

Activating your network

Part of IoD Ireland's Director Development Toolkit

Introduction

Networking will be a crucial tool for securing board roles and staying current with the latest corporate governance trends. It's essential that your network knows you're interested in non-executive director positions, the specific types of roles you're seeking, and how they can support you.

Contents

Which networking events should I attend? 4

Tip and suggestions 5

Which networking events should I attend?

If your executive role has left little time for networking recently, it may be time to refresh and refine those skills. With networking increasingly happening in both in-person and virtual environments, it's important to be effective both online and in-person.

Focus on nurturing your existing connections — reach out to key contacts to inform them about your non-executive director aspirations. Don't hesitate to reconnect with people you haven't spoken to in a while; those who have seen your work first-hand will often be your strongest advocates. Additionally, this new chapter will require expanding your network and forging new connections.

Which networking events should I attend?

- IoD Ireland events are a great place to start! You can find out more about upcoming IoD events online [here](#).
- Choose events where you can learn something as well as network. Events that have a learning element make it easier to network at, as all attendees have an interest in the subject matter. For example, an event about the boards role in AI allows you to discuss with people how their boards / organisations are leveraging and dealing with AI.
- Make networking easy for yourself by choosing events that are convenient in both location and time. If an event is difficult to attend, chances are you won't go, so opt for those that fit your schedule seamlessly.
- Explore industry-specific networking events.
- Events with a modest entry fee can often attract a more targeted audience.
- Professional services and law firms will often run non-executive director events.
- Don't forget to ask prominent head-hunters to add you to their guest lists for networking events.

Tips and suggestions

Once you have planned which events to attend, here are some tips and suggestions to be an effective networker:

- Preparation is key — be ready to answer the question 'What do you do' with a memorable and unique answer, one that leaves the person you are speaking to wanting to find out more. Creating a great first impression doesn't happen automatically — preparing in advance is critical.
 - Have a few thoughtful questions ready that you can use in any networking setting.
 - Listen more than you speak, demonstrate you are interested in the person you are speaking to. Be curious, ask questions.
 - Don't try to sell yourself, instead seek guidance and be interested in their expertise.
 - Do what you say you will do — if you suggest a coffee make sure to follow up with an invitation for a coffee. If you suggest you will send them some information, make sure to do so in a timely manner.
 - Don't expect a quick win, remember networking is about fostering relationships for long term benefit.
 - Be positive, leave a lasting impression. People warm to people that make them feel good and have a positive, can-do outlook. Remember to smile, be confident and be you.
 - When networking virtually, make sure your backdrop is professional, make eye contact and work harder at smiling and being engaged in the conversation. It can be much easier to secure a follow up 1:1 with someone when only asking for 30 minutes of their time for a virtual chat. Make the most of those 30 minutes by being well prepared with what you want out of the conversation.
 - Look for open circles at networking events where it's easier to join a group, strike up a conversation, find another attendee who looks like you feel.
 - Give as well as receive — be generous in giving if you expect people to help you. Perhaps share a contact or an interesting article. Remember networking is a two-way relationship.
 - Get the attendee list in advance and identify anyone you already know and anyone you are interested in meeting. You could reach out to an attendee in advance and arrange to speak to one another at the event.
 - Be kind to yourself and keep your goals modest. Rather than setting yourself a goal of securing 1 meeting with a view to a non-executive director role consider a more modest goal of have 3 interesting conversations with 3 new people. You will then feel successful and are likely to attend another event.
 - Connect with interesting people afterwards on LinkedIn — it's a great way of staying in touch.
 - Follow up with a 1:1 coffee meeting. Be prepared with your Personal Brand summary — what is it you want them to know about you and be clear on your 'ask' — how the person you are meeting can help you. Can they help connect you with someone, are they on a board you would be interested in joining, have they dealt with a board challenge you are facing?
- To assist in being well prepared for networking opportunities take time to read the **Building your personal brand** guide.



Institute of Directors Ireland
Indigo Building, Whitaker Square,
Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2, D02 P2X8

+353 (0) 1 411 0010
info@iodireland.ie
iodireland.ie