

Take on Board Podcast – Episode 218

# Transcript – Caroline Pilot and her Take on Board KickStarter experience



Helga Svendsen 0:00

Hi, folks, in the episode you will be hearing today it's me in conversation with Carolyn Pilot, who is an alumnus of the Take on Board KickStarter program, I wanted to have a conversation with her about her journey to the boardroom, and how KickStarter may have helped get her there.

So to give you some context about that, before we go into the conversation, I thought it might be useful just to outline that sessions that we do as part of Take on Board KickStarter. And I will also make sure there is a link in the show notes to this overview on the website.

So there's 10 sessions. Sometimes we do that over three days face to face here in downtown Melbourne. Sometimes we do them virtually so people can participate from wherever they are in the world. Either way we do it, there's always these 10 sessions.

The first four sessions are kind of some of the nuts and bolts of being on a board. Often people asked me about the difference between the company directors course run through the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Kickstarter. And the company directors course is really a deep dive into governance. Whereas Take on Board, KickStarter is more about the practical tips and tricks to get into the boardroom. The first four sessions, however, give you a taste of some of those things.

So **Session One** is about skills, what are the skills that you have? What are the skills that you need? And what are the skills that you should showcase for the boardroom. So we talk about governance, which is boardroom skills, versus operational, which are more management skills. We talk about the different stages of development of an organisation from that startup mode, through growth, through maturity, sometimes to wind up, and what some of the different skills might be needed in the boardroom for each stage of development of an organisation. And we talk about hard skills, you know, those technical skills, or the more soft skills. I don't like that terminology about hard and soft

skills. But I haven't come up with something better if you know something, let me know. So that's what we cover off on in skills.

**Session two** is about alignment. And this is really about what sort of organisation do you want to make a contribution to by joining their board. So we do a process called developing your personal purpose statement, where we look at some of our past achievements, we look at our core values, the contribution we want to make, and from that, develop our own personal purpose statement. And that gives us some guidance about what sort of board we'd like to join.

**Session Three** is called commitment. And really, it's about what are your duties and obligations as a board member. This is the sort of thing that the company directors course goes into in much more detail, or any of the other courses that are out there with the Institute of Community Directors or the Governance Institute. And we talk about directors responsibilities, and importantly questions you should ask an organisation as part of your own due diligence.

**Session Four** is about diversity, equity and inclusion in the boardroom. Because those of you that know me know that it's not possible for me to run a program without touching on it. So we talk about what is diversity, we talk about why diversity is important. And we talk about how to encourage diversity and inclusion in the boardroom.

**Session Five** in the program is one of my absolute favorites, is about your pitch. So when you're in a Board interview, or when you're at a networking event, and somebody says so Helga. Tell us a bit about yourself. And you'll look at them slightly burning in the headlights thinking, What do I say now, this is about developing your pitch. It's a framework for that. And by the end of this session, everybody has a snappy statement that they can say, and they sound awesome.

**Session Six** is building on your pitch and developing your board resume. Yes, your board resume is different to your management resume, or your operational resume or your day to day professional resume. It is different and you want it to focus on governance. So in this session, we go through all of the elements of a board resume and start to build yours.

**Session seven**, where to find board roles. We talk about some of the places they are advertised. And of course, we talk about networking, and how you can build your network to find some of those board roles as well.

**Session eight** is interview skills. So we practice board interviews, where you are interviewed for a role, where you interview somebody else for a role, and where there is an observer and you get to play all of those different roles in the groups that we set up.

**Session nine** is really the bring it all together. Let's review what we've done. Let's come up with any questions. So that's the Board KickStarter program where we cover off on all of those key nuts and bolts.

Firstly, what are the skills you need for the boardroom? Secondly, what alignment is there? What sort of board should you be looking for? Thirdly, commitment. What are the duties and obligations of a board director? Fourthly, diversity, equity and inclusion in the boardroom. Fifth, your pitch to get into the boardroom? Six, your board resume. Seventh, where to find board roles, eight, practicing interviews, and ninth, bring it all together and Q&A. There's the program. Okay. With that in mind, let's hear from Caroline about her journey to the boardroom, and what she found most valuable out of the program.

Today on the Take on Board podcast, I'm speaking with Caroline pillow about her journey to the boardroom and her experience of the Take on Board Kickstarter program. Before we start that discussion, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we record today. For me, I record on the unseeded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elder's past and present, I acknowledge their continuing connection to land to waters and to culture. I support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and I encourage others in the Take on Board community to do the same. Now, let me introduce Caroline. Caroline joined, who first board Mambourin Enterprises in late 2022, having undertaken the Australian Institute of Company Directors course about six years ago, and then the Take on Board KickStarter program in mid 2022. Joining the board of Mambourin fulfilled her ambition to drive health outcomes in the not for profit arena. A commercially and politically astute healthcare leader and marketer, Caroline has over 20 years experience creating visions, developing an executing strategy and utilizing strong partnerships to drive business results and improved health. With a track record of leading industry change and transforming operating models. Her purpose is to drive a positive difference to health outcomes. Caroline, welcome to the Take on Board podcast.

Caroline Pilot 7:13

Thanks, Helga. And it's really great to talk to you today.

Helga Svendsen 7:16

It is awesome to have you partly because I know so much about you already, because you did the program.

Caroline Pilot 7:21

I did indeed.

Helga Svendsen 7:22

But before we dive into that, as always, I'd like to dig a little bit deeper about you. So tell me what was young Caroline like? And when did you get your first inkling that you might end up in the boardroom?

Caroline Pilot 7:34

Oh, very good question. The young Caroline. Well, I grew up in the country area with horses and nature, and was pretty sporty, and athletic, and always interested in health and biology. So interestingly, when I left school, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and ended up going nursing, which was wonderful. And I love nursing, but really didn't fulfill everything that I felt that I could do in terms of driving health outcomes. From there, the young Caroline, I guess, grew up and decided, how can I take this further? And that's when I ended up in the pharmaceutical industry. The interest in being on a board didn't happen until probably about 10-12 years ago, when I was ready for that next step of going, how else can I make a difference?

Helga Svendsen 8:29

I gotta say side note, I'm loving that there are more nurses ending up in the boardroom these days, such incredible skills, such incredible breadth of skills. I've had a number of conversations with nurses recently have ended up in the boardroom and I love it. So I'm reminded again, how good it is.

Caroline Pilot 8:46

There's there's the train for life. If you can deal with surgeons and red tapes within hospitals, you are trained for many a situation.

Helga Svendsen 8:54

Absolutely. And again, side note, on the side note, do you walk quickly, Caroline and I asked this because my mother is a former nurse. My mother is almost 90 years old. And when we go walking, she doesn't know how to walk slow. She's so used to rushing around. So is that you as well.

Caroline Pilot 9:12

I probably do everything fast. I do have to remind myself sometimes to slow down and smell the roses.

Helga Svendsen 9:23

Oh, all right. Well, let's turn then to your journey to the boardroom. And how that played out. When did your journey to the boardroom start talk us through the journey.

Caroline Pilot 9:36

The journey to the boardroom for me just started with a small thought probably about 10 years ago, where I was hearing about what people were doing and how they were impacting different elements of life. And you have a couple of friends that were on board so started getting inquisitive about what did that mean for them. And it was at that stage He started to do a little bit more research and came across the AICD course. And like everything, it takes you a little while to get your act together. So it was probably about six, seven years ago when I finally actually went on to the AICD course, and had a whole awakening of this world out there, and how vast governance was, and the true implications of it.

Helga Svendsen 10:26

What was your experience of the program?

