



Take on Board

Transcript – Jan Molino

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, I'm speaking with Jan Molino about how getting on a board starts with you. First, let me tell you a little bit about Jan. Jan is on the Aging Life Care Association Advisory Board and is an active member of both the International Women's forum and the DC chapter of International Women's forum. She is also an emeritus member of the George Mason University Women in Business Advisory Board. Jan is the President and CEO of Aspire Ascend, a consulting firm that provides a comprehensive portfolio and board career development services to enhance the success of executive women. Jen specializes in preparing executive women to sit on paid boards as well as excel in the C suite. She is also well known for her public speaking on women in the boardroom brand development and gender diversity and leadership. Welcome to the take on board podcast Jen, thank you so much. I'm excited to be here. It is fantastic to have you and I know there's going to be some great nuggets of gold here in this conversation that we're about to have. I just love to dig a little bit deeper about you. Tell me what was young Gen like, and when did you get your first inkling that you'd end up, you know, on a board?

Jan Molino 1:14

Well, you know, it's an interesting story. I don't know how many brothers and sisters you have but I grew up with three brothers. And I learned how to be a tomboy and to be a great baseball pitcher. So I guess in my own way, I was learning how to lead. And my early career started as a teacher and an educator. And then I became exposed to the corporate world when I joined it. And I found that I was often the only woman in the room and definitely the only woman in leadership. And that later led to my career in executive search, where I placed women in the CEO role and in the boardroom, to today where I coach and develop executive women to be more successful. So in reality, I've come full circle and I'm still an educator. When I was in the corporate world, I was in health care at a global healthcare system. And there weren't many women in the executive suite. In fact, there still aren't today. But you know, I was kind of fortunate to have worked for the only female CEO in the entire company. And her name was Joyce. She showed me the power of building a strategic network. And she made sure I had a seat at the table, and that I was always positioned for success. So to this day, I continue to practice what I learned from her and I pass it on to every woman that I coach.

Helga Svendsen 2:36

We all need someone like Joyce in our lives. Don't we have fantastic did just out of interest. Do you keep in touch with her?

Jan Molino 2:43

Absolutely. She's an amazing sponsor.

Helga Svendsen 2:46

Well, hi, Joyce. Thank you for all that you do and all that you have done it because no doubt not only did she do that with you, Jan. She's no doubt done it with a whole stack of other women as well.

Jan Molino 2:55

Absolutely. The really funny part about this is that I actually learned from her about the boardroom, quite frankly, she was my first real introduction to the boardroom, outside of being in a sorority in college where I was in leadership. But I learned about governance, I learned about the value of influence and persuasion. And she helped me climb the corporate ladder and prepare me for leadership. So she asked, she was an amazing, amazing woman, you've touched on it there.

Helga Svendsen 3:21

Tell us about your first experience in the boardroom.

Jan Molino 3:25

That actually was funny to tell you the truth. I was actually a pretty young woman at the time. And I was recruited to an American Red Cross board, local board in Florida where I lived at the time. And the reason that they wanted me on the board was because of my fundraising capabilities, which I didn't even know I was that good at. And again, you know, when you're with the American Red Cross or any of the non-profit boards, it's all about helping them build funding for the organisation. And I learned pretty quickly that I was the person that they went to all the time, to get Things Done. And it later came, it became obvious to me that this was my path, helping people get where they wanted to go. But also that I was really good at the fundraising component and really bringing people together. And to this day, quite honestly, you know, I am very good about mentoring people and bringing people together.

Helga Svendsen 4:23

Obviously, I speak to a lot of women about getting on boards, and there are some common themes in there. And certainly, that having the right networks, finding the right mentors, the right sponsors is a common theme that we hear,

Jan Molino 4:33

it's very important that when you're in the boardroom, that you are very good about networking with people in strategic networking, even while you're on the board. And that's what I learned the very first time I was on that board, to build your alliances and to build the people that that you know, on that board.

Helga Svendsen 4:50

Tell me more about that. I know we're meant to be talking about getting on a board and we will get there I promise but you know some of the lessons of being on a board. Very similar, quite frankly. Getting on a board. So because often people think about those networks to get on a board, and then do let their little black book kind of fall away once they're on the board. So tell us about that lesson that you learned on that and how it came about?

Jan Molino 5:13

Well, I think it's actually extremely important that you build a strategic network while you're on the board. Because if you are looking at having a second or third board seat, all of those relationships are important to you. And as long as you're looking at strategic networks, you need to put the right people into them. So as you look at the people around the boardroom, that you're with, who in that boardroom, can you add value to for them if they want to go to another board as well as what they can do for you. So you should never stop looking at how to build your strategic network. And I think to exclude the board members that you're sitting with in that boardroom is a big mistake.

Helga Svendsen 5:50

And in fact, it's one of the magical things I think about your first board is that you get to interact with those board members as a board member rather than aspiring board member You're one of them. You're in that club now. And you can have that conversations with them and be introduced to others around it. So it's it's a fantastic point.

Jan Molino 6:07

We know the good part about that was because it was a nonprofit board, I was able to also learn because I did not go to that board with any Board Governance experienced behind me. I had to learn while sitting on that board, which I think is the wrong, definitely the wrong way to do it. So I made sure that I took governance courses. So by the time I went to my next board, I actually knew what I was doing.

Helga Svendsen 6:31

So again, that's interesting. I wonder what did that board do? How did they support you on that governance journey as well? Was there any tips in there?

Jan Molino 6:39

Actually, they were really very good. The reason they brought me on the board was because of my network, and I understood that. But they also set me up with a partner, so to speak with a strategic partner on the board, who helped me learn the ropes of the boardroom and governance

Helga Svendsen 6:57

Hmm and it's it's heavily because more common now I think that when you join a board, you're appointed a, you know, a partner or a body mentor, whatever it may be from that board, or even sometimes from other boards as well, which is just such a fantastic way for people joining a board. I think no matter what their level of governance experience, even if they have quite a lot of governance experience, it's great to have somebody to just ask those questions of and learn more about an organisation with your body, even if you've been on board for quite some time.

Jan Molino 7:29

No, I agree with you totally. And I think it's a great way to learn more about the culture of the organisation and the flow of how the meeting go, I think it's very important to have that mentor or partner to help you

Helga Svendsen 7:40

Just from that first story of yours about you getting on the board. We've already got so many lessons out of that about, you know, having a great sponsor, someone like Joyce in our lives, having those networks and really neutering those networks, not just for what you can get out of it, but what value you can give to that network. It's really a it's A mutual relationship really, and, you know, potentially mentoring and learning, there's a whole bunch in there already. I also know that you work with lots of women about getting them on board. So for the work that you've done, what are some of the stories that you're hearing from your the women that you work with? Or what are some of the the lessons that you've learned from that work as well?

Jan Molino 8:22

Well, you know, the interesting thing is when I work with women, to help them get on their board seats, you know, the first thing they want to do is connect with a recruiter. And I keep saying, you know, getting on a board really starts with you. If you wait for an executive search firm to call you, you're going to be waiting there a long time. And during the, during the course of these conversations, you know, I really look at how do they own their own success. When I was an executive search before I retired from that I would recruit women for CEO roles and also put them in board seats and in one instance I sent a female candidate the job specs. And she sent it back to me with red checkmarks on it. I'm like, What are these? And she said, Well, these are the areas where I really don't feel like I meet all the qualifications. And I'm like, I don't think we need to worry about that. But in my entire search career, which I did for 16 years, I never had a male candidate ever tell me he didn't fit all the qualifications. So I have met few women CEOs, or women in the C suite that completely own their own success. You know, most of the time, think about it. When you speak to a woman, they started telling you the least important thing about their career first, and then they end up with their current role. I'm able to work with women and help them see the real value they bring to the organisation, whether it's a CEO or whether it's on the board. So I just think that taking a look at how you own your own success is really critical. To all women looking at a board seat or even being on a board.

Helga Svendsen 10:04

It's interesting, isn't it? We do often hear anecdotally that, you know, there's the position description for a role. And unless we can we, as women can make 100% of that, or probably 120% of that. We won't go for it. But there's John down the road, who will just go, yeah, I'll give that a crack. Why not? So we often hear this anecdotally, but and I guess in one way, your experience as an executive, an executive search is anecdotal as well, I guess in one way, but it's quite a large sample to be anecdotal evidence so to hear that, you know, you've never heard that from the men. Yeah. Okay. So we just really need to step into our own.

Jan Molino 10:43

You know, our own experience. We need to own our own success. It was coaching a young woman last year. She is a first time CEO. And she was also going on to her first board and her name is Adriana and she had every kind of quality you would want in a CEO and she had to do her first board presentation. And she had all the content put together. I mean, from a from a standpoint of her content, she was an expert in everything. She was just a perfect candidate, but her delivery style was completely wrong. And so I worked with her on her delivery of how she was going to lead this organisation and stopped her from at the end of the conversation, she would always lift her voice like she was asking for permission to go ahead.

Helga Svendsen 11:31

Yes

Jan Molino 11:32

You know what I'm talking about. And, and, and I said to her, I said, I want you to just tell your vision, tell them how you're going to work with this organisation and where you're going to take them. So she actually did that. And she had one board member who really did not care for her. At the end of the board meeting, he came up to her and he said, You know, I didn't vote for you. But I will tell you you're the only See ya ever seen in this organisation who put out a presentation actually told us what we were going to go as an organisation. So needless to say he is now her biggest fan.

Helga Svendsen 12:10

So Jan, you just talked there about presentations and about getting rid of that, or at least minimizing some of that upward inflection. It's really hard to get rid of that when you're asking you a question. So can you give us an example of that? And can you tell us how you worked with her to work on that, because it's a very difficult thing to identify and to do.

Jan Molino 12:31

What I do this all the time, to be quite honest with you, I can't tell you how many women I work with and and some of them are sitting on two and three boards today, and some of them are CEOs and they still have problems with where they present because we as women have, I don't know what the hang up is it is coming across as informative, you know, strategic person. And so sometimes when we were talking, our voice goes up at the end, and it almost sounds like you're asking for Permission all the time when you need to come across as a very thoughtful strategic leader. And I think it has to do with the fact that we don't know how to brag ourselves. So it's hard for us to take that and put it into a presentation because it also sounds like you're bragging in certain ways. We have a tendency as women to own our own success. And so when I work with potential women candidates for board seats, I have to pull success stories out of them. It's our ability to talk about ourselves or do a presentation with great confidence, something all of us need to do and so as women, most of us are not born with this skill, so it is something you need to learn and practice and practice. So you need to come across as a confident person and own the room. At least in my growing up as a little girl. That was never something that I was taught. So I actually had to learn that which I'm sure a lot of women had to learn.

Helga Svendsen 14:05

And I think it's owning as you say, owning that, that success and that being confident. And assertive is not being arrogant or aggressive. It's okay to really own that and be assertive and confident in what you do.

Jan Molino 14:21

Absolutely. The funny part about all of this is if we didn't as women leaders, if we didn't think about any of that we would come across more confident, but we're so worried about how other people see us. And if we might be too assertive, that it comes across as if we're asking permission. And I hate to see that and women because I have coached a lot of women in the last couple years. And I can tell you, there's a big difference when they come across as strong independent women versus not doing that, coming across with confidence and success.

Helga Svendsen 14:55

It's interesting, I do a similar session in one of the programs that are I run around, you know, building your pitch for a board. And every time I do it in a group, and every time we go around the table exactly this, I say to people, so how did that feel to say how to stand up and do your pitch? And everyone's like, Oh, it's uncomfortable. I feel like I'm showing off. I feel like it's, you know, I'm being a bit over the top. And then I said to the room, so everybody else, how did it feel to hear it from everybody else? All sounded fantastic. Everyone just sounded, you know, really confident and like, they knew what they were saying. So it's getting over that feeling inside and just imagining you're hearing it from somebody else, it makes such a difference.

Jan Molino 15:37

Well, you're absolutely right, in that, you know, whether it's your pitch or unique value proposition, you need to own it. And you need to understand what your what your brand is. And of course, you also know that you're, you're bringing with you to the table to the board aboard grant. So you need to be able to articulate that with confidence or nobody's going to believe in you.

Helga Svendsen 15:58

So in developing the unique value proposition for women and working on that, what should they be thinking about in developing their unique value proposition for the boardroom?

Jan Molino 16:10

We're the reason you want a unique value proposition because it's the best way to help your now work help you your value proposition. It just isn't about your skills. It's about the different elements of your background and network as well as your personal brand. You know, too many people overlook that last point I just said, your personal brand is how you market yourself to the world. And it should appropriately reflect what your value proposition is. So just kind of ask yourself, are you considered a thought leader in an area where you would add value as a director? I mean, I asked women this all the time because I am constantly on a daily basis helping helping women write their unique value proposition their pitch in their board BIOS. So once you start thinking along this line, it becomes To identify what you might need to make your value proposition more apparent. Successful boards are a mosaic of experience and cultures. So what might make you attractive as a board candidate? isn't what is common about your profile, but whether what makes you unique? So boards are made up of the diversity of thought with members being all kinds of experience, whether it's cultural, you know, age, geographic, whatever. So think about what is true that you can bring to an already diverse board. What is your unique board value proposition? You do this all the time as well, you can kind of equate it to your elevator pitch. When you have 10 seconds to sell some to someone, what would you like them to know about you?

Helga Svendsen 17:48

And it's different for often for different organisations, there might be quite a bit of value you can provide to a boardroom and you might, I don't know what's the word tailor it for will in fact not, you might tailor it for the audience, you should tailor it for the audience depending on what they need and what they need to know the best.

