



Take on Board Podcast – Episode 309

Transcript – Advisory board mini series – Mary Goodwin on her experiences with the Advisory Board Centre's Certified Chair Course

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the Take on Board Podcast, I'm speaking with Mary Goodwin about the Advisory Board Centre's, Certified Chair course.

Helga Svendsen 0:07

This is a bonus episode in our advisory board series. In the advisory board series, you've heard from Louise Broekman about the history, purpose and structure of advisory boards. Then from Sandra Gamble about energy and sustainability. Cynthia Payne about the health and aged care sector. Heather Disher, about the business sector. And then, of course, we put to air that live recording of Louise talking about the state of the Advisory Board market. Now, as part of that conversation, somebody asked about training. So when I was talking to Louise, I'm like, Louise, we should do a bonus episode about the Certified Chair course. So ta, da, here we are today with Mary to have a chat about that.

Helga Svendsen 0:48

So Mary, thank you so much for coming on and having a yarn with us about the course that you've done and maybe some other professional development stuff you've done as well.

Mary Goodwin 0:57

Absolutely, thank you for having me.

Helga Svendsen 0:59

Before we dive into that conversation. I'd like to just acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. For me, I am on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elders past and present. I also pay my respects to any First Nations people who may be listening or watching today. I acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters, skies, culture and country. I support voice, treaty and truth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and I encourage others in the Take on Board community to do the same.

Helga Svendsen 1:34

Now let me tell you about Mary. Oh, there is a long list here. So Mary is the independent chair of the audit risk and improvement committee at Gladstone Regional Council, and she is the independent member of a range of different and audit and risk committees Redlands City Council, Western Downs Regional Council and Whitsunday Regional Council. She's also an advisory board member for a pharmacy company and an advisory board member for a fabrication company. Mary is also the co chair of the peer advisory group for the Queensland Northern Territory chapter of the Advisory Board Centre. So you can see she's a great person to have here today. She's got over 25 years holding strategic leadership roles across public, private and not for profit sectors, both in Australia and internationally. She served as chief procurement officer for Queensland Government and Deputy Director General of a state government department, and has international experience, including working on a significant gold mining value delivery project, which brought her to Canada and India during COVID, she founded her own consultancy, One People Proprietary Limited to help businesses achieve their full potential, particularly bringing big business concepts to SMEs in pragmatic and practical ways. Welcome to the Take on Board Podcast, Mary.

Mary Goodwin 2:58

Thanks so much, Helga. It's nice to hear all the things that I've done, because I tend to forget from time to time,

Helga Svendsen 3:08

I must confess, there's more in there, but I thought I better get on to the conversation. So folks, if you want to know more about Mary, there's a link to her LinkedIn in the shownotes. Now Mary, before we dig into the Certified Chair course, which I'm really looking forward talking about. But before we go there, as always, I would love to dig just a little bit deeper about you. Can you tell me about your upbringing, the lessons you learned, what you got up to, and the leading influences on how you thought and what you did?

Mary Goodwin 3:37

It's such an interesting question, Helga and like looking back, when you get a question like that, it is, how much does your upbringing influence where you go in your life? And I was lucky. I had a mum and a dad who they were actually born in the States, and I was born in the States, and I like to think of dad as a little bit of a pioneer, but he grew up in a depression, and I think because he grew up in that depression. He was very, very much about stabilisation, very much risk averse. He did not hold a credit card his entire life. And I lost mum and dad recently, like they were married for 61 years, and they lived a great life. Dad was 92 and mum was 87 but I think the impact that they had in terms of where I am now, and particularly working in that risk space, but very much about stabilisation has had a huge impact on me.

Mary Goodwin 4:29

I'm the youngest of five, a good Catholic family, and I think that also taught me about perseverance, tenacity, how to get things done, how to navigate complexities, and a very strong independence that was actually nurtured by my mum, who, I like to say, was a strong, fierce woman who was very supportive of all of us in all of our endeavours. I think, great impact. And, you know, I owe a lot to mum and dad today.

Helga Svendsen 4:53

Wow, 61 years, that's a pretty impressive set there. Out of interest. Brothers or sisters, there's five of you all together. Are they brothers or sisters? And where do you fall in the line?

Mary Goodwin 5:06

Yeah. So brothers and sisters, the first three were 11 months apart, but there's 10 years between the oldest and me on the youngest. So lots to learn and lots not to do. So I think I got it easy as the youngest, because I had some great siblings to learn from who made all the mistakes before me and paved the way.

Helga Svendsen 5:25

So totally, I'm the youngest too, and I well, either my siblings made all the mistakes before me or perhaps they just broke my parents in so by the time they got to me, they're like, oh, whatever. It's fine.

Mary Goodwin 5:38

I tend to agree, Helga, tend to agree.

Helga Svendsen 5:40

Thank you so much for letting us delve in a little bit there. It's always great to know a little bit more about the full story of the person we have sitting in front of us. But now let's turn to education, certifications and so on. Now, you did the Certified Chair course with the Advisory Board Centre, actually. When did you do that course and what drew you to do it?

Mary Goodwin 6:01

Well, interesting. I did it just before COVID hit, so I did it five years ago, and then I just recently did a refresher course, which I always think it's very important to sharpen the saw. And it was awesome to actually go back and do the refresher course, and you meet the people coming through, going, how does this fit? What do we do? How do we apply these principles? But going back with the five years of experience that I have, it was just such a nice reflective space to be in, and really brought forth some of the key concepts and just that conversation that you can have with your other peers, to be able to go, Hey, this is what it could mean, and there's so much flexibility in what it has to offer.

Helga Svendsen 6:42

So five years ago, how did you know about the Advisory Board Centre? How did you know about the course, and what was it that drew you to do it?

Mary Goodwin 6:50

So I just come back from Canada and was doing, I guess, a number of consultancies under my own name, and through a colleague, they said, hey, just based on your experience, I think you need to have a chat with Louise, and I had a chat with Louise, and then you go through a rigorous kind of screening process to see whether or not you're actually the right fit for the Advisory Board Centre. And I actually really liked that, because it means that you're coming into something that has value and that has certain frameworks, but also respects the boundaries around that.

Mary Goodwin 7:24

So ethics being a really key principle with the Advisory Board Centre, but I had that conversation with Louise, and through that, it was like, I think, based on where I am and where a number of people, based on my experience, would have coffees with me and pick my brains, and you're almost

on these informal advisory boards, but it really pushed me to go, I think there's something here that really aligns with the work that I'm doing, the work I want to do, and also just adding to that toolkit overall.

Helga Svendsen 7:54

So you'd been on advisory boards prior, had you chaired advisory boards prior?

Mary Goodwin 8:01

Yes. So certainly, and even, and this is where I think the terminology is changing. So having gone on the course, you actually start to go, oh, I've actually been doing this for quite a while. It just hasn't been framed in that way. So that's one thing that I think the course really allows you to do, is go, there are committees, there are task forces, there are actual boards that you sit on. All of these are a range in terms of the advisory board scale. And so previously, my first board that I actually was on was in 2000 and I don't want to give my age away, but I was quite young and inexperienced, and it was on a director of a credit union, and I was able, or asked to be on that board, purely because of my different way of thinking and what that brought to the board. So they were very much around. Well, what are the skill sets? What do we want the conversation to be like around the table?

Mary Goodwin 8:56

It was a great introduction to boards, but it also showed my lack of experience. I think when I look back, you know how you can kind of go in with eyes wide open and think you're doing a fantastic job, and then you learn some other things and go, oh, actually, I perhaps wasn't doing the best job that I could have been doing. But we have to start somewhere, don't we.

Helga Svendsen 9:16

Sometimes the fresh, sometimes slightly naive eyes that we have when we first joined boards that can actually be helpful, I think, to others as well, because you ask a whole bunch of stupid questions that can be quite valuable in the end.

Helga Svendsen 9:29

So you've been hanging around the governance system, as Louise would say, we don't have governance boards and advisory boards. We have all boards that are part of a governance system for quite some time. You then decide to do the Certified Chair course. You get into the course, you jump through all of the hoops that you are required to jump through, and then you do the course. So tell

us a bit about the headlines of what are the sorts of things you learn as part of that Certified Chair course.

Mary Goodwin 9:58

I like structure, but I. Always like to say it's, you know, structure is liberating, so particularly if there's flexibility. And what I really liked about the advisory board best practice framework is that it's principles based. So it's very hard to argue with principles. And I like that because it then means that the different perspectives that everyone brings you've got this, this great framework, but you can use it in different ways. So it's quite versatile.

Mary Goodwin 10:24

So number one was, I guess, the principles base. The other was that, you know, it's around simple concepts, and they're concepts that I guess, through my career, either advertently or inadvertently, I've come across, and as I like structure or frameworks, and I always go, it's kind of like a jigsaw. You know, when you pull a jigsaw out and get that, if you can get the frame around it, the rest of the picture starts to take shape. And you can either put all the colours together, or you can look at the box and you can start with just the middle piece, whatever it is. But having that frame around it is such a good place to start.

Mary Goodwin 10:58

So with the Advisory Board Centre framework, or best practice framework. It's really three key concepts, purpose, process and people. And you think if you have all of those, then you've got a great structure to work with, if you know why you're there. So through the Advisory Board Centre, there's some great toolkits that you get, but the charter is the, really the key thing that allows you to go, what's the scope of this? What are we working with? And then in terms of process, well, of course, there's structures and disciplines. So we get meeting rhythms, we have agendas, and then we measure ourselves. And it's all about measuring the impact of what that advisory board does. And I think it's really important to be vulnerable in that space and continue the self assessment, whether it's the self assessment of the board or the actual person you're advising, or the team you're advising or working with, for them to it's about really providing that safe space for vulnerability, and then in terms of people, it is the right fit. So it needs to be fit for purpose.

Mary Goodwin 12:01

I could be really good on a board which is talking about stabilisation, and where we're looking at frameworks and different things, but then put me on a tech startup where they're really wanting to grow in a fast rate. Well, I may not be the right fit. So it's being very, very critical, or, you know, self critical to go, is this the right place for me? And often, depending on the time, like, you know, fit for

purpose can be fit for purpose at one stage, but then it's about being able to actually go, okay, I've done my bit. Now it's time to pass on to the next group.

Mary Goodwin 12:34

So I think that framework really hit home. The other key thing, and I think, it actually comes back to, there's this great tool that I fell in love with. And so again, being a consultant as well, I use the Business Excellence Framework. And this framework that the Advisory Board Centre uses aligns with that similar kind of principles.

Mary Goodwin 12:56

But I found through that it's actually about this little tool, you know, you can look at it, and it's got quantitative parts and it's got qualitative parts. And typically, I think most advisors who are just starting out would probably look at that tool and they want to jump in and they want to solve the problem. And it's kind of, they're looking at the numbers, they're bringing, you know, consultancy to it, and going, we've worked it out. And in actual fact, that the thing that really hit home to me is that it's actually the first time that you really get to understand how that owner, how that client, is actually feeling, because it's a self assessment, and while it's taking a certain approach, you're really getting to see, and it gives you that opportunity to be really curious. And I think that's where you can go. Tell me a bit more about why is this rating like this? What's going on here, and asking those questions rather than judging and so I think the whole understanding versus judgement is really nice. And I know Louise often, and she may have said this in the refresher course, but it was like, it's quite interesting, the difference between a governance board and an advisory board. And remember, we're back to systems, but one's kind of viewed as you're on my back. The other is you've got my back. And I think it's such a nice little just a reminder to go. Why are we there? We're actually there, you know, it's this testing ground. We actually have to know all of the answers. And that's something, again, that really hit home to me, being a consultant, often, we do need to have the answers. We're delivering something here. It's really about the testing ground and asking the right questions to give that owner or the person who's on the other side of that advisory board that real confidence in the decisions they're making.

