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# BUILDING A BOARD MEMBER BRAND



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## T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S



## I N T R O D U C T I O N

Many see holding a board seat as the epitome of success and yet feel that it is completely out of reach. Although historically board seats have been filled by men over the age of 50 with C-suite positions, trends are showing that boards are seeking younger, more diverse members.

Getting your foot in the door can be challenging, and it all depends on what the board is looking for. Today, many board recruiters are looking for next-gen execs under the age of 50 with significant potential (Sahadi, 2018). A diverse set of skills, background, ethnicities, and experience are actively being sought after, and the exact qualifications a board is looking for will depend on the type of board.

There are several different types of boards; they all function differently and follow different guidelines. A few of the most common types of boards include:

**Working Board:** A working board consists of employees who work at the organization. This is common for smaller or new businesses.

**Governing Board:** The board provides direction to the owner of the business. The owner does not sit on the board, and the governing board focuses on the future success of the business.

**Cooperative Board:** All members are equal; there is no CEO. This is common for smaller non-profit organizations.

**Executive Board:** This board makes all decisions. There are often subcommittees to handle various aspects of the operation.

A Corporate Board, or more commonly referred to simply as a Board of Directors, is an elected group of individuals who represent shareholders. They don't make day-to-day decisions but meet regularly for general oversight of the organization. Every public company must have a Board of Directors.

The size of the board will vary; however, the average is 9.2 members (Segal, 2020). Trends in board tenure are changing, and the current average tenure for men being 9.2 years, and 6.4 years for women (Lukomnik, 2017).

Additionally, Institutional Shareholder Services, Inc. have identified five trends in board appointments last year (Mishra, 2019):

- Board renewal rates are increasing as board diversity is a high priority for many.
- The number of women joining boards is at a record high.
- Ethnic diversity is at a record high, although only 10% of board members belong to an ethnic minority group.
- There is an increasing demand for diverse skills, many moving towards non-financial skills.

·The average age of board members is increasing.

A board seat allows you to showcase your expertise and will provide you with greater experience that will help further your career. Holding a board seat has been described as earning a mini-MBA, as you work to strategize and resolve legal and business issues that come before the board. There are incredible networking opportunities as well as financial benefits that can open doors to new career prospects. The compensation for a board seat ranges; non-profits may not offer any compensation, where corporate boards can offer up to seven figure salaries and stock awards. According to a Spencer Stuart Board Index report, the average compensation for a director at S&P 500, excluding the Chairman, was \$280,389 (Spencer Stuart, 2016).

Board seats are always available; currently, LinkedIn has over 9000 board seat openings posted. Last year, 482 new seats were assigned to S&P 500 boards (Sahadi, 2018). Due to the career-boosting benefits, they are highly competitive positions. In order to position yourself to get in the board seat, you must take a strategic approach and work on your executive presence and brand.

CHAPTER

01

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

Have you ever been in a room with an executive, and you could feel their presence? They command a room with just a few words and stir up feelings of both intimidation and inspiration. These leaders stand out and have the 'X factor' known as executive presence.





## EXECUTIVE PRESENCE: THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN MERIT AND SUCCESS

The term executive presence has been gaining momentum since 2014 with Sylvia Ann Hewlett's book, *Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success*, where she described it as the "it factor" (Hewlett, 2014). According to Hewlett, you can tick every box regarding education, experience, and qualifications, but if you don't have an executive presence, you won't advance and get yourself a seat in the boardroom.

Hewlett has described the "it factor" as a mix of communication, appearance, and gravitas, and the ability to know when and where to use these three things (Hewlett, 2014). COQUAL (formerly Center for Talent Innovation) researchers and Hewlett backed this with a survey completed by 268 senior executives from major corporations. The surveys examined how these

how these senior executives acted in various situations, how they perceived themselves, and how they felt others perceived them. The research found there were 3 pillars to executive presence, each with a list of specific abilities that included the following: (Hewlett, Leader-Chivee, Sherbin, Gordon, & Dieudonne, 2013)

### **Gravitas**

- Exudes confidence and control in high-pressure situations.
- Acts decisively and displays acts of authority.
- Displays integrity and speaks the truth.
- Demonstrates emotional intelligence.
- Has maintained their reputation.
- Expresses their vision.

## **Communication**

- Has superior communication skills.
- Able to command a room.
- Can read an audience effectively.

## **Appearance**

- Displays good grooming.
- Carries self with assertiveness and is appearance conscious

Additional studies and articles have been published since the book's release, and with time, the definition has evolved. Fortune described it as a leader's ability to engage, align, inspire, and move people to act (Bates, 2016). Forbes has said it is all about inspiring confidence. Inspiring confidence tells your subordinates that you are the leader they should follow, and it instills confidence amongst peers that you are reliable, and effective. More importantly, the executive presence and the “it factor” is about inspiring confidence in other senior leaders that you are suited for a board seat (Valentine, 2018).

Although there are a few different takes on the exact definition, most agree that presence is an essential component of executive success.



# 01



## **HOW TO ESTABLISH A STRONG EXECUTIVE PRESENCE**

Executive presence is a set of behaviors people have learned over time. Some people figure this out at a very young age, and others learn it later in life. You can establish a strong executive presence by following these 5 steps.

### **IMPROVE STRESS-MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

Strong leaders don't buckle under pressure. We all get stressed, and in a board position, you are guaranteed to be in situations that feel like a pressure cooker – the key is how you respond. Think about how you act; do you start sweating? Lose your cool and start shouting? Be self-aware and keep your composure at all times. A person with a strong executive presence is prepared, confident, and calm. If you feel your stress levels building, focus on your breath. Taking deep, slow breaths will slow your heart rate and make you feel and appear calmer. People look for a leader capable of steering them in the right direction when things get tough, and effectively managing stress will instill confidence in your subordinates, peers, senior leaders, and board members.



**COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**

Establish a clear vision for organizational success as well as for your own career path. Write it down and get crystal clear. If you were asked by a top executive what your vision was, how would you communicate this? You don't need to write your elevator speech on a cue card and keep it in your pocket at all times, but you should be able to articulate this at any opportunity. Speak with a colleague you trust and ask for feedback on your communication skills, or work with an executive coach who will help you identify your weaknesses and ways to improve. A good leader communicates effectively in-person, virtually, and in writing.

**INCREASE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS**

Executive presence all comes down to others' perceptions of you. To command a room, you need to read it – you need to be self-aware. When you speak, pay attention to others' body language, or ask for feedback from a mentor or supervisor. When you identify areas you need to sharpen up, continue to be cognizant of these, and adjust accordingly. For example, if you are giving a presentation, and you observe others looking disengaged or bored – this is not commanding a room. Being aware of this, will allow you to appropriately adjust

your tone, volume, body language, and content. You also need to be aware of your physical presence, the way you stand and take up space speaks volumes. Incorporate power-poses and refrain from slouching.

**GROW YOUR NETWORK**

Individuals with an expansive network and established, cohesive relationships in different departments, organizations, and industries have a strong executive presence. Just like a politician, you need to work on cultivating new business relationships. LinkedIn is a phenomenal way to grow your network effectively. Establishing mentor relationships and attending various conferences and events can also help you grow your network. For each interaction, focus on making an authentic connection. Too often, I see people at conferences making transactions through a rehearsed 2-minute conversation and exchange of business cards, believing they were 'networking'. This is a big mistake that can be avoided by asking a few questions, listening, and establishing a genuine connection with the person you are speaking with. Make a conscious effort by introducing yourself, handing out your business card, and following the LinkedIn strategies I've listed in the next chapter. By the end, you will be in an excellent position, and

have a more robust network that can enhance your credibility.

### **PROFESSIONALLY POSITION YOURSELF**

How you show up is important. It's something you become known for, and something many people have become lax about since working from home. This is a huge oversight. Appearance matters, especially in a professional environment. It is important when establishing your executive presence. Although it was the least important of Hewlett's 3 pillars, it remains essential piece of the puzzle. Your appearance can help you or hurt you. Clothing, and hygiene should not distract from your other traits and experience; it must be appropriate for the setting and company you are with. Take cues from the senior leadership team in your organization or at the board you would like a seat on. How do they present themselves at meetings? Do they typically stick to more formal business attire or is it a casual environment? Think of the saying, 'birds of a feather flock together' – if you look like a peacock in a group of sparrows, you should reconsider your wardrobe and adjust accordingly.

Executive presence accounts for 26% of what it takes to get promoted (Hewlett,

Leader-Chivee, Sherbin, Gordon, & Dieudonne, 2013).

The remaining 74% make up your executive brand, including your experience, reputation, social proof, and others' perception, social proof, and others' perception of you as a thought leader. With a cohesive and consistent approach, you can create an executive brand that will provide a strategic advantage and position you in the boardroom.

# WHY BUILDING AN EXECUTIVE BRAND IS KEY

Executive branding is the conscious management of your reputation and markets you as a professional destined for the boardroom. Current and future board members must build their executive brand through relevant channels. Strategically creating and maintaining a strong personal brand will impress and instill confidence in your peers, subordinates, and superiors and demonstrate your potential for a board seat.

You have the power to create your own narrative and can get it out there for everyone to see. There are three key components to building an executive brand:

- Have an online presence, specifically LinkedIn, with a profile that effectively tells your narrative, aligning with your executive brand.
- Be considered a thought leader by delivering compelling content.
- Make a consistent effort to maintain and evolve your executive brand.

We will address the second and third components in the following chapters. But before you can position yourself as a thought leader and maintain your brand, you need to establish your online presence.



## **EXECUTIVE BRANDING & SOCIAL MEDIA**

Many board seats are filled through board recruiting firms. Recruiters are increasingly scouting board members from LinkedIn. Technology and social media have evolved, and not utilizing it can send a message that you aren't technologically fit, lack social awareness, or have something to hide. A LinkedIn profile will make your profile visible on popular search engines and ensure the information you have crafted comes up first when someone searches your name. A well-crafted LinkedIn profile will provide you with more opportunities.

Creating a profile isn't enough; having a neglected and abandoned profile can have more negative consequences than if you were not to have one at all. You need to maximize your profile to build a strong executive brand.

### **MAXIMIZE YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE**

#### **USE A PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOT**

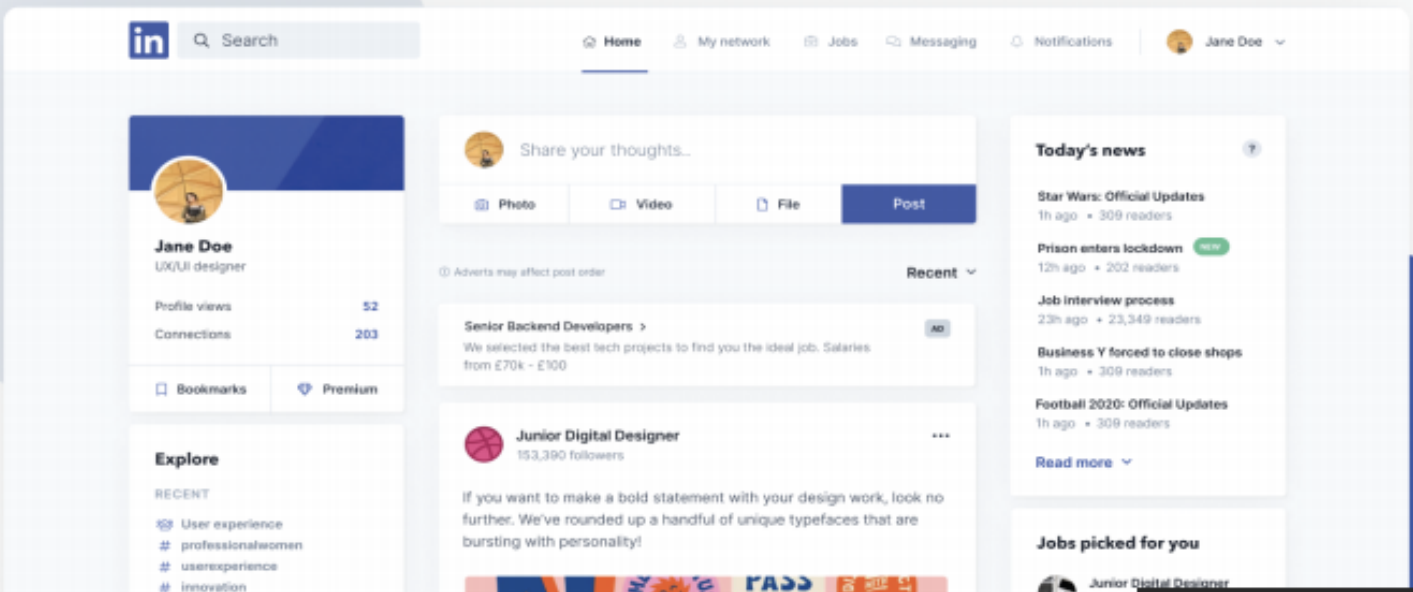
People want to engage with a person, not a brand, or a job title. Don't put your company's logo, emoticon, or leave your profile picture blank. Instead, have professional photos taken, and include a high-quality headshot, and a few

well positioned lifestyle photos.

There are professional photographers who specialize in LinkedIn photos and can help you create a professional, attractive portfolio. For LinkedIn photos, follow these guidelines (Arruda, 2018):

- Look directly into the camera and smile.
- Keep the background simple; something that reflects your brand.
- Dress appropriately and for the role you want.
- Minor editing completed by a professional photographer.

You should have more than one headshot, as they will populate Google search results, and the more photos in the results, the greater influence you are perceived to have.



If your name is Sheila Smith, and your name is searched, and the results show one picture of you and 5 photos of another Sheila Smith – who would appear to have the greater influence and power? That's what executive branding is all about. By posting more photos, you are strategically presenting yourself as a person with influence.



### WRITE AN ENGAGING SUMMARY

When writing your LinkedIn summary, you should include several well-integrated keywords that will improve search results. These are the words that will help people find you in a search more easily and should appeal to your target industry. Think of this like the LinkedIn version of SEO.

Your bio will be the biggest differentiator between you and your competition, and it should make a big impact. When someone visits your page, they will see the first 300 characters, so these first few sentences need to impress. This is not the place for your whole life story – it's a place to summarize your career and trajectory, past accomplishments, and what makes you great. This is where you want to show your personality and enthusiasm for your career and industry.

Here are two examples of an engaging summaries featured on the LinkedIn profile of Fortune 500 board members:

#### **Catherine Courage, Board of Directors at Insight**

*Catherine is committed to delivering world-class products and services that drive customer adoption, loyalty and business results. She advocates a design-thinking approach, which focuses on customer empathy, experimentation, design, and innovation. Her experience spans brand, web, product design, information experience, and business process reinvention.*

*Catherine co-authored the book "Understanding Your Users," and is an active writer and speaker on customer empathy, innovation, and design. Catherine has been featured in Harvard Business Review, The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, and TEDx. She has twice been selected by the Silicon Valley Business Journal – in 2011 as one of Silicon Valley's "40 Under 40" young tech leaders, and in 2013 as one of Silicon Valley's 100 Most Influential Women. Also in 2013, Catherine made Forbes list of "Top 10 Rising Stars at The World's Most Innovative Companies." In 2014, the National Diