



Transcript – Anneli Blundell

Helga Svendsen

Today on the Take on Board Podcast. I'm speaking to Anneli Blundell, about how to influence with impact. First, let me tell you about Anneli. Voted as one of YMag's top 10 women to watch in 2019 Anneli's passion for decoding people and performance dynamics make her a sought after speaker, mentor and leadership expert. She makes the complex job of understanding why people do what they do, and how to get the best out of them both accessible and entertaining. Anneli works with leaders to increase their influence engagement and interpersonal impact for better business results. Welcome to the Take on Board Podcast, Anneli.

Anneli Blundell

Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Helga Svendsen

Yay. Well, we are very excited to have you here. We listen to me the Royal We. I'm very excited to have you here. Before we really explore influence, and why that should be important in the boardroom. Let's, as always dig a little bit deeper about you. Tell me, how did you get into coaching? Because you started out your life at ANZ bank, didn't you? So there seems to have been a few twists and turns in there?

Anneli Blundell

Oh, yes, yes, indeed, I did start out at the bank. Don't hold that against me, I did start out at the bank. I had a wonderful career at the bank. But you do get to a point or I certainly got to a point where I thought you still have to pay me to come to work, you know, I'm not doing this out of the goodness of my heart as much as I enjoyed my job and the people around me. And I really just wanted to find that work or vocation that felt like a passion and that you really didn't have to pay me although I do accept payment, just FYI. Kind of like, you know, like an artist or a dancer or something like that. So I stumbled across coaching, one thing led to another and here I am 15 years later, you know, having done all manner of iterations from coaching one on one, coaching teams in groups, and then it leads to leadership development across the organisation. Next thing you know, you're on stages, and you're writing books and you think, hang on, I just signed up for a coaching course, what happened?

Helga Svendsen

Oh, it's so wonderful to hear about people's backgrounds and where they came from. And I know I can't quite remember when I met you. I think it was probably six years or so through the equally fabulous Corrinne Armour and you know, another person who totally loves what she does, and you can just tell when people are energized and passionate about what they do when you are clearly one of those people. You mentioned in there, in terms of people who love what they do much like being a dancer. Now, can I just dig a wee bit here? Because I understand that you might be a salsa dancing addict. Tell me more.

Anneli Blundell

Yes, you may be absolutely correct. I confess I am a salsa dancing addict. I do have a penchant for the old dancing. I did grow up doing lots of dancing when I was young. Dance classes, ballet, jazz, modern funk, all that sort of stuff. And as I got older, I never did tap. I never did tap dance. No, that was not on my radar. But as I got older and much less flexible I sort of gravitated to salsa dancing. Because I don't know if anyone out there realizes but it is the most brilliant way to keep fit without even noticing.

Helga Svendsen

Yes could not agree more as a some who listen to this podcast might already know I used to dance and teach modern jive. And the catchphrase for La Bop dancing, which is who I was dancing with was, get fit by accident. It's so much fun, you just have fun, but it's it's quite energetic and quite strength building as well. And well, you know, at the competitions, there might be a little bit of glitter going around as well which is never a bad thing either.

Anneli Blundell

It is absolutely mandatory in my book, I have to say there must be glitter or it is not real.

Helga Svendsen

I wonder how I can work it so that we can get more glitter in the boardroom? That might take me a little bit of work. So then thinking about the not very glittery, but equally important boardroom, you know a lot about influence with impact. And I know from my discussions with people in the boardroom, it is one of the common themes about influence. Influencing your co directors, influencing management, influencing the chair, influencing key stakeholders, it is everywhere, this concept of influence. What are the keys to influence?

Anneli Blundell

Well, key to influence is really understanding who your audience is. You know, I mean, influence is just good communication on steroids, really. So it's the basic principles of good communication. And rule number one, always, always, always is to know your audience. Who is in the room? Who are they in relation to you? Who do they care about? What do they care about? Why is this topic important to them? If you don't know why it's important to them, chances are, it may not be important to them. And then no matter you know, how compelling you are, or what evidence you have, or your business cases, if you don't know why it's important to them, then you don't give them a frame for listening. So rule number one is know your audience that really that has to be it.

Helga Svendsen

Hmm. So for people who are, let's say, trying to influence their colleagues in the boardroom, in fact, it doesn't even need to be their colleagues. It could be the chair, it could be other stakeholders. How do people find that out? Without saying to that group or that person, I need to know more about you so I can influence you? How do people find that out?

Anneli Blundell

Well, one of the cool things about the topic we're talking about now is that we're dealing with a group of people who have to cultivate informal influence, because they don't have positional power. You know, you and I, colleagues, were peers on this board, you're not my boss. Sure, there's a chair and all that sort of stuff. And there are sort of some boundaries around that. But for the most part, it's informal influence is what we're dealing with. So we joke and say, without being able to say what's important to you, how do I influence you, you can actually say that, so there's a number of ways we can do it. So we can kind of surmise what might be important to them, what kind of person they are, how they like to be communicated with. Or we can just ask them, let's go with, you know, a couple of scenarios. So you might set an intention to create some opportunities for discussion that are relationship building. So whenever I'm working with people at an informal level, so it's its peers, we're on a working committee, whatever the case is, I know that I'm going to need buy in from them at some point. I want to know as much as I can about them, I want to know who they are, I want to know what they value, what their challenges are, what their pain points are, what their goals are. And that can just come out of general conversation. So you know, why did you join this board? What's important to you about governance, you know, what are your thoughts around this industry? What experience have you had blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, just general get to know you questions, the more they talk about repeatedly about certain things or topics, if they use the same word again, and again, it's a good indicator, that's a value for them. Right? So if they say, something like, you know, it's all around making a difference, you know, I joined this board, because I really want to make a difference. And you know, I love the industry we are in, because I see that the organization is really making a difference. When I hear that a couple of times, I put it in my pocket. And I say right, making a difference is a big value for this person, service, contribution. So if I'm there trying to influence them, I might not go with something like oh, we'll just we'll make more money. Because they haven't

mentioned it, it's not on their radar for them. It's about contribution. It's about giving back. It's about service, they are the words that I will use.

Helga Svendsen

Know your audience, listen out for those things, put them in your pocket. What else is important for people when you're thinking about influence?

Anneli Blundell

Or one of the things that we don't spend enough time thinking about is how people like to become convinced. And this is a huge thing that runs at a below conscious level, but is really instrumental in getting buy in. So if you're on a board, one of the first things you really want to be able to understand and FYI, I just want to, you know, just position this, that this is really advanced stuff. If you've been to, you know, influence trainings or anything like that in the past, it's likely that we may not have come across these ideas. So this comes from the body of knowledge that helps us understand how people are likely to behave and communicate based on their below conscious drivers. So, what do they, what are they unconsciously paying attention to? Or driven by, motivated by? And how does that then find its way to their behavior and their communication? So I want to talk about one thing as an example. So one of the things you want to look out for is how do people get convinced about an idea, about a project, about a person, about an idea? So there's a couple of things you can look at so, we either like to hear about it, we want to chat about it, we want to read about it, maybe we want some information or some reports, maybe we want to have a go at it. So we want to do the thing or use the product or whatever it is. Or maybe we want to see it in action or observe something. So that's an example of four input channels, right? How do we get convinced? The next thing we want to ask is, how many times do they need that information presented in order to become really convinced? Now some people are what we call automatic convinces they just hear a snippet of information go, yes, that's it. I want that fridge, you know, five star rating, you had me a five star rating, I'm in. We've got people who are convinced by a number of examples. So which fridge? Fridge one, maybe fridge two, maybe fridge three, or it's definitely fridge one, I've had enough to make a comparison to make a decision. Some people are convinced over a period of time. Now, this might be overnight, you know, you hear some people say, just let me sleep on it. Or can I come back next week, you know, I just kind of need to sit with the information for a little bit. And that period of time is gonna be different for different people. And the final one there is being convinced by consistency. And this one's really tricky, because it suggests that people are never quite convinced. And you would know this. So you know, you have a conversation with someone you think they're on board, and they say, yes, let's go ahead with that. You come back next week, and they say so, about that initiative. Tell me again, why are we doing it? Just tell me again, and you go through all the information and all the examples, and they go oh, yeah, okay. Okay. Yeah. Okay, let's go ahead. And the same conversation happens next week. And you think, how will we had this conversation over? Like, last week, what's happening? Now, if you take all those variances of how people become convinced, you can see the opportunity to get it really wrong? If I'm an automatic conveyancer who likes to talk about things, that's how I become convinced. So show me the fridge, I just need to see a

five star energy rating. Tell me a little bit about it. Boom. I'll buy that fridge. And I tried to influence you. And you need to sit on things for a couple of days. And you Yeah, who? Yeah, and you need to see it in action. I'm there going. But it's a five star energy rating, what, what else do you need? Like we're done, we are we done?