Jan Molino 18:08

And it doesn't make you stand out. You know, you need to stand out. And I was talking to a young lady yesterday that I was coaching. And I asked, I think I actually stumped her. And I said, Can you just say what your job is in one sentence? And she goes, No, she goes, it would be a big run on sentence. And I said, it doesn't matter. I said, can you tell us what you do? as a CEO in one sentence? I said because that is again, your pitch. You need to understand how you come across to people and you need to understand how to sell yourself. And that's no different than being in the boardroom or trying to get on a board.

Helga Svendsen 18:44

You work with so many women about these. Is there. A story you can tell us about one of your clients and how they use some of these little nuggets and how they used it and where it got them.

Jan Molino 18:56

Absolutely, you know, the the funny part is in the middle of the pandemic that we're going through right now, I have two clients who want to just, you know, continue at work. One is a CEO of an IT company, and the other is an a VP at a company, and she is actually being considered for a rather large board seat. And she says to me, she was I just think that I need to focus on this and not on anything else. And I said, use me to help you is it don't stop our work. It is all about this downtime, so to speak, it is time to focus on you. And so what we did was we put together their entire board mapping strategy, their unique value proposition, their board pitch, and we completed their board bio during this time, so that when all of this is done, they can hit the road running, so they're not wasting time, because nothing's happening right now. So I just think it's important that we as women don't stop what we're doing to make ourselves better. Whether it's in our career or our lives, I think we need to stay very focused. And I was very fortunate to tell you the truth that that they were willing to continue on this path because they're very strong women, they are running big companies. And they actually took the time. I work with them on a, like a bi weekly basis now that they're actually mapping out their entire board strategy and where they're going to go. And again, I help them help build that strategies from the standpoint of the network that I have that I can also give to them to work with. Because I have a rather large network, not just from this, but also from my 16 years in Executive Search I have been in I still remain in contact with every single person I ever placed and put in and worked with. So I have a very extensive network. I use that to help my clients. I think it's extremely important that during this time that our women in this network that continue to bring up build their personal networking strategy, you know, the the challenge is not only to build one but to leverage it to support and inform your board aspirations. So if you're just not networking, and building this network and letting people know that you would love to learn more about board seats, people don't read minds, you know, you have to continue to do this. You need to find ways to be more forward and ask people in your network to introduce you to keep people so that you continue to make your value proposition known. So building a personal board networking strategy is critical.

Helga Svendsen 21:48

I could not agree more. Jan, you are you're talking my language. There's been so many little nuggets in here that are useful for people but I'm wondering what what are the main points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today.

Jan Molino 22:01

Well, the first one is I really would love for people to start building a brag sheet and really talk about what are your your successes, and put together a board pitch so that you don't race through those accomplishments. Learn how to brag and put them on paper to delivery is crucial. So you need to do this in a nice conversational manner. So you need to practice that. And if you can, if you're home and your husband or your wife asked them to critique you, it may not be pleasant, but it but it will work. And I think from the networking map, use your network to map how you might be connected to

members on the board or other board. The more connections you have to the board, the more comfortable you can be about talking with them, and because they'll make more introductions for you. And I think my last thought on that is something I say repeatedly, research research research, As tempting as it may be to explore offer any opportunity that comes your way from a board seat. I strongly encourage people to be thoughtful and evaluate. Board service is a long term decision. It's not a short stop.

Helga Svendsen 23:13

It is such a good tip there to do your due diligence. But it's not all just about getting the offer. You need to be thoughtful about the acceptance. I was speaking with somebody recently and she had even gone all the way through to observing a board meeting. And it was only after observing the board meeting that she declined the offer of a board rolls, so never have to feel obliged, no matter how far down the track you are. It's not often that you hear that that is the circumstance. And I often recommend that people do try to observe a board meeting prior if possible. So I'm wondering, is there a resource that you would like to share with the take on board community, a book or a podcast or a TED talk or anything else?

Jan Molino 23:55

Well, I do have a favorite book and I have bought, I don't know how many of these and I have and to my clients and they love them. It's it's about bragging, it's called brag the art of tooting your own horn without blowing it by Peggy Klaus. You can get it on Amazon. It's a it's a very thin book. It's a fast read. And you will learn so much from it. Because, as I said before, if we don't learn how to brag and toot our own horn, there's nobody else to do it. So we have to get out there and do it the right way.

Helga Svendsen 24:26

Jan, thank you. It has been so fabulous to have you on the take on board podcast today. I just know that people will get a lot out of this discussion and some great tips for not just getting on a board but also for being on a board. So thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with us today.

Jan Molino 24:42

Absolutely. Thank you so much. It's been an honor.