Caroline Pilot 10:29

Oh, such a good question. It was way bigger than I ever expected, incredibly intense. The AICD course is really about being on a board. So you learn an awful lot about governance, and I was in a room with many lawyers, and many accountants, and little old me. And I have to say that through the majority of the course, I had to question Helga, whether I really belong there, he was this nurse who worked in pharmaceuticals and had some experience in the corporate world. I was sitting with all of these high-faluting supposed people compared to myself, and I really wasn't sure if I belonged, until the last day of the program, when it really clicked for me, because with governance and being

on boards, there's the one element that's all around compliance with the accountability, the monitoring, the financial accuracy of everything that they're doing, really around the risk. And then on the other side, you have performance, around strategy around policy about where you're going for sustainability and future ideas of the organisation that you're on. And it was an awakening moment where I went, wow. So we've probably got 80% of this room during this course with me, that are on the compliance side. And whilst I feel I don't belong, I actually probably belong here more than ever, because they need someone who's going to help that sustainability of the organisation. The course was fantastic. But when I left, probably the gap for me, was, well, what do I do now? I've got all this knowledge about being on the board. But how do I get on one?

Helga Svendsen 12:18

Nice segue for me. Thank you. So you know, you did it six or seven years ago, yet? You only have joined the board last year? Yes. Lots going on in that six or seven years?

Caroline Pilot 12:29

Well, a couple of things. Ah, I guess firstly, whilst the course prepares you for what to do when you're on the board, I still didn't have the skills to get on a board. And it, I guess, put a bit of a stop gap on that, that process of getting on a board. And then of course, life gets in the way, and a lot of things were going on. And it wasn't until a couple of years ago when as life evolves, then things come along like that you don't expect such as COVID, and disrupt and change your course of life, where I sat back and went, I need to work out what's really important to me again, and number one was my family. I was living in Sydney, they were in Melbourne. And secondly was around driving health outcomes that I was really passionate about. And I felt there was a gap in my work life, my career life where I could get back to doing what was really important for me. So I packed up sold my house, I left my job moved to Melbourne, and took some time to go well, okay, I want to get onto a board. What do I do now? And hence, the renewed vigor a couple of years ago, to get back on that process that I'd started six years previously.

Helga Svendsen 13:44

Music to my ears on surprisingly, because I do often. Sometimes people ask me, you know, what's the difference between the company directors course in your program, and I'm always there, chalk and cheese, they're not the same. One is, as you say, being in the boardroom, and one is about getting into the boardroom. And I spoke earlier in this podcast in the introduction about what the overview of the program is. So we cover off a lot in there. And some of it is about being in the boardroom, you know, we cover on day one, a bit of the mechanics of it, you know, what are the skills? What commitment is required? What are those duties and obligations? What sort of board do you want to join? What does diversity look like in the boardroom? And then we talk about doing your pitch for the board role, and where to look for board roles. And then of course, board resumes and board interviews. What part was most valuable for you?

Caroline Pilot 14:36

Okay, I had a couple of awakening moments in the course. And the amazing women that were in my program almost shook me and it was a wake up call for me. I actually kept apologising, Helga, for my background of being a nurse and I don't know if you remember that. So my years of nursing took me into the corporate world which has led me on an I was in Korea. And I felt like going into a board, I had to really focus on my corporate world and the experience, I'd gained the projects, I'd worked on the huge operational expenditures or targets that I'd worked around. And I was almost apologizing for my background. And it was these ladies that really went Carolyn, you're all about driving health outcomes. And it started with nursing and people and patients, and you need to own that. And it was a shake up. So that really helped shape my pitch of owning who I am and what I'm about and what I believe in, and what I bring to a board. So from a pitch perspective, and preparing myself for the interviews, I gained an awful lot from doing the Take on Board KickStarter program.

