

Take on Board

Transcript – Nikki McClure on board culture and how education is key in sporting organisations



Helga Svendsen 0:00

I'd like to start in the spirit of reconciliation. And on behalf of the take on board community, I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land. For me, that's the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. And I acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea and community. I pay my respects to their elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be listening to this podcast today. Today on the take on board podcast, I'm speaking with Nikki McClure about board culture and how education is key in sporting organizations. First, let me tell you about Nikki. The 99th AGM of Kingston Heath was held on Saturday, the 21st of May 2022. And Nikki McClure, was elected as president of the club, the first woman to fill this role. Only a week earlier, she had concluded her term as women's captain, during which time she was instrumental in establishing the highly successful women's gateway program. Aside from her involvement at Kingston Heath, in 2017, Nikki formed the online forum, fairway birdies, providing women a pathway into Victoria's golfing community. In addition, in May 2020, she was appointed as director of Golf Victoria, this work involved project managing sports events, as well as the management of fitness clubs. Welcome to the take on board podcast, Nikki,

Nikki McClure 1:26

Thank you so much. Helga. Lovely to meet you.

Helga Svendsen 1:29

So Nikki, before we talk about board culture, and how education is key in sporting organizations, let's dig a little bit deeper about you. Can you tell me a story about young Nikki that tells us a bit about how you got to where you are today?

Nikki McClure 1:45

Well, young Nikki, gosh, I could go back a very long time. But back in the day, I was always very interested in being part of the group and having a community of friends that we'd all enjoy weekends running around or riding our bikes that just be free of the household. And I lived in a

street with I was very lucky. That was about four girls, and we'd all head off Saturday and Sunday on our bikes and have picnics in hedges of neighbors houses. I don't know, it was just it was a free time for us. When I was school days. Yeah, I was more interested in sport than study. Had a wonderful time. You know, in the sporting community, parents very happy to sign me up wherever and I get myself their little ass netball tennis. It was a fun time. And and I suppose it was driven by a family that was instrumental in the fitness industry, which is where our family business still stands today.

Helga Svendsen 2:47

Interesting. So there's the threads in there building community around sport. So perhaps it's no surprise, you've ended up as president of Kingston Heath. Although it's interesting. Maybe it shouldn't be interesting. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised. I don't know. But really the 99th AGM, we have our first woman elected as president. Tell us a little bit about that story to becoming president of that golf club.

Nikki McClure 3:12

Yes, I still pinch myself today. I started golf because my parents were into it. My sister started when she was 13. You know, my brother and I were off doing all sorts of sports, and she wasn't that keen on it. So mom decided to take it out to the golf club. And anyway, she picked up the clubs, I was directed to other things in life and just didn't pick up the game. I think back in the day, when you're a career woman, you're doing a thing. And then you meet, you meet your husband. And then you have your kids and I've always been you know, I hear the term a lot helicopter parent. And I was very happy to throw myself into my family and my kids and I, I love being part of organizing things. I was part of the school environment, I always put my hand up for committee and running balls and guy was at the school and, and I felt like that was a great contribution to my family. And I love doing it. But then you get older and you kind of lose that identity a cycle. Okay, my kids finishing school and I what am I going to do now. So, Golf has been just a wonderful platform for me to be able to throw myself into, and I took it on and I and I had this time to share. I've always wanted to create an environment for people to make them happy to inspire them to do something. When I worked in the fitness industry, back in the day, I ran a triathlon club, you know, I, I've just always had that entrepreneurial ability or want to help people and I think I get that from my father, because he's been a very similar mentor to many, many, many, many people over the years. Through his industry that he's worked in. His reputation precedes him because is there's a lot of people that look up to dad. So I feel like I've got a lot of contribution to give this industry and yeah, back to the President's role. Well, it's a club that's been around for 113 years. And yes, the sport is a very traditional sport, we're but we're really trying to move ahead and push it to be modern and engage people in the game, to try and create a new way of looking at golf. The members embrace it, and the club is really progressing. And it's fantastic.

Helga Svendsen 5:32

First up, congratulations, and congratulations to you and Kingston Heath and the members because I can hear from the energy in your voice, that, you know, it's a great choice for Kingston Heath as well and fabulous to have a woman in the president role. So yeah, congratulations to all on that. Oh, actually, can I check? How does it work? There it will you on the board prior and then became president? Or is this you know, your entry to the board as being president.

