



# Transcript – Maryanne Puli Vogels

**Helga Svendsen 0:00**

Today on the Take On Board Podcast, I'm speaking with Maryanne Puli Vogels about how she leveraged technology to better prepare new directors. First, let me tell you about Maryanne. Maryanne is passionate and inspired by the divergence of Learning and Technology, always looking to improve the way businesses and health institutions leverage and streamline their operations with new technologies. She's led and managed teams virtually for over 20 years sharing her expertise in the successful implementation of online education. She's held voluntary positions on the Australian information Industry Association, and she now chairs one of Victoria's multipurpose health centers, Timboon District Healthcare Service, and in that role, she helps to strategically oversee the implementation of government policy. Welcome to the Take On Board Podcast Maryanne

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 0:53**

Welcome Helga.

**Helga Svendsen 0:55**

Maryanne, before we talk about leveraging technology, and how that can help us to better prepare directors. I'd love to hear just a little bit more about you. Can you tell me something from the last month or so that you're proud of?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 1:09**

Oh, Helga, there's been so much going on. And, you know, we're all in self isolation and we're still working remotely. But I think one of the big things that's happened to me recently is losing my very good friend who died of COVID alone in London.

**Helga Svendsen 1:25**

I'm so sorry to hear that.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 1:27**

He and I spoke just as he was going into get his induced, he went into it and induced coma at the height of the COVID pandemic in April. And I spoke to him as he was wheeled in to intensive care to be put on the respirator. And it involved me calling daily the hospital twice a day just to see how he was doing and then to be finally told that he would be one of the ones taken off the respirators, which was needed to serve someone else. So it was quite an experience for me difficult situation. But as I'm the next of kin and his executor, I've had to coordinate everything using technology, including his funeral. And I thought I could be able to do this. But in reality, it was so beautiful because what happened was, I had to use WhatsApp and I had to use Facebook and I had to use whatever I had in hand to actually pull the many groups of friendships that he had from all over the place. And what ultimately happened was, it's really united people that haven't seen each other for years. And I was involved in some of the groups he was heavily involved in different rugby groups, etc. So from that point of view, I'm really proud of what we ended up with a 30 minute funeral which was really quite an expression of a beautiful life lead, and one that united people and one that drove people to learn about the technology people have never used it when motivated to get online learning. How to use streaming. Learn how to use WhatsApp and Facebook. And we had the most beautiful tribute. So I share that with you because it's so recent and it's so roll but it was, I feel very honored to have been able to step in and do that from such a long way away given that I can't travel there.

**Helga Svendsen 3:20**

Oh my goodness, what a story, Maryanne, that is. Wow. You know, for those of us in Australia, we and I should say we are recording this in the middle of June in Australia ... touchwood, touchwood in Australia, we have avoided some of the bigger impacts of COVID. But gosh, it brings it home the reality of it, hearing these stories of people close to us dying. It is such an honorable role being somebody next of kin and just so bittersweet. I imagine your friend would be quite pleased to hear that he's you know, brought people together in that process as well.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 3:56**

And the other thing great thing was it was recorded so people, you know, they were able to go back. And so it's fantastic that the technology was there. And we're at this point of, you know, in our lives that we can use it in a situations like this and I'm sure others have got similar experiences. But so that was in the last month along with lots of things that are happening on the board.

**Helga Svendsen 4:19**

Oh my goodness. Okay. Well, again, thank you for sharing that story. It's a tough story to hear, no doubt an even tougher story for you to have lived through but well done you on, on being able to honor him in that way and bring people together in that way. And thank you for sharing that with us.

And it does tie in dare I say it it does tie in in some ways about the topic for today, which is around working virtually. And I know that you've been working virtually for decades now. So how did you start and and how do you manage that?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 4:50**

Well, I kind of evolved into it Helga because I started working in computer based training and distance learning back in the 80s when it was just thing that was starting out, I worked with an organisation that were interested in my education skills because I was a teacher years before. And I had studied at Melbourne Uni they had done adult education. So, you know, I evolved into it to the point where once the bandwidth became, you know, suitable. And because I was by then leading teams, the company I was working for big American firm called SkillSoft, basically said, Let's not waste time with trying to get to the office and back, let's work from home and let's develop that. So back in 2000, I think it was, it was fantastic, really, for me, and it was fantastic for the pool of people I worked with, because there weren't any sort of scenarios there weren't any guidelines that are working virtually. But it went very, very well. And what was great was the company invested in our offices, and I think that was the one thing that worked very well for for us, you know, we had a proper office, it was set up, we had guidelines we had they invested in us. So we had all the support, and we had everything set up so that we would be successful in what we did. And I just made a point of communicating much more with the teams that I managed, that I probably would have done. If we were all based in the office. We had virtual meetings every Monday, we had a virtual sort of glass of wine on a Friday, and we had lots of sort of one on ones and assisting each other working as a real team but virtually, it's gone really well and this is not unusual for me.