Helga Svendsen

Every board I'm on or been on, you've got the person who needs to read things and is automatically convinced. And then you've got the people who needs to see things, but they want, you know, time and all of that stuff. You've got them all in the room together. How do you navigate that?

Anneli Blundell

Well, if you have the opportunity to put this conversation on the table as an explicit intervention to help the decision making of the board, that's the ultimate because you can then I mean, this is the work I do, right. So part of the stuff I do is around individual profiling and team profiling. So trying to work out what those below conscious drivers are, so that we can go on the table and say, look, we're all convinced by different channels. And we're all convinced in different ways. How do we want to structure our information gathering and sharing so that when we're asked to make a decision in a meeting, everyone has everything they need, in the timeframe they need, in the way they need, so that they can come to that meeting ready to make a decision?

Helga Svendsen

What are the profiling tools you use for that sort of conversation or for that sort of assessment of say, a board?

Anneli Blundell

So I use a particular tool called the iWAM which stands for the inventory of work attitudes and motivations. So it looks at 48 individual below conscious cognitive filters, basically, like what are the lenses that we see our world through? And it's a brilliant tool, because it's a context based tool, you know, it's not who you are forever, you're always like this, it's in the context of this work at this point in time, here's what you're paying attention to. And here's what's driving your behavior at an unconscious level, which creates the behaviors you're exhibiting and the way you're likely to communicate. So for example, if, if we don't have the opportunity to do that wonderful intervention, but you now know this stuff. So you might ask each individual person so, how do you know when to buy the right fridge? I don't know, how did you buy your last car? Or, you know, how do you make a decision about what initiative we should go with? How many times do you like that information presented? Well, I'd like to see at least three proposals that gives me a good suite of things to consider. Or some people say, I just need to read the headline, and a couple of bits of information

and I just make a pretty quick decision and you think to automatic convincer. You can just ask them, would you like to think about it overnight? Or about a week? Does that help you make a decision? Or is it pretty quick for you? Ask questions straight out and you think, get them to reflect on the past decisions they've made. That is similar to the ones that you make in that board and in that group, and then you can just look back and say, you know, what, Harry, oh, Harry, every time this conversation, every time we're looking for a decision, Harry says, or have we checked? And do we have enough examples? And you know, we're only so one proposal, and I wish, all we've only got, you know, seven candidates enough to really make a good decision. You know, and I didn't get time to think about it. Can I come back to you after I've had time to think about it? And you think to yourself, Harry, he's a seven time convincer or he wants to think about it for a week, and you build that into the process, do the work for them, so they don't have to do the work that they're not even aware needs to be done? Yes.

Helga Svendsen

Yeah. Right. So yeah, it's part of that really understanding yourself and everybody else as well around you. Because my guess is that often people use the convincer method that suits them on everybody else.

Anneli Blundell

Oh, yes, you've got it in one. So you know, this is where is it the golden rule that says, treat everyone the way you wish to be treated? You know, you've heard that saying, yes, yeah. And I say yes, except in the context of communication and influence. And in this case, you treat people the way they want to be treated, so you communicate with people the way they want to be communicated to, because that is most influential, unless it's about values, ie, treat people with dignity, treat people with respect the way you want to be treated. Yeah, at a values level. If we're talking about communication, style and influence, it's the exact opposite, treat them as they want to be treated.

Helga Svendsen

Yeah, nice. Okay. So keys to influence is that knowing your audience, knowing how they are convinced, knowing that how they want the information, how often they want it, all of those sorts of things? What are some of the things that get in the way?

Anneli Blundell

Particularly around boards, one of the things I find really fascinating when it comes to barriers, in terms of being influential, being compelling and really having the level of impact that you could have. Imposter syndrome comes up. That old chestnut. And I say that because typically what happens is as people rise through the ranks of an organization and become more and more senior, they grapple

more and more with imposter syndrome. Yeah. And you would know being on a board is kind of the top of the tree, you know. And so this is where imposter syndrome can really get out of control. If you are second guessing your value, then you are unconsciously inviting other people to second guess your value. Second guessing. So for me, imposter syndrome is something that we need to really acknowledge, embrace and do the work on so that we have backed ourselves, we've given ourselves permission to be in that room to be in that role. I mean, in sales, there's a saying the first sale is always to yourself, right? So yeah,

Helga Svendsen

Yeah.

Anneli Blundell

Imposter syndrome is certainly one of those things and the mechanics of imposter syndrome, from what I see with all my clients. And, you know, I coach people around boards, I coach CEOs, I coach people that imposter syndrome is rife. For men and for women, it's both genders, women tend to talk about it more, they acknowledge it more often, men outwardly less so but in the privacy of a coaching conversation, just as much as women. That's good to know. And so when it comes to imposter syndrome, what I noticed happening is, it all comes down to your focus. See, what happens is we assume or we start thinking about the fact that we're in this room, we're in this group of highly accomplished individuals who are very good at what they do. And it starts us thinking about comparisons of ourselves against them. Oh, am I as good as them? Am I as experienced or as accomplished as them? Do I know as much as they do, we have to really think about the danger of that focus. When your focus is on the comparison or the gap between the two of you. You're always going to be less than someone. Yeah, I mean, it's everyone is better than you at something, and you are better at some things than lots of people. So your area of focus is what's getting you into trouble and really flaming imposter syndrome. So I try and help people shift that focus to remembering why they're on that board. So for example, even if you're new to the industry, even if you're new to that board, as you know, first time board member doesn't make you any less valuable. You've got beginner's mindset, you've got the power of those naive questions, as long as you have the ability to think and challenge, it can be less about what you know, and more about how you think that can be the value.

Helga Svendsen

Yes, we're having this exact conversation in one of the groups the other day about being new board members. And that when you're new to a group doesn't have to be a board, it can be any group, when you're new, you see things that others don't see. And that's actually the value that you bring, that you are seeing things that when people have been around for a few years, they can't see that.

Anneli Blundell

That's right. Because when we've been in the water for so long, we've forgotten the temperature, we don't we know we're not knowing what's going on. And also, there's a sense that, you know, you're on that board for a reason, it's really important that we remember, we have been chosen for a reason. So someone has seen something in you that you may have believed was there, because that's why maybe you put yourself forward for this, but you've forgotten. So you're on there because of your unique skills, perspectives, experience, background, whatever it is, it doesn't matter how it compares, in fact, I would suggest that if it doesn't compare equally, then you're on the right board. Because we want people with diverse backgrounds. I don't want to be as good a lawyer as Fred or Nancy, because they've already got a good lawyer in Fred or Nancy, you know?

Helga Svendsen

Yeah, yep. Exactly. Bringing that difference is exactly the contribution you make. So you'd said earlier about which was interesting about acknowledging imposter syndrome, which is part of I think, what you're talking about he embracing it, is that what you mean, by coming up that area of focus is that what you mean? Because, you know, people often try and avoid imposter syndrome rather than embrace it.

Anneli Blundell

Yes, they do. And just like any negative emotion, for example, if you're learning meditation, they will tell you don't try and get rid of your thoughts. You think you're human, you're not gonna get rid of your thoughts. You let them float by, you know, you watch them as they go. So when you're learning meditation, you don't stop your thinking, you allow your thinking to change, you change the quality of your thinking, with imposter syndrome, we don't need to get rid of it, we can use it as an indicator that we have forgotten our own value. And to come back to the reasons why we were invited, or why we put our hand forward in the first place to join that board. Because chances are, if you're having a flare up of imposter syndrome, your focus is on the value of others. Yep, they are so good at that, they are wonderful, look at their experience. So as soon as you flip it back and go, well hang on, what am I bringing? What's my experience? What's my value? What's my perception, that's all value here. And how is that unique? Because it needs to be unique, otherwise, you'll be the same as everyone else on the board. And that's not a good board. Imposter syndrome is an indicator that you're probably on a good board for you. You're different from others, you've got a different experience and backgrounds. So it's an excellent indicator, you're in the right place.

Helga Svendsen

That is such a lovely way of thinking about it that it's a good reminder for us that we're in the right place. It's often how I think about anyway, diversity in some ways is that if you come out of a boardroom, and everybody's thinking fantastic, we've all definitely made the right decision that

could in fact, be a red flag around groupthink. Whereas if you come out thinking, Oh, we were really tested in that conversation, and I'm not entirely convinced, well, possibly, I'm someone that therefore needs to consistency. Or it might just be that there is a really diverse group that is making that decision, and therefore is testing everybody out, which makes us a bit less confident in the decision, even though it's a better decision.

Anneli Blundell

Yes. And in fact, this is, you know, I do a lot in the space of diversity and gender and stuff like that. And, you know, this is great push for diversity on boards as well. And we don't realize that diversity without understanding is just difference. So if we're just putting lots of different people on the board and not building in our understanding of how to work with that difference, how to appreciate and incorporate the difference, then we're not truly getting the value. So what happens is you may be uncomfortable in the discussions, you may be pushed and challenged and it might feel not complete, it might feel a bit, you know, I don't know, just not as good as it could be when everyone agrees. And so you want to be embracing a sense of discomfort or feeling challenged, or maybe feeling like you're not quite sure about this in terms of, you know, everyone being on the same page, because as you say, it's likely to indicate that you've taken on board, you know, robust thinking, yeah, which will actually give you the better outcome.

Helga Svendsen

Yes. Oh, my goodness, that is a whole other wonderful rabbit hole that we could go down, that we don't have time for today. Such a fabulous conversation today. So what are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Anneli Blundell

When it comes to your role on the board and your ability to influence with impact, the first thing I want people to understand is that if you feel like you're not up to the task, it's an indicator that you're very much up to the task, you just need to refocus your thinking, to remind yourself of the unique value and perspective that you have. So the first tip is to own your value. Remember, the first sale is always to yourself, you can't expect people to buy you and buy your ideas, if you're not even, you know, lining up to pay your money for yourself. And the second thing I'd say is cultivate curiosity. So you know the rules of influences around understanding your audience and asking questions and paying attention to language and key words. So once you cultivate that sense of curiosity, you open your mind to start hearing people at different levels, you'll start noticing things like, Oh, I just need to sit on that for a little bit. You know, I was, I was reflecting last week on... After a period of time, there's been many mentions of reflection and thinking and overtime, and oh, I'll put that in my pocket. So cultivating curiosity.

Helga Svendsen

Is there a resource you would like to share with the take on board community?

Anneli Blundell

Absolutely. So myself, along with two brilliant co authors, Corrinne Armour, and Belinda Cohen, we wrote a book called "*Developing Direct Reports: taking the guesswork out of leading leaders.*" And this is a book that looks at the 12 globally recognized leadership derailers. And it's a really useful book for leaders who are leading leaders, you know, so how is the leader managing or developing their team? Are they a micromanager? Are they a bull at a gate? You know, are they not delegating? Are they a guardian and won't innovate. So, you know, we took some of these key derailers and put them in this book and created a chapter per derailers that talks about, these are the outside behaviors that you're likely to see. And this is the infighting tension that's going on. You know, when you're a micromanager, your intention is to protect quality, to do a great job. And yet in the process, you snuff the life out of somebody. And from a board perspective, you are always dealing with the leadership team. So having a resource like this, and you can use this stuff for helping you understand the people around you in that room, you know, you're seeing, what's the intention behind that. Remember, this is about cultivating that curiosity. So there's a manual for it.

Helga Svendsen

I'm pretty sure I've got a few spare copies of your book around. And I reckon what we do is, folks, if you're listening to this, get in touch with me, all my details are in the show notes and tell me maybe how you have owned your own value or recognized your value or how you have cultivated curiosity. And let's give a couple of them away to people who want to, you know, explore more about influence and impact. What do you reckon?

Anneli Blundell

Boom, sold, to the highest bidder? Yes, I think that's a brilliant idea.

Helga Svendsen

Excellent. So get in touch folks. I'll put a post over in the Facebook group as well. And people can respond to their or email or whatever, you know, organically, we'll make that work somehow. Oh, fantastic. Thank you so much. It's been magnificent to have you here today. And to have this conversation, I knew you would have a wealth of tips and tricks for people around influence and around impostor syndrome, which is such a common conversation for people. So thank you for sharing your wisdom with the take onboard community today.

Anneli Blundell

You're so welcome. It was my absolute pleasure.