Nikki McClure 6:01

So I've been a member of Kingston head for 15 years. It took me about five years to get into it because me I was still in kinder, and I was back and forth, back and forth. So I just threw myself into the club. I met many women, and then I became women's captain. So within the golfing industry, you know, the way these clubs are set up, you have a lot of subcommittees and the subcommittee's feed recommendations into the general committee or the board. And so you have a lot of volunteers running this business. So I've been on many subcommittees during my tenure as women's captain, I spent three years doing that. And then I was invited and nominated to be the president. And now I sit on executive so I'm an office bearer of the club. Okay, so I'm on executive and general committee.

Helga Svendsen 6:49

Okay. So, so with your experience, then on the and the general committee is the board, right? Correct. Okay. So with your experience there, I'm just wondering what your observations are around the culture within sporting organizations from the boardroom? Yeah, well, I

Nikki McClure 7:07

I love listening to Ellen Hooper, the young woman that you interviewed in your last podcast, and I really resonate with her, quote of beginner's mindset. Because I don't believe that you have to be an expert at every single thing to join a board. I think a contribution is made by being motivated to bring something to the table to speak your mind but in a really positive way and, and contribute in some way. So in my wildest dreams, I never thought I would be the president of Kingston Heath and sit on the board, going back to fairway. Bertie's that was a little entrepreneurial business that I was doing on the side, through social media, trying to encourage women to start the game of golf. A little backstory there. My 17 year old at the time daughter said to me, you are so obsessed with golf, you need to create a blog to encourage your girlfriends to start playing golf or some planner can't do that. She said, Yes, you can. Yes, you can. So within an hour's we'd set up a Facebook page, Instagram page, and I was writing articles about starting the game of golf. So then six years down the track, we've had over five 600 women start game of golf, and word of mouth. I mean, women are just fearful of missing out FOMO. And so this platform of fairway birdies has really encouraged women to start playing the game, creating communities of like minded women to go out there. Don't be fearful, don't be intimidated, go and have fun, laugh at yourselves. And really just let yourself be free of judgment. And it's been such an amazing experience for me, but also the joy that I get out of seeing other women doing things that they just never thought that they'd be able to do.

And so I think that's given belief in myself to be able to say, like, yeah, I can actually do this, I can join the board I, I have something to give, and people want to listen to me, apparently. So what I've learned through the culture of sport and boards, and the engagement that I've had on Golf Victoria board, and now Kingston Heath, I'm putting energy into being able to change a culture that is still a little bit too archaic, for the next generation, to modernize a game to modernize the thinking around the culture of this game called golf is it's not a bad thing, because it's what we're living today. But through golf, but for the future of golf. I can just see the language and a narrative that needs to change when I'm sitting around the board table in the sporting organization. I've had lots of experiences on the board just in regards to the narrative. And you know, I was having a conversation yesterday with the golfer who is on the board and, and naive to him. He just as an example. He was talking about young girls who are doing a sporting program strangle scholarship, but he was referencing them as ladies. And to me, I don't believe that that is the right narrative to now grow the game and bring the new generation through. And he said, Well, why is it so offensive? And I said, well, that in itself is the wrong narrative. Because no one's offended. I'm talking about changing a narrative, to sell a product to a new generation. So when you're selling a product in anything, any product, the advertising team and the marketing team are always having to change the narrative around how we're going to promote, or how we're going to sell this product to the next generation coming through. It's always evolving, always changing. And I don't see it any different around a culture, because we're the promoters were the leaders of the industry, it's just an education piece, that we just need to keep reminding people that, oh, we're not being aggressive, we're not being negative, it's not offensive. Well, I'm just thinking about No, this is just a really good opportunity to change the way people's mindsets are and how we can engage the youth and the younger generation. So I sit around the board table, and we'll have new members come on. And their narrative is the old way. And I'll sit next to one of our board members. And he, he will change the narrative for the new director that's come on board, and I just sit there and think, Well, you know what, my job is done. Not so my job. But I have impacted this man is director to now share the message. So it is doable, I can see it. And we just need to keep thinking about the next step.

Helga Svendsen 11:46

Oh, Nikki, that is so interesting. Because, you know, from the outside, I'm not involved in the governance of sports organizations, or indeed really in sports organisations. But it's fair to say, Well, from my perspective, sports organizations don't always look as inclusive as they could, and as welcoming as they could to all. But all of what you're saying is that you are doing everything in your role to change that narrative, both with individuals, and therefore collectively, as well. And you're in the role of president. So it's not like you're an outsider in this. So what's your advice to others who might be involved either in supporting boards or other boards? How did you manage to garner that support to become the president and garner that support to become the member of the Golf Victoria board? So that you could have this positive influence around making the sport inclusive for all? How did you manage to garner that support? Is it just this storytelling and changing the narrative? What What's your secret Nikki?

Nikki McClure 12:49

Oh, I've always had the ability to connect with people. I have a girlfriend who is the most placid and serene woman highly intelligent, and I would, I would watch her connect with people. And she just listens. And she's always asking questions about the person. And really talks about itself unless somebody asks her a definitive question. I've learned so much from her. And I'm always interested in people's stories, like, and I think Golf has taught me that because when you go out and play golf, you're on the course for it could be two hours, four hours, and almost teaches you the ability to be patient while it does patient. That doesn't always work. But patience, you know, being in control of your emotions, it teaches you to enjoy your own company, and to ask questions of other people and to listen to listen to other people's stories. So I feel like I've learned a lot on the boards as well, like, I'm not perfect. I've learned to bring people on a journey. That's so important. Like, if you want to get anything done, you have to create an environment where people believe that they are on the journey with you. It's not just your agenda. And I think that's really important around a board to always reference the person's opinion or idea. I feel like, at the end of the day, everybody's there as a volunteer, and everybody has a right to contribute. Whether you like it or not, you still gotta listen to people. You know, I'm a half glass full. So and I'll always see the positive in things. I had a tragic life experience. We lost our third daughter to since at 30 weeks. I'm sorry, and that's like 19 years ago now. But I think now today, it's almost like, I've learned so much from that. And it's made me a stronger person today as well. It's creative part of me and my skin is a hell of a lot thicker than it was in my 20s I don't know I just feel like I'm a people person and I love to talk to People, I think that's also guided me to where I am today. My mum and dad, great supporters. And we've got a very, very close family, brother and sister. They're all the cousins. So ya know, good family around me and, and, and great support.

Helga Svendsen 15:17

Often when people think about governance, you think about risk and compliance and finances, and all of these things are absolutely important in governance. But what I'm hearing from you is people skills, listening, stakeholder engagement, narrative telling stories. They're not always the skills that people think about in the boardroom. But they're clearly so important. Just last week at AICD, the Australian Institute of company directors update, I wasn't able to be at that. But I understand from others that were that and Sherry spoke, and she spoke about a number of things, and one of which is the board's role in stakeholder engagement. And what I'm hearing from you is you have that hands down, and you have the skills in that hands down. And maybe it's something boards need to think about more broadly as well.

Nikki McClure 16:06

Yeah, absolutely. Golf Australia board, Sarah Chia, she's a young woman, lawyer, she's from Adelaide, and she joined the board. And I read an article about her positive contribution, but also her youth, and how she can be a representative for a younger generation. And many boards are starting to implement younger generation directors, you know, the younger directors, being nominated for boards. And it's just so important, because we are what we see. And so, you know,

golf needs to really start changing direction with that, and promoting the younger generation to come on and younger, all abilities more diverse, we need to be more modern thinking around that.

Helga Svendsen 16:53

Well, speaking of all abilities, more diverse, I understand there's an event starting, if people are listening to this on the day, it's released, there's an event starting tomorrow, which is a little different to how people might usually perceive these events. So tell us about that event, but also a little bit maybe about how that came about from the governance perspective.

Nikki McClure 17:13

You know, as we know, sporting arenas around the world are changing with more diverse, and the genders are all mixing the AFL, the soccer in Europe, you know, there are many, many sports that you know, I don't want to call it out. But obviously women are getting more opportunities, and they're getting broadcast rights. And it's all it's all going along nicely now. And we're starting to see a bit of a change in environment. And so and golf has jumped on board with this, which is brilliant. We have an event called the Victorian Open, and it's been going for quite some time, and maybe 2015, I'll probably be corrected on that. We co joined the women and men's week open together, and they play on the same course. And they have equal prize money. And that's the big open and it's highly successful. It's down at boneheads at third eighth beach, we usually hold it and it is the most brilliant event you can walk down the fairways with the players next to them. Have a little convo with them. It's just fantastic. And so our national open that we've had, which we're holding next week, it starts Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and the venues are Victoria golf club, and Kingston Heath Golf Club, which is where I'm at. And we are hosting round one and two, and then and so Victoria and then the final days are at Victoria, Sunday, Sunday. But we have changed the format. And it is now men's women's and all abilities. The three tournaments held together at these two venues, equal share prize money, and the players are playing together on the same course. So it speaks volumes for golf for diversity and equality. And it's great for the both clubs to be part of it. And also for Golf Australia to be able to put this format together. And and we hope that it continues and no doubt at will.

Helga Svendsen 19:04

So Nikki, you talked before about you are on the committee, and then you became the president. And I would love to hear a little bit more about that transition because it it often happens. And it's it's not the same role being the president versus being inverted commas just a board member or just a committee member. So yeah, I'd love to hear a little bit more about that transition.

Nikki McClure 19:24

Yeah, well, the transition was easy, to be honest. And the support that I got from the members and the wider community has been extraordinary. And it's not a story that that's uncommon around the country. And look, I was naive to it as well. And once I became president, there was a story told through golf Australia website about it and some leaders in the industry reached out to me and one of them was Dr. Deb Kimba from Brisbane golf club and she is currently the vice president of Brisbane. And then we had royal Queensland Golf From Evelyn Foley, and then from in the Ripoli Lindell Plant, and it goes on and we've got a captain, Glenelg Golf Club as well, all women around the country, they invited me and we named ourselves the golf Leadership Network group. And we all meet and support each other. But it's not about the women that aren't in these roles. It's about all these women that are in these roles. And we just don't tell those stories. And so the transition has been fantastic within my community and my club, but we're really the only ones that know about it. And I suppose my position was highlighted on golf, Australia, but there are so many other other women around the country doing the same roles and sitting on boards. And it's a fantastic story. So that's what I get out of it. And they're extremely prominent women in within leadership groups.

Nikki,

Helga Svendsen 20:54

Such a great conversation today for just I think, not just governors of sporting organisations, and not just women who are involved in sporting organisations. But I think, you know, board members everywhere and about some of the lessons they can take from this for their own good governance. So I'm wondering what are the main points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Nikki McClure 21:18

I believe culture needs to be a huge part of the concept and the process and the outcome. I was at panel last week that the PGA put on showcasing careers for women and girls. And I spoke about the whole aspect of just go for it. Like, don't hesitate. Because you can only ask you can only strive to do your best and contribute. And at the end of the day, trying to create a place for new and younger generation. And there's a great quote that says, children are great imitators, give them something great to imitate.

Helga Svendsen 21:54

Fantastic. And is there a resource you would like to share with the take on board community?

Nikki McClure 22:00

Yes, there's Karen Harding. Her podcast is Tee for Two. And she talks of women in golf and the men that support us, which I love. Fabulous.

Helga Svendsen 22:13

Well, we know that people listening are already podcast listeners. So we'll make sure we put a link to that one in the show notes. And indeed, of course, we'll put a link to your good self in the show notes and maybe fairway birdies as well, people might be interested in that as well. Oh, Nikki, thank you so much for coming and sharing with the take on board community today. You know, hearing the way you had built the golfing community and women and golfing communities. You know, it's an amazing testament to building community and building that story and narrative as well, as well. So thank you for all that you do. And thank you for being on the take on board podcast today.

Nikki McClure 22:49

And I thank you and I'm I thank Mary for getting me in touch with you because I love in your podcasts too. And I'm going to be listening to more of those fantastic and extremely inspiring. So thank you so much. It's great to meet you. Hell yeah.

Helga Svendsen 23:04

Oh, and yes, you're right, a shout out to the fabulous Mary Muirhead for suggesting you Thanks, Mary. That was awesome. And if anybody else has suggestions for guests on the podcast, let me know.