webinar, it's recorded, and I would love to offer it to your listeners, you know, for free, no charge if they if they send me an email.

Helga Svendsen 28:32

Oh, that would be fantastic. Oh, is that okay? I don't know. Listen, folks, what do you think? Is that okay? a free resource to help us get networking better? I think so. That is fabulous. I will put your email in the show notes, Sheila so people can get in. I think that's what you said to email.

Sheila Ronning 28:51

ronning@womenintheboardroom.com

Helga Svendsen 28:54

Fabulous. There you go ronning@womenintheboardroom.com and I will also make sure a link to that is in the show notes. There. He's very generous offer Thank you, but just for the next month, right, last 30 days, we need to put a cap on that because I that's the other thing. I want women to do this now don't wait, just go for it now, right? What are you waiting for? Oh, I love it. I love it. It is also part of that, you know, if it's around forever, then people will potentially not do it so great. But then in the next 30 days, you can email Sheila, and you will get free access to that fabulous webinar about networking and how to, you know, find your influences and connectors. That is a very generous offer. Sheila, thank you. That is fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with the take on board community today. I know people will get not only a lot out of listening to this but also a lot out of that networking webinar that you've so generously offered. So thank you for your time today and for sharing with our community.

Sheila Ronning 29:57

Well and thank you so much. It was truly a honor to be on your show. Thank you