Mary Goodwin 14:48

So whether that's an advisory board, people say one, I like to say two, because it's the owner and yourself, or whether it's a wider advisory board that has other members and different experts on it, that's the real key. So lots of learnings, but an awesome, practical, pragmatic course. And that's the other part that I really, often I say, like, even you take one thing away from a course, that's great. Well, I took probably a million things away.

Helga Svendsen 15:12

Well, that is a beautiful segue for me, because I was then going to ask, so, how has this come to life for you? How have you put into practice some of those principles that you've learned around curiosity. And I love that we've got your back, although I would like to think the governance boards do that too, but still understanding, not judging. Once you got your certification, five years ago, you'd already been on advisory boards, then you got your certification. Is there a story you can tell us about how you put this into practice, and how it may be impacted your practice?

Mary Goodwin 15:47

Because it was COVID when I did it, and it's quite interesting, because the framework really operates on 90 days, and so there are different parts of it, and 90 days is just really nice to be able to go we understand, we take you through certain things. What did we achieve? Now? Have we achieved what we set out to do? And we go to the next step? So the first part of that course was a challenge to us as individuals, to go away and do our own 90 day plan, to say, what are you going? Where are you going to take this?

Mary Goodwin 16:15

It took me, if I'm honest, and I like to think I am honest, it took me longer than 90 days. It actually took me probably a good year because I was balancing consultancy. I wasn't sure what this was actually going to do, how it was going to impact my world. And now, like I find I use the term, I'm in a portfolio career. So I do my consultancy. And when I started, so back at the beginning of COVID, my consultancy work was probably 90% of my work. Now my advisory work and advisory boards, it's flipped, not quite at 90, but it's probably more 70/30 to where I have.

Mary Goodwin 16:53

I get more joy out of the advisory board work than consultancy, and I think it's just the part of my career. But what did I do? I think I tested and it was very much around that time that I started to look at audit and risk committees, which they're a sub committee, they are a governance committee. But I like to think I'd bring a bit more fun to an audit and risk committee and because I can be quiet, it's all about numbers, but really being able to actually go, what is our purpose here, and realigning one of the things there, though, is outside of the audit and risk committee, the ability to actually meet with the CEO. And I think that is probably one of the biggest things I've learned from this is that it can be lonely at the top, so being actively engaging with the CEO outside of the audit and risk committee to be able to understand what's going on, and then being able to use that confidential scenario to then go, well, how can we then bridge the gap between the CEO and the board and whether that's a local council or whether that's a corporate I think it's a similar, similar scenario.

Mary Goodwin 18:05

So being able to then go, how can you listen with empathy, but then be able to bring some of those concepts back to the board table and ask some challenging questions, and I think that's one of the key learnings, just in utilising this framework and its versatility to be able to go, it's not a one size fits all. It's not that an advisory board is an advisor. You know, that they all take different shapes and come in different shapes and sizes.

Mary Goodwin 18:31

And I think the other part, too is just in some of the discussions with smaller businesses, that real ability, instead of kind of cutting to the chase and going, let's fix this problem, actually giving them space. And I think one of the key things in terms of the agenda that I do is always go, Hey, where's your head at? We're coming into this advisory board meeting, but what's going on? Vent do whatever you want to do. And now let's work out is that, do we still want to be going on this agenda path, or do we need to change direction? Because it's not my meeting, it's actually that co founder, that founder, that CEO, it's their meeting. And so I need to be able to adapt to where they are. And again, Louise uses that term, you know, meeting the owner, where they are, that's our job. And look, it can take. I won't say that I've got it right initially. It takes some time, but I think for giving yourself that time to actually reflect. So it's not just not pushing the owner, but encouraging the owner to reflect. It's also about us as chairs or as members to reflect on how we're actually coming across in those meetings as well.

Mary Goodwin 19:41

But gosh, when I look back to when I started and you know, it was all was probably pro bono work, some work that you just did ever, yeah, it was out of the kindness of your heart to actually being in paid roles now it's lovely to be able to look back and go, I probably felt like I had imposter syndrome to start with. It was kind of like, hey, are they really going to. To listen to me, and I think that's what the framework really gives you, and that, that chance to build your own strategy, your own plan, to go, no, actually, I've got some real worth here. And the more that you have those meetings, and you kind of come out of them and go, oh, actually, that went really well. I know more than what I think, but I always say I know less than that owner like they are the expert in what they do. My job is to ask the questions and to ensure that you know, we're aligning to what was set out in the charter, what they're looking to achieve. And go from there.

Helga Svendsen 20:31

I'm wondering if there's a sticky situation that you've experienced as an advisory board chair, and if there is, if in as much detail as you're able to share what that was and how this experience helped you get beyond that sticky situation?

Mary Goodwin 20:50

I won't go into detail, but certainly it was navigating the bridging the gap between the CEO and the board, and it really came back to trust. And I think this is where, no matter what, at the core of these, these meetings, it's trust. You're wanting a CEO to be vulnerable and to share everything that's going on, warts an all, and that's tough, particularly if you're new, and you're new and you believe, you know, you have all of those elements. And I think sometimes this comes back to just a little bit of maturity or the understanding of what an advisory board is about. And I think sometimes we can go too quickly into thinking we need an advisory board structure, whereas perhaps it's a little bit of mentoring and getting to know the chair in the first instance, and that's actually what happened in this state, I think, well, not only I think I know that we moved to advisory board before we'd actually really built the trusted foundations. And so it was an opportunity, and we saw it was one or two meetings, well, it was more than one meeting. It was two and at the end of the second one, it was like, hey, let's stop. Let's go back. And I think let's unpack some of what's going on in the wider group, and let's slow down. And not everyone wants to hear the slow down and I was just having this conversation with someone where it's like, is slow down the right, the right terminology, particularly for a startup that wants to grow and eventually exit where, to me, it's kind of like it's actually saying it's slowing down to speed up. Let's get some of the natural foundations in place, and we can do that quickly, because I like to think of myself. I actually am a sprinter. I'm not a marathon runner. And so because I understand these other concepts, it's quite easy for me to be able to work with someone to go, hey, these are the gaps. Can you see that? What are your thoughts on that? Now, let's plug them. How are we going to plug them?

Mary Goodwin 22:50

And remembering that as an advisor or as a chair, it's not our role to plug the gap. And sometimes that can be difficult because you do just want to do that. You just want to fix it, but it's actually saying, how are you going to do this? Do you have the capacity? How long is it going to take? And if you don't have the capacity? Well, let's look at the consequence if you don't do this, if you just continue to run and sprint.

Mary Goodwin 23:13

So I find sometimes it is just, it's not taking it personal, although sometimes it is hard, because it's a relationship, not to take things a little bit personal, because it's like, oh, I'm letting them down. What do I need to do differently? But I think the one thing I have learned is honesty is key, and I think that's key in any relationship, and that's a key factor in building trust. It's also showing your own vulnerability. You can't expect someone you're advising to be vulnerable if you can't meet them there, but it is a relationship. The strongest ones, I think, are built on the ones that you've actually you've confronted some things, or you've had some tension. And I always it's kind of like the traffic light reports, like, I don't know if, but you know, in any kind of thing, I always it used to be that you'd see these reports and it's all green, and you're going, it's not all green. So I really encourage the people I speak with, I'm like, embrace the red, because red means we can do something about and I

think it's the same thing with a relationship. It's actually going some of those tension points are really necessary, because it means we're touching on something that actually means a lot to you, or that you haven't got the answer to, or whatever, so let's find what they are and I may not be the right person to do that, but I can connect you, and I think that's the other part of being in this is it's about the connections, the network, and being able to go, I don't, yeah, I don't need to have the answers, but if I can introduce you to someone who can get you there quicker, or introduce you to a few people who you might like to, you know, test the idea on, then that can actually be really valuable.

Mary Goodwin 24:52

So probably, I don't know how specific enough in that example, but it's a little bit hard because there are some some complexities. So yeah, with it, but I do think confronting, not running away, is really important, and then being able to say, hey, I may not be the right person here, but these are the things you need to discuss, so it's not me. It needs to be with someone else.

Helga Svendsen 25:14

Yeah, no, it is the hazard of running a podcast around governance systems that often people can't give specificities of the circumstances. So that is a beautiful example. Oh, Mary, thank you so much in here. What are the key points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Mary Goodwin 25:32

Yeah, I really think continue to be curious, and the other part too is learning how to listen with purpose. And I think that's a really important one, where it's like, it can be a real superpower, not listening to reply, but listening to understand. And I think sometimes it's by listening you'll just get some markers that kind of go tell me a little bit more about that, instead of diving straight to, oh, I've got an answer for that. So I think that's really important.

Mary Goodwin 26:03

I think governance. Don't be afraid of governance. It actually is there to add clarity and not complexity. Foundations matter. And I think if I go back to, you know, the story about my mother and father, I think it matters in life. It matters in leadership, and it certainly matters in business. And I think if you can get those foundations right, it actually means it's a great platform to springboard from to whether it's growth, whether it's just staying the same and I think staying the same is actually that's pretty cool too. It's still successful, or if it's exiting, but giving you that optionality to be able to go, hey, I've got strong foundations, so no matter what I know, I'm ready for what's next.

Mary Goodwin 26:42

And I think that's kind of it relationships like, you know, okay, so don't try to be someone. You're not just be yourself. And I think, again, from the the Advisory Board Centre, it's a great framework. You mentioned. I'm co chair, so I've got an awesome co chair through Mark Cranny, who's also part of that. But we chair these events, which are actually called peer advisory groups, and we say, you know, how awesome is it that you actually, as someone who's coming through the advisory board program, you actually get your own advisory board, your own peer advisory board. That's what those groups are about. So they're a lot of fun. They're a chance to actually, you know, to learn a bit, to practice your skills in an environment, and to network as well. So we like to think we're a little bit different, but it's all about, you know, building the global network that we now have, and that's a great place to start, is local.

Helga Svendsen 27:35

Now other than the Advisory Board Centre certified chair course, we'll definitely put a link to that in the show notes, is there a resource you would like to share with the Take on Board community?

Mary Goodwin 27:45

Yeah, I just, I think I shared with you, there's, there's two books which are like they had an impact on me. And, you know, one is about grit. And I think, you know, living in a world where there's, I just think resilience is key. It's one of my key strengths, and it's something that I just think I'd love to share. It's called Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, by Angela Duckworth. Strongly would recommend that as a great read.

Mary Goodwin 28:11

And then the other one, we talked about listening, and that's The Lost Art of Listening, by Michael Nichols. And I think again, they're too practical resources that can be...they just add to your toolkit. You don't have to agree with everything they say. But you know, if there's one or two things that come out of it, I think that that would, you know, that's a good thing.

Helga Svendsen 28:30

Amazing. Thank you. I'll make sure there's links to both of those in the show notes as well. I'm already wondering whether The Lost Art of Listening is available as an audio book so I can listen to it rather than read it, but we will see. I'll look it up afterwards. Oh, Mary, thank you. Thank you so much for doing this at rather short notice, because, as I say, Louise and I had the conversation. I'm like, find me someone, and, of course, snap my fingers. And she has so thank you for being open to

the call, for doing it so quickly, and for coming and sharing your wisdom with the Take on Board community. Today, I really appreciate it. So thank you for being here.

Mary Goodwin 29:06

Yeah, well, thanks for having me, Helga. I mean anything to just share learnings and just share the good work that the Advisory Board Centre does, and also that advisory boards do, more than happy to help. So love the fact that you're doing these sessions. So happy to help. Hopefully there was something useful in it.

Helga Svendsen 29:24

Thank you.

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