Helga Svendsen 15:51

Okay, so I haven't given you a heads up about this, but I'm going to put you on the spot. One of the things we do in the program is your your pitch. And it always starts with Caroline, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Caroline Pilot 16:03

Oh, Helga, you're taking me back to that pitch you. Let's see, let's see if I can remember some of it. So Helga, I'm all around business development and marketing. And I come from a nursing background. So I'm all about people, patients and health outcomes. And my strengths are around innovation, stakeholder engagement, and really driving health strategy. So as a consultant in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, my background is around driving change, pioneering flu vaccines in pharmacy, driving action on obesity, and unifying groups to come together to drive a unified voice. So with a background as a registered nurse and a marketer, my real passion is thriving health outcomes. And really looking forward to using these on the board. I'm on now as boards in the future.

Helga Svendsen 16:56

Oh, my God, nice work, look at you go. It is one of the things we really drill a little bit in the program, it's probably the only thing we really drill into over and over and getting people to introduce taking people through that framework of ima, whatever, you know, my strengths are in my current role. And some of my achievements include my background is that framework is the thing we go through over and over, I get people to introduce themselves multiple times. And then of course, we do practice interviews where the first question is always, as I just did, then, so Caroline, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Caroline Pilot 17:31

And I think Helga, what happens is we get so close with part of our lives and so intense on our own lives, that to step outside, and see what we're saying and hear it a completely different. And that's where the amazing women on the program with you really pull you up and go hang on a moment. You know, you miss this, or you told me at the morning tea, that you're really good at this, or you're this was important to you. And I'm not hearing that coming through. So the network in that room is formidable.

Helga Svendsen 18:05

So I'm glad that that's part of your experience, whether it's kind of in the more formal learning or over lunch, or over the walks you do together, or whatever it may be.

Caroline Pilot 18:14

And I have to say, however, that the connections have stayed on since I did that first KickStarter. And there's a couple of the ladies that I still catch up with today, once every couple of months. And we chat about where are we at? Where are you going? Let's go and have a glass of wine and have a chat about what's happening or Helga. Having illuminating dinner coming up. Are you coming along?

Helga Svendsen 18:37

One of the things we do in the program is interview practice, board. KickStarter is a practical program, you then very quickly after did a very practical application of some of those skills. Tell me about how that played out for you in that practical application?

Caroline Pilot 18:53

Oh, Helga, I was so fortunate. I had been in conversations with Mambourin the weeks going into the Take on Board program. What played out was my interview happened within two to three weeks post finishing the program. So boy did they give finally, applicants, the interview process, I went in so prepared, I had my story strong. I knew what was important that I could bring to the board. And really importantly, I had the right questions to ask them to make sure the board I was going on to was the right board for me. I wasn't afraid to ask if I could be an observer in a board meeting before I made the final decision. And so many tips and tricks that I've learned through the program that gave me confidence through that interview process in terms of asking the right questions.



Helga Svendsen 19:56

I'm interested in what other questions did you ask them and I love that you ask them to observe, I probably shared during the program that I certainly know of one client who observed a board meeting. And after observing a board meeting, she chose not to join that board. So it is an excellent thing to do to get an idea of the culture and how things work. What else did you ask them?

Caroline Pilot 20:17

I asked if I could have a meeting with the CEO, and have some time with the CEO, which was fantastic. I'd gone through some previous board meeting notes, which they allowed me to go through. So I could ask specific questions asked around this strategy moving forward, the gain an understanding that as a not for profit, that they were a business that were functioning in a way that was really ethical and, and compliant. Because we know it's a really difficult space, they wanted to make sure I've joining an organisation that had really strong standards, and that their purpose and their values were really aligned in my purpose and batteries. And through having meetings with the CEO, the chair, and the co chair, I felt really confident that the group that I was joining, were a really strong group and a real commitment to their purpose.

Helga Svendsen 21:12

It can be tricky sometimes. And I think what I'm hearing there is you interviewed them as much as they interviewed you possibly more. So possibly, you put them through the ropes even more than they put you through the ropes,

Caroline Pilot 21:23

Possibly, and the board meeting that I observed was actually quite a juicy one. But what was wonderful was I observed that whilst it was fairly juicy, and in depth board meeting that day, how the chair handled it, how the board members were really passionate, but also very respectful, and how they pulled it all back together to make sure that the outcomes were the best outcomes for the organisation and for them invisible living with disability.

Helga Svendsen 21:51

What should I have asked you about either your journey to the boardroom? Or about the role that the Take on Board KickStarter program played in that?

Caroline Pilot 21:59

Or how did I find you? Well, I was incredibly fortunate. So I went to an AICD networking function. And this is where I really advise people to always be open about what are you seeking? What are you looking for. And at the AICD networking event, it was one of these evenings where people are pitching to get people on the board, and you're almost pitching to get on a board. There was one organisation there. That was fascinating, but not really for me, it was Greenpeace, an incredible organisation, but not a board that I felt that I could contribute a lot to, as opposed to where I was quite clear that my value was in a health organisation or someone around health outcomes. However, I met an incredible lady named Hannah Browne, who's on a non executive director on Greenpeace, and we hit it off and decided we were going to go and have a coffee together, which ended up being a lunch and...

Helga Svendsen 23:02

Come on a coffee with Hannah. I reckon it was probably a glass of wine. Yeah, okay.

Caroline Pilot 23:06

It was, it was a glass of wine. And we just got on incredibly well. And when I shared with her that my goal was to get on a board and it was on a board around driving health outcomes. And how although I've done the AICD course, I really didn't feel I had the skill base to get on the board yet. You know, your CV, your resume is very different to your day job. The interview is very different to a job interview. So she mentioned this program that she had done called Take on Board Kickstarter, and recommended that I contact you, and lo behold, you are running a program that was sort of two weeks away and had one spot left. And I went that was mine. So I guess where I'm going with this is you really need to verbalize what you want to do to different people, people know people. And whilst Greenpeace wasn't the organisation for me, and it was an incredibly astute woman who was able to give me some advice on where to go when she knew what I was after. So don't be afraid to talk about what you're trying to do, where you want to go and the skills that you have to bring to it because you never know where it's going to hear.

Helga Svendsen 24:19

Such good advice. Excellent. And yes, Hannah Browne is a powerhouse and I think Take on Board's, greatest advocate out there, she's always flying the flag. Thanks, Hannah. You're a superstar. Absolutely. Ah, all right. So, you know, we've heard a bit about your journey to the boardroom and again, kickstart is rolling that what are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Caroline Pilot 24:44

Believe in yourself, believe in your skills, and what you bring to the boardroom. And a boardroom? Like Life is full of diverse people and if it's not, it should be and so you have to find out what is it that you bring? What is it that you're strong in and know that if you can take those to an organisation and the right organisation, then your chances of getting on a board are going to happen. So I think it's really about understanding yourself and where you want to go.

Helga Svendsen 25:19

And is there a resource you would like to share with the tech on board community

Caroline Pilot 25:24

AICD has incredible resources. But the networking functions, if you're ready to get onto a board are definitely worth networking into, and going along. So in terms of resource, it's probably my resources, yourself, use your skills, use your mouth, but use your ears, talk to people link up with others. And of course, Take on Board has an incredible wealth of resources as well. So as you do the course you build up a phenomenal library to tap into as you move forward.

Helga Svendsen 25:54

I love the resource you're suggesting is is yourself as in you person out there who is listening, you are your own greatest resource. Nobody has ever suggested that as a, as a useful resource. Thank you for seeing it like that. I think that's a really great way of looking at it. Caroline, thank you. Thank you, Hannah, for all those years ago introducing Caroline, thank you for bringing your incredible energy and connection to the group last year. I have no doubt whatsoever that you are making an incredible contribution to the member and board I know that you are because I've had some conversations with you about it. So they are so very lucky to have you. And we are very lucky to have you in the Take on Board alumni it's so thank you for sharing your wisdom with the community today.

Caroline Pilot 26:39

Thanks Helga, you're it's been an absolute pleasure. And now the connections that you get we Take on Board go well beyond being on the course so I highly recommend anyone get on board with a Kickstarter and follow up.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>