



Five Tips to Help in Interview Preparation by Deb Nelms

Since it may have been a long time since you've had a formal interview, I've prepared this tip sheet to help organize and focus your thoughts and questions as you prepare for meetings or interviews with board decision makers.

Decision makers include your network of CEOs, board chairs, nominating/governance committee members who you are networking with, and those you meet with during the interview process. Other board decision makers include the search firms who represent you, as they will select only a few candidates who will be presented to the board.

Tip One

Be clear and concise concerning:

- Your board value proposition
- Your overall firm-level impact
- The value you've created for your clients
- Any board service internal or external either NFP, academic, or others

Tip Two

Use examples to detail your experience and perspective. Your examples will help move the meeting from a question and answer framework to a conversation where you both gain more meaningful insight into style, fit, chemistry, and expertise.

Tip Three

Think about how you've contributed within or outside the firm on issues pertaining to:

- CEO performance
- Development and succession of key executives (CEO) and board members
- Oversight of or engagement in cultivation of the strategic plan
- Organization reputation
- Risk assessment and mitigation

Tip Four

As part of your due diligence process (also refer to our prospective director's checklist), and in addition to reviewing the company's recent public filings, press releases, analyst reports, and news stories, have key questions for each phase of your interview process. These questions will vary by industry, company size, and the type of board (public, private, private equity backed, family, government, academic, and advisory) Some preliminary questions are:

- What are the key risks, issues, and concerns the CEO is facing?
- What are the primary issues facing the board?
- Where is the board in its strategic continuum (how is it executing against its immediate, mid-term and longer-term strategy)?

- Who do they consider their competition and why?
- What are their competitive differentiators?
- What are their top priorities, both skill and character based, for a new director?

Other questions as the opportunity presents:

- What's the board matrix of needs? Or, what specific gaps exist in the board; industry, functional, or areas of specialization? What's the level of importance attributed to these areas? Is diversity on the short list of gaps?
- Ask all directors you meet with to describe the company and board culture. Is it consistent?
- What's the role of the board in this organization?
- How long has the CEO been with the company? Any issues or concerns?
- What is the CEO performance evaluation process and how often is it conducted?
- Is there an assessment of the board done annually?
- What are the key issues over the next several years – multi-national expansion, M&A, trends, competition, others?
- Recent past key issues?
- Are there any pending events, lawsuits, ethics violations?
- Additional commitments (directors training, annual meetings, social events)?
- What is the onboarding process for new directors?

Tip Five

Be intentional as you move through the process. Seek understanding of key issues and offer perspective and examples of how your experience applies. Finally, avoid information overload and be able to summarize your experience.