

## Take on Board

# Transcript – Mallory Pehm



Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, I'm doing an on air strategy session with Mallory Pehm. And in fact in saying that Mallory, is that how I say your surname?

Mallory Pehm 0:09

Yes, it is. I was actually thinking about that earlier because a lot of people don't pronounce it correctly.

Helga Svendsen 0:15

Excellent. Got it right. First up Mallory, if you could just introduce yourself to the take on board community.

Mallory Pehm 0:21

Sure. So I have a background in public health, that sort of my education background. And I'm currently in the early stages of my career, currently working in strategy and planning at a public health service in Victoria. I've been involved through that role in sort of organisational strategy development, implementation and performance measurement, among sort of many other strategic projects and pieces of work that that span across the organisation. And then outside of work, I do have a real interest in volunteering, you know, and volunteering my time towards causes that are really meaningful to me, and allow me to sort of contribute towards addressing health inequities and the social determinants of health. I've always thought that I would be interested in pursuing leadership roles later on in my career, I always had, you know, that idea. But it was only recently through talking to my peers and mentors that I actually realized, volunteering my time on a board could be a really great way to actually develop my leadership and governance skills. Now, rather than waiting to gain experience in those things later in my career.

Helga Svendsen 1:27

That is excellent background Mallory, and just for people in the take on board community. Just to give you a bit of background about how this came about. Mallory has already said that she is a volunteer in various things. We met at one of those volunteer events. So she and I are both

volunteering for a program called Asista, which is a mentoring program run through the YWCA, where you get matched up with a young woman and mentor her, or work with her or meet with her all hang out with her. So I went to the mentor training, gosh, I don't know about six weeks ago now, I guess. And, and as things happen, they say I pair up with the person next to you. So I turn to the person I now know to be Mallory. And she's like, Oh, I just need to let you know, I work in strategy and planning at the Royal Women's Hospital and which is where I'm on the board. And Sandy Bell, who's also been on this podcast, who have also been on the board of YWCA with as we're in the YWCA offices. When I saw your name, I asked her about you. And anyway, that's how this came about. So not only did we meet at a volunteering session, but you work at the organisation where I'm on the board in strategy and planning, which is one of the key roles of board members. So we had this conversation, like Sandy, I no doubt said, Yeah, of course, you can be on a board now. Like, that's exactly what boards need. They need different voices. And as part of that, I said, Why don't we do an on air strategy session? So, folks, that's how we got to be here as part of this conversation today. So then, for you in exploring leadership roles, the boardroom, you're already we already know, you're right on it for volunteering, that for board roles, what would be of most value today? What do we need to explore for that for you?

Mallory Pehm 3:11

You know, although I am really interested, I don't actually have any board experience or direct board experience, I guess. And in thinking about getting that experience, I've been a little bit intimidated or unsure about exactly where to start. Because I I don't think I ever really thought of a board role as something that a young person would do, I think, you know, I had that idea that it's for people are the late stages of their career, or they're, you know, moving into retirement, and they get to sit on a board and have that leadership and governance role. But I didn't think that young people near the beginning of their careers really had a role there, you know, pursuing this sort of thing, you know, not really sure if I have all of the relevant skills that I need, if there are other experiences that I should actually be looking at to develop those skills before I look at a board position. And I guess I'm also interested to learn a little bit about how board applications might actually differ from, you know, my typical job applications and how I should sort of go about writing an application.

Helga Svendsen 4:15

Alrighty, well, let's start delving then, shall we? So there's a couple of things that I heard in there, how to develop your experience, which kind of leads into what could you do before a board role? And what would board applications look like? In a little bit? I'm going to skip to the end. But there are a range of boards. Sorry, there's a range of organisations that overtly value the younger voice in the boardroom. How old are you Mallory?

Mallory Pehm 4:15

I'm 26 at this point. Ah,

Helga Svendsen 4:15

Okay. Awesome. So YWCA, the offices which we met my first board, Sandy, who also helped put us in touch first board. The YWCA has allocated roles for you young women. When I was on the board, it was still a federated model. So I was on the YWCA Victoria board, it's now a national organisation, but I think it's the same or similar rules would apply. So for the YWCA Victoria role, we had four roles on the board set aside for young women, and we defined young women as 30 years and under. So if they still define it that way you are in YWCA terms a young woman, but there's other organisations as well, that have allocated roles. So the foundation for young Australians has a number of allocated roles. Oak Tree has allocated roles, probably YMCA, but possibly not Girl Guides, there's a whole range of organisations that have roles for younger board directors. So I would say check out some of those organisations and check out how they define young, because for some of them, you might already be too old.

Mallory Pehm 5:58

Yeah, I have noticed that.

Helga Svendsen 6:02

So for some of them, I think it's Oak Tree, but I could be wrong. I think it's 25. And under. So you're already weirdly you're already too old. For that one. I think it's definitely worth mapping out some of those organisations that you have an interest in, and what their requirements are for young directors. Because then, you know, it's an organisation that values young voices. And you know that it's a role where you will have some other young people around you as well, you won't just be the young person in the room where people turn to you and say, so what do young people think it shouldn't be a representative role. And again, I think I've said this on this podcast before, but with YWCA, one thing I loved about that there was four young women, so they weren't alone. And they were just board members, just board members, you know, they weren't the young board members, they were board members. And they participated in the same way as those of us that weren't quite so young. And I think that's what you should be looking for one that will give you the experience and totally value your voice as an equal in the boardroom, not as the young person in the boardroom. Thinking about your experience, then again, the YWCA was my first board, I was probably I don't know, late 30s, I think when I joined that board, and I'd never been on a board, and everybody's first board, they've never been on a board before. So I wouldn't be too fussed about not having board roles to put on there. However, I just want to explore that a bit further. Because sometimes when we really think about the experience that we've had, there may well be governance experience. So, you know, you've said you volunteer a lot in organisations, have you been on any committees, or the leadership, I guess, of some of those organisations? Even if it wasn't called a board role?

Mallory Pehm 7:43

Um, I guess I haven't, it's probably because, up until recently, this wasn't on my radar particularly. And so when I looked for volunteer experience, this is just not something that I would search for. And so it's not something that I really have a lot of experience and outside of my current role at the Women's and, you know, the interconnectedness between, obviously, working in strategy and planning. And, and you know, the board's involvement in that. So that's really, I would say, the only experience I've had sort of peripheral to to a board, but not sort of directly working with on a board. Yeah,

Helga Svendsen 8:24

yeah. Okay. But that is, you know, your work in strategy and planning, which, as I said, at the top is a key thing for boards. And so I'm guessing from that process, you might have got some insight into how boards work. I hope you got a good insight being somebody on that board. But anyway, don't comment on that. So you've got some experience of what governance looks like, I guess, in that way, and what the role of the organisation is and what the role of the board is. Yeah, yeah. Again, it's skipping slightly, but when you asked about board applications, so board applications should focus on what the value is that you would give to the boardroom. Now, in terms of the skills that you would lend to the boardroom, I would say strategy and planning would need to be front and center for that for you. experience in public health, whatever else it may be, it depends on what sort of board roles that you're looking for. So we can we can come back to that. But for board applications, I would say even though you might not have a huge amount to put in the governance section of a resume, it is still worth having a separate board resume to your normal everyday professional resume, and a board resume. It's shorter and sharper and focused on those skills that you will lend to a boardroom. So it might start with a overarching statement about what sort of board that you want to make the contribution to and how you want to make a contribution. It will then focus on the skills that you will lend to the boardroom. So you've no doubt got a whole shopping list of skills. Some of those will be more relevant to the boardroom than others. So it's really highlighting those that are relevant to the boardroom highlighting any governance experience you've got, you haven't been on boards before, that's okay, you might just put under just inverted commas put under governance experience, that you were involved in the strategic planning process at the Royal Women's Hospital, which gave you an understanding of the lines between governance and operational and strategy and planning and those sorts of things. You would also outline your professional experience, but much more briefly than you would do in a normal professional resume. And you will, again, you would highlight your achievements that relate to the skills that you will learn to the boardroom, and the referees that you choose, maybe those that are more focused on board roles, rather than, and they would highlight those skills, rather than those that you might have for your professional resume. So in thinking about that, just in thinking about your resume, what would you say are the key skills other than strategy and planning because that should definitely be on your list that you would bring to the boardroom?

Mallory Pehm 11:06

Yeah, obviously, strategy and strategic thinking, and, you know, my experience and strategy and planning is something that I would highlight, you know, I also have a really natural curiosity, which means, you know, I love to read and explore and research when I come across anything that I haven't heard of, I don't know, so well, even just a word in a meeting, or, you know, if I meet someone, and I'm not, you know, I don't understand their role in an organisation, I'll just either by asking questions, or googling as soon as I can, and just, you know, I have that real natural curiosity about a lot of things. And so, I think that is a skill, I think it can also actually hamper my decision making ability, because, you know, I'm forever gathering the information and feeling like I need to know everything that I can never know everything before actually make a decision. So that's a bit of a balance, I think. Aside from that, I, you know, I have really good written and verbal communication skills, you know, that I've been able to develop through my work. And I have really great attention to detail. And although I would consider myself a decent problem solver, and quite task oriented, but I think that my current role in strategy, and planning has taught me to be a lot more flexible, and to be able to adapt quickly and sit with a level of ambiguity. And I've become more comfortable when I can't solve everything straightaway. So I think developing that as a skill as well, from my understanding, could be quite useful in a board role.

Helga Svendsen 12:38

All of those things are key skills for the boardroom. And I love that you've got a mix in there of hard skills and soft skills. I don't necessarily like that terminology around hard skills, soft skills, but it is a very useful summary. And I love that you've got a bit of a mix in there. Like I would say something like, although it's interesting, you know, curiosity, I would say is a bit of a soft skill, although then you threw research in there, which could be a hard skill as well, anyway, whatever it is, it's a nice mix. Okay, so if you were doing your resume, you would highlight those at the top, these are the skills that I bring to the boardroom. And I would say don't put a shopping list of 27 things make it sharp, three or four are your key skills that you bring to the boardroom. On the other side, when you're reviewing applications, if people put 10, inverted commas, key skills, I'm like, well, this doesn't actually tell me what you're good at. It tells me a whole list of things. And I want to know, when we get Mallory in the boardroom, what exactly is it that you will add because we've got a group there, it's a group decision making it's group dynamics, we don't need every individual in that boardroom to have everything. Yeah, making it really sharp about what those key skills are that you will bring to the boardroom. And have you got in mind then in terms of applications, or resumes, is there some achievements that you could list that highlight those key skills,

Mallory Pehm 13:59

definitely in my work currently, and I've been directly involved in the whole process of developing, finalizing and now implementing a strategic plan. And so I think that would demonstrate some of those hard skills, I guess, as you were saying, around strategy and planning that have really caught it for the role of a board. You know, some of those other skills, I could probably highlight, definitely

through some of my other experiences in volunteering, and even some of the key projects that I was a part of, through my Master of Public Health, I think, you know, I could write those in a different way. In speaking to you about this. I'm thinking I could write those in a different way than I've currently written about them on my professional resume.

Helga Svendsen 14:43

Fantastic. I just want to come back to the board roles and the experience that you need, as I said, everyone's got a first board so you don't need to worry about that. And you've got some governance experience. So you're actually in some ways a step ahead of some others that don't have that at all, or talked about some of those organized nations that have allocated roles for young people. But there's some other programs as well. There's the board observership program. That's for young people in inverted commas, which is people under 40. So you've got plenty of time for that one. But the board observership program matches people with organisations. So organisations sign up to the observership program and individual sign up, they get matched. And they provided training and support for 12 months to observe that board as well. So there's an there's no doubt other programs, in fact, shout out to their take on board community, if others no other programs, there's just the ones that I know if there are other organisations or programs that support young voices in the boardroom, I would love you to let me know when this episode goes to air, I'm going to put a post in the Facebook group, and just ask for other ideas as well, because that could be useful. But yeah, there's a range of different programs that will provide that support as well.

Mallory Pehm 15:59

I think we were discussing recently, the YWCA have a board traineeship program for I think it's women under 30. So yeah, their definition. I do make it in as a young person, according to them. So awesome. That's thinking about applying for as well. So I think it closes this week. Yes. So I've sort of been trying to get an application together in the background. But I think this conversation I was waiting for, because I thought this would be really helpful to understand how I can write some of my experiences in one way to really strengthen that application.

Helga Svendsen 16:34

Okay, well, then, for that application, let's focus there. Is there any, like we've talked generally about applications, but for that application to put that in? Because you definitely should put it in? Is there any specific things that we need to work through to help you to bring that application together?

Mallory Pehm 16:50

Well, I guess they break the application down into some key sort of questions to address in a cover letter. There's a question around how will you use the skills gained through this experience. And so

I've started to work that response up, it comes down to my, I guess, actual interest in wanting to pursue a board role and position. And part of that is, it's about my professional development and key leadership and governance skills. But, you know, I'm passionate about the representation of women in leadership roles and positions. That's part of the reason that I'd been keen to develop these skills and gain these experiences, so that, you know, I can, like so many great women that have come before me sort of contribute and shift the balance of women in the boardroom, and one day mentor other young women to do the same the way that I have had the opportunity to be mentored in this space. So that's where my responses heading in that section. But if you've got there's anything I'm overlooking.

Helga Svendsen 17:53

You are totally on the right track there, I'm guessing that what they will want to hear is that it will, you know, you might end up in the boardroom of the YWCA. And that's great, but you might not, but you are still going to be using the experience that you get to give a leg up to other women in the boardroom. And you will continue that regardless that you will show that leadership. So I think you're totally on the money there.

Mallory Pehm 18:15

Perfect. The other part of the application is why feminists, leadership and governance are important. And I think that ties into those interests and passions of mine as well. You know, my responses along the same lines there. So

Helga Svendsen 18:27

actually, I'm interested, why is the in terms of what you've written so far? Why is feminist leadership important and governance? What have you come up with? It's a great conversation to have. So yeah, where's your thinking at all your response to that question at currently,

Mallory Pehm 18:41

you know, for me in line with those interests and passions around women's representation in leadership positions, and particularly in board positions, because I know that women are very underrepresented in the boardroom, typically, you know, and other gender diverse groups are underrepresented compared with men in those positions, it really comes back to that, for me, it's about actually shifting the balance. And that helps to create further opportunities for groups that are underrepresented in those positions, whether that's women, but also, as I mentioned, other gender diverse groups, you know, culturally and linguistically diverse groups that often are severely underrepresented in positions of leadership and, and governance and powers. And, you know, I see that more broadly in Australia, you know, through to our leaders in government, our politicians, and

so, if in some small way, you know, this is a space that I can try and create some change in by just pursuing these opportunities myself, and then being able to, as we spoke about mentor and open up those opportunities for other young women or other people who really should be in these positions. That's something that I'm really interested in doing. And, you know, I think that I really aligned with the values and the mission of YWCA as a feminist organisation, but I think that those values need to extend far more broad the outside of that organisation. And so the reason I'm really interested in this board traineeship program is that, you know, whether I might end up on their board or a board elsewhere, I think, in some ways actually taking what I can learn there to a different organisation and embedding some of those values and those leadership styles at a different organisation that might be, you know, a really good thing to sort of open up those conversations.

Helga Svendsen 20:27

And you're right, it's an interesting point there as well that you might actually bring more value to another organisation rather than YWCA, because it can help that organisation also live those values. Yeah, it's a great point. You're on it in terms of that question as well, then. So is that all all inverted commas? That's Is that all there is in the application?

Mallory Pehm 20:47

Yeah, there were those three key questions that they asked you to address in a cover letter and so

Helga Svendsen 20:53

fantastic. And it's due this week, isn't it? We're recording this in early April, by the time it goes to air it will have closed? In fact, by the time what are their timelines? By the time this goes to air, we might have a response. What are the timelines after replications?

Mallory Pehm 21:06

I think it's sort of around May June that some of the orientation and training you know some of that sort of stuff. So yeah, it's it's could be you know, it's quick, have an outcome. But at that time,

Helga Svendsen 21:19

Well, when it goes to air, I might come back to before we put it to air, just getting an update at the end. Just one other thing to add in there. I'm sure you've worked it in there somewhere. But you should definitely say you are volunteering for the Asista program with

Mallory Pehm 21:32

Yeah, yes, I will, and had popped that in my resume already. As commencing 2022. Because I didn't want to highlight that. But now that you might have a match, I can probably just put it in there as current volunteer, so yeah. Okay, good. Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 21:50

Fantastic. Do they want referees? Have they asked for referees?

Mallory Pehm 21:55

I think that they will. And, you know, I was hoping that I might be able to request that you could be a referee for me if I get to that stage.

Helga Svendsen 22:05

Yeah. And Sandy Bell. Sandy is a life member of the YWCA, which is pretty high regard for why I'm not I am a member but not a life member. So yeah, very happy to have a chat about that. But Sandy should definitely be on your list.

Mallory Pehm 22:21

She's offered to definitely be a referee. So that's great as well.

Helga Svendsen 22:24

And even during your work with a strategy with Sue Yin. Did you work closely with us?

Mallory Pehm 22:30

Yeah, we did. We worked with Sue Yin, yeah.

Helga Svendsen 22:34

So Sue Yin is also a life member. Not wanting to get myself off the hook. But you might actually consider us a life member. And you've probably worked more closely with Sue Yin. So we can you know, the why women are everywhere. And yeah, really. So that might be something to think about as well.

Mallory Pehm 22:54

So yeah, no, that's really good. Yeah, yeah.

Helga Svendsen 22:57

So we've talked about some of the experience and looking to develop it, this internship is a great way of doing it. If you're not successful for this internship, because it is a pretty competitive process. I think they only have four positions. Is that right? They have to Ah, okay, so it's quite a competitive process. If you don't get that role, what's next on your radar for building that experience?

Mallory Pehm 23:22

Well, this is actually a question that I had jotted down for today, because I have looked at a few of these sorts of traineeship programs. And whilst they look like amazing opportunities, and a great sort of stepping stone for someone in my position, they usually are quite competitive. And if I am not fortunate enough to be able to have that opportunity. I guess my question is around what your advice would be for continuing to pursue, you know, getting board experience, is it about finding a smaller organisation, a local organisation, and just trying to get some experience there? Or what would you recommend, as you know, a different way to approach it?

Helga Svendsen 24:03

Yeah, so I think having all of those things on your radar is great, but as you very rightly point out, some of them are quite competitive. I think you should be doing both things at the same time applying for the various internships, traineeships, younger roles, all of that sort of stuff, and applying for board roles. In other organisations, you've got some fantastic experience. And for organisations that really value diversity, which should be all of them, but he's not but for those that really value diversity, having a younger voice in the boardroom is of value. Part of your value to the boardroom is that you are young part of your value to the boardroom is that you haven't been on a board before that you will be asking those open curious questions around things because you don't have the experience. So that's actually part of your value. So for applying for board roles more generally, if you could tomorrow land in any boardroom of any organisation. And anywhere, what would it be,

Mallory Pehm 25:01

I would be really keen to pursue, you know, tie some of my sort of volunteering interests and goals and my more professional development goals together. And, you know, using my background in public health, I'd be really interested in organisations that sit in that health or social impact space. So anything from healthcare organisations through to organisations that that address more of the

upstream those social determinants of health that work with communities in that way, I think definitely in the not for profit sector, like I'm looking to consolidate my interest in volunteering with interest in a board role. And so whether that's at a really local level, or a larger organisation, I'm not really sure, at this stage,

Helga Svendsen 25:49

Two things a keep an eye out on what's advertised, not just board roles. So sometimes organisations have external people on their committees, and their board committees or their advisory committees. So have a kind of a broad lens, I guess, on where that involvement could be. So definitely keep an eye out on what's being advertised. But also just starting to shake the tree have any connections, you know, because you work in public health, because you work with the board, you will probably be reasonably closely connected to a number of other people who are in organisations, on boards or on committees. Get on the coffee rounds.

Mallory Pehm 26:32

Basically it's not something that I, I don't naturally sort of do that classic sort of networking and reaching out to people and looking for opportunities, because I feel awkward about it. But I think in speaking to people like yourself and Sandy, like you just realize how connected people are and you know, all the great things that people like you have done and all the great people that you've met, and there is an opportunity to use that a little bit and connect through to new people and new opportunities.

Helga Svendsen 27:06

And think about it at worst, let me frame it a different way. You said before that one of your skills was around research. Think of it as a research project. So you're doing a research project around what might be the board's the committees, the advisory committees that you could make a contribution to. And in doing some of that research project, my point would be that you would check places online, all of that sort of stuff. But you would always also speak to people. So it's a research project. And it's a research project that may or may not end up in a board role for you. But you'll definitely learn more about it and make some of those connections through it as well.

Mallory Pehm 27:46

Yeah, certainly, yeah, that's a good way to think about it.

Helga Svendsen 27:50

It sometimes makes it a bit less stressful for people in thinking, Oh, my God, do I have to reach out to people, you know, at worst, you're just going to have a couple of coffees with people that you'll learn some good stuff and 90% of people are really open to it. They are open to having the conversation.

Mallory Pehm 28:05

Yeah, I have realized that in just trying to be a bit more curious and, and put myself out there and just make people and ask them about their experiences. People are really open and keen to share. And for the most part, that's it's been a really like positive experience more so than I expected. So yeah.

Helga Svendsen 28:24

In fact, given we're putting this to air take on board community that are listening to this, if you're involved, like maybe in a public health organisation, maybe in a not for profit health organisation, in health, actually, it doesn't even need to be in health, I think if you're involved in a not for profit board, and you'd be happy to have a cuppa with Mallory, and just talk her through what's involved and have a chat about it. It's no obligation. It's not her pitching to be on a board role. It's just her doing the research around what boards are about. Again, I'm going to add that to the Facebook post when we put this to air. And if there's anyone out there that would love to do that. Let us know. And we'll we'll do some of that matchmaking as well.

Mallory Pehm 29:03

That would be amazing. I just one of the ways I do really like to learn is just by talking to people about their experiences, and asking a lot of questions. So if anyone is keen to us, let me buy your coffee and have a chat about your experience. That would be amazing.

Helga Svendsen 29:17

Excellent. One of the things we love about the take on board network. They support each other the community is there.

Mallory Pehm 29:24

Yeah, beautiful.

Helga Svendsen 29:26

Is there anything else we need to work through for today's conversation?

Mallory Pehm 29:30

Being able to talk through the particularly application for them like YWCA traineeship that's been really helpful and helped me to get some my thoughts together and provide a little bit more direction on how to put that application together. But just the more general discussion around my, the skills that I do have and how I can approach further developing those and pursuing a board position that's been really helpful as well.

Helga Svendsen 29:54

Fantastic. I'll get an update from you actually, once you know what's happening with the YWCA. internship, please give us an update because that will probably go to air at around about the same time. So fingers crossed for you on that one. But knowing that it's a competitive process, there are some other options in there for you to pursue as well, partly shaking the tree of the take on board community. Fabulous. Okay, well, thank you, thank you for being so open with sharing when we just happen to sit next to each other at our own mentor training. Thanks for being so open with sharing. I know that when people listen to these on our strategy sessions, that gives them ideas as well. So so thank you for being open to having a conversation on air and sharing it with people. Yeah,

Mallory Pehm 30:39

So thank you for for having me. It's been, you know, so helpful for me and just to be able to pick your brain a little bit and ask some of those questions is really, really awesome and more than happy to turn it into a podcast to, to sort of put that information out there for anyone else that it can help as well.