**Helga Svendsen 6:41**

You're an old hand at some of this stuff. I think

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 6:43**

It's great that people have seen us come together because people would always ask me how could you work virtually Don't you miss the the social aspect of the office. You just created different social experiences for yourself, you know, you make time during the day to go to the gym or do other things that, you know, put you in touch with people, because you're on the road anyway, meeting customers. So no, it was, it was fantastic.

**Helga Svendsen 7:10**

And that links to what we're talking about today, which is using technology to prepare new directors. I know that in your role as chair of Tim Boone District Health Service that you recently implemented an online induction program for new directors, so all the new appointees and our assist and

supported individually online. So tell us a bit about that. How did it come about and how does it work?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 7:38**

So induction is really important for me anyway, and I think it should be for all boards. When someone is appointed to a board, and I share this as personal experience. What happened to me was, you know, I got invited to the first meeting. It was great. I met the CEO, I got a tour of the hospital. I got given This really hefty big folder. And I joined the meeting. And I must tell you that it was quite a nerve wracking experience not having come from a clinical background, also first time board. And it was just very, very difficult to to provide any input for the first few meetings, just out of nervousness, I wasn't sure what I can contribute to the conversation, even though I had done all the governance, training, etc. So when I became chair, which was only seven months later, I reviewed the whole thing and I thought there must be a better way of doing this. Timboon had no formal induction program. There was no way of evaluating what skills were coming on to the board. There was no way of evaluating how they were progressing. There was no way of evaluating, you know, how we could support them. And this, you know, just one on one questions or what have you. We were currently using some software from governance evaluator provided us with input individually from the current board members. And in talking to them, there was a software package, which addressed the skills of each individual and identifying the gaps that these individuals have. Now, the beauty of that was, I was thinking that if we could actually assess the inductees as soon as the department let us know who they were, give them a structured plan online, which included the interviews, etc, the access to the departmental toolkit that gave them timeframes and gave them a mentor and also gave them the opportunity to hit the ground running by doing the assessment up front, which would identify if someone had no clinical skills, when you immediately that we could provide resources online for them to start ponying up their skills in clinical governance, for example, or if they were very weak on stakeholder engagement, we'd be able to tap into great resources and podcasts for them that they could undertake. so that by the time they reach the first board meeting on the third Monday of the month, they'd already tapped into a whole heap of resources before they've met the executives, we've provided a level of confidence to them in terms of we're going to take care of you in terms of your development. And also the main thing was contribution that by the time they made that first board meeting, they're able to feel confident that they were coming in with this skill set is so for example, if they came in political, it's okay to speak up at the meeting because that's what we're relying on you for, and you'll develop the rest. And it's worked very, very well. We did it last year and I'm in the process of doing it again this year. Is are waiting to be told, you know, He's kind of bored this year. But I'm ready to go ready to tap the buttons and send off an email to them. And they'll be ready to go next week. If we get told by Friday on Monday, they'll receive a letter from me, they'll have access to a zoom meeting with the customer care person, they'll be introduced to their mentor, and they'll be able to start training on Tuesday, they'll have a full week leading at least before you know, July meeting.

**Helga Svendsen 11:29**

You know, you told your story about your first board meeting and you know the induction five seconds before you walk in the room and not feeling like you're able to contribute versus this process, which is really from the first moment and allowing people to really not allowing encouraging and giving people the tools to participate from the get go.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 11:49**

I've extended that out to the rest of the board to Helga. So we've got the induction program with their induction plan which goes for six months, but the rest of us tap into in October, and we go through the skills matrix. And then we sit down with our convener, and we develop a personal training plan that we then work through the output of that's great for a board chair because I get a heat map of where our school cities so I can see immediately whether we've got a huge gap in one particular area. So if I'm trying to organize a group training session for a sole are focusing on that area, I'll discuss it with the board and then focusing on that area and bringing a specialist in that area. But what it has given me too, is a tool that helps identify the skills we need for the next round of board members. It helps provide me with a tool that is feedback back to the department in terms of you know, what are we doing for training and development, which is something now that they have an expectation that all boards have a development plan. It gives us the opportunity to support Individuals that then move on to other boards, because we could pull data out now, which demonstrates exactly what they have in terms of skill sets and the training and the resources they've undertaken. It's all recorded. So from their point of view, it's worked very well.

**Helga Svendsen 13:15**

You've been Chair of the Board for two and a half, three years. What have you noticed around the participation at the board table? Since this new induction program? What's been your observations as the chair?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 13:27**

Well, definitely last year, when we trialed it, to see if this would work. Three new board members participated almost immediately with different skills. So we had a clinical. We had somebody who was in the department originally by back and somebody who was the CFO, those three people, when I went back and asked for feedback said it was really structured. They loved that it sort of demonstrated the culture of our board, that you know, we were inclusive from the start, that we were very supportive and we cared about them, you know, the mentoring worked really well, because they knew that they had somebody apart from the chair to talk to, and to ask questions, and I try to map them into, so that, you know, they had different skills to them. What I've noticed is a much more inclusive culture, and much more openness. They all contributed from the get go. I had one person who was part of that trial last year, who came on board the previous year, who got given

the book. So I asked her to be part of that test group. Her feedback was amazing. She basically I think I wrote this down, she said, I can see since during the development and skills matrix prior to my induction development plan and seeing my strengths and gaps. I can see where my strengths are, and I can feel more confident now to contribute at the board meeting, using my clinical governance skills. For the areas I don't have skills. I now have a mentor and a clear set of tasks with link to resources such as YouTube webinars to work towards. It's very self satisfying. And I feel like I can meet the governance objectives I've set out to do. And she was a new starter. She'd never been on the board before. And it was really, really fantastic to get that feedback from her. Oh, absolutely

**Helga Svendsen 15:22**

Great for the individuals and also great for the board as a whole to really have you all operating at that level. How fantastic.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 15:30**

I've been really inspired by everybody because at the end of the day, everybody brings something and we need the diversity around that conversation that we have around the board table and it's okay you're not an expert in everything. But you bring something to the boardroom table and I want everybody to contribute to every discussion that we have whether we do it virtually do it face to face.

Helga Svendsen 15:54

Can I just take one thing in there you'd said that they get a mentor is that a mentor from the board.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 16:00**

Yes, the way I've done it is have appointed a mentor to them from the board. If we've got somebody based in Melbourne, then ideally, I'd have somebody from Melbourne. So that can meet regularly. And if it's somebody from the country in our region, and it's somebody from there with the right skill set, but yes, it's somebody to be an additional support to them outside of me as the chair, somebody that can talk to and get, you know, up and running quite quickly. They've got questions that they don't feel comfortable asking me they've got somebody that they can ask.

**Helga Svendsen 16:30**

Our board does similar, in fact, way for new board members get a board body and also an executive buddy, somebody from the executive as well to work with. So it's a great thing. I think it's great both for the new person on the board, but also for the person who's been on the board for a while I think

both learn from the experience. So I just want to swing back to one of the other things you'd said. I think if I heard rightly, this is your first board. And I think if I heard rightly, you're on the board for seven months before you became the chair of board. If you became the chair pretty early on in your board role, talk me through that

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 17:06**

In the country boards and on our country board, and the other thing Helga, I was new to the area. So I was recently finished my work and decided that I wanted to do something and contribute and give back. And being on that particular board seemed to make sense that I was joining a board at the time when there was a lot of turnover. There was the nine year rule that came in. And most of our board had actually been part of that. So when I came on board, there were five new board members. There were two that were allowed to stay on because of you know, the sort of corporate intelligence and the history but we're told that they would be leaving the board and the following year, one of them was the chair and it was a couple of others that have been on for a couple of years who also didn't have the history and the was a lot happening. So the current chair at the time, who was fantastic asked me if I'd be interested in sharing with his support. So he would shadow me, and he would support me and would step in with me. So I had a lot of meetings with him, rather than taking on the job in the following July. And that made a lot of sense to me, because that gave me a lead up period where I could work with him and learn from him. And also feel that I had somebody there that I could fall back on, if I had any questions. So he became my mentor, the go to person. So that's how that all happened.

**Helga Svendsen 18:37**

What a great way of doing succession planning in a probably slightly quicker time than you'd initially expected, but it sounds like you went right. Okay, how we are going to make the best of this situation and put in place some things to really support you in taking on that role.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 18:53**

Yes. And I suppose nobody was really keen to do it at the time and I was happy to put my hand up. So it's been In a wonderful experience, and we have got such a brilliant board timbering, you know, they are so open, and we've got a diversity in terms of gender in terms of age groups in terms of, you know, skill sets, in terms of, you know, half of our board comes from Melbourne, the other half, you know, based around the region, it's been great, because everybody comes in with a perspective, everybody asks a question a different way. It's non threatening. So if people don't agree with you, you don't feel as if you're a failure or, you know, and that's what we want. We want people to ask those difficult questions, questions that don't make sense to them so that everybody has the opportunity to explain, then we come to the conclusion together. So far, it's working well.

**Helga Svendsen 19:48**

And it sounds like I think I heard you say also that you were new to the area. So I'm guessing that helped you to to really meet some people in the area and to really get into the local community as well.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 20:00**

I look, it's been amazing. Because we are a multipurpose service. You know, we're very much driven by community needs. We went out and surveyed our community. We surveyed them by doing it different ways. Some of it was surveying online. But we also had a community caravan that we parked around the various areas and asked people to come to us and we asked him lots of questions. We interviewed the school we interviewed the footy club, you know, so it was great, but one of the pieces of feedback we received was that we were a great hidden secret. The only way you got to know us is if you got sick and had to go there, but nobody really went there for anything else. So the marketing side of that had to be improved. And we have got a great website. Now we've got a great Facebook page. We have been very creative. And as the executives there we've got a community engagement that focuses on it's Men's Health week this week. Great story from one of the community members about their journey of prostate cancer. So we're really involving the community in everything that we do. And that's been amazing. It's been wonderful.

**Helga Svendsen 21:17**

Oh, Maryanne, we have covered so much in this conversation that I think will be valuable for people to think about in terms of their own boards and induction and around working virtually. What are the main points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 21:32**

Well, I think the main thing for me is leverage technology. I've worked with technology for the last I'd say 30 years easily. And I'm not a technical person. I simply use technology to make my life easier, and as soon as someone says, provide a report on this, or can you prove this? I'd like to sort of tap a button and get a report out and demonstrate that we're on top of this. And I know more and more things are being delivered that way. And even the integrity framework that Jo-anne Moorfoot talked about recently, you know, it's an online assessment tool. For me, as soon as someone has an induction plan online, they fill out the skills matrix, I know where my conversation with that individual is going to go. And I know how I'm going to support them. So don't be afraid of the technology in times like this, where we've got the opportunity to get online using, you know, WebEx or zoom or whatever, you know, the board meetings don't have to change, they just need to be laid out differently with the technology. And we're using there quite a bit. So don't be afraid of that. And also, induction is key, I think, you know, when someone makes a commitment to join a board, and when you take them on, you want them to contribute, and you want them to have a voice. Even if

the voice isn't the same as your voice. That's good. That's actually what you do need, you want a different perspective. So focus on induction, don't make it difficult, I'm happy to share what we've done. I'm happy to point you into the direction of governance evaluator if you haven't got anything already, that sort of thing. And, you know, we don't have to reinvent the wheel, we can all share from our experiences.

**Helga Svendsen 23:16**

Yeah. Which is exactly why I have these conversations here. I'll make sure we put a link to governance evaluator in the show notes, so people can get hold of that as well. Which, in fact, probably answers my next question, but I'll ask it anyway, is there a resource you would like to share with the take on board community?

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 23:32**

If you want to have a look at the governance evaluator, I'd highly recommended because I came onto the board didn't know what it was. And so with governance evaluator, whatever you put in is what you'll get out. And I'd highly recommend a conversation with them. I'm happy to talk to anybody about it, and have the conversation and make your life easier. It's there. I've got templates I've created for our service, you can have them all. You don't have to start from Nothing. So I'd say that's the best resource at the moment that I can think of.

**Helga Svendsen 24:05**

Absolutely. I think that's incredibly valuable. Fabulous. Well, we'll we'll put a link to governance evaluator. And we'll also put a link to your maybe your LinkedIn in the show notes. So if people want to get in touch with you don't know how to do that.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 24:19**

Fantastic. Thank you.

**Helga Svendsen 24:20**

Oh, thank you so much for being on the podcast with us today and take on board. I think there will be some amazing things in there for people in thinking about their inductions, both about thinking about inductions and working virtually some beautiful pearls of wisdom. So thank you for sharing with us here today.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 24:39**

Look, thank you for the opportunity Helga. And I hope that it's of some use to someone out there.

**Helga Svendsen 24:44**

I have no doubt that it will be fabulous. Thanks, Maryanne.

**Maryanne Puli Vogels 24:47**

That's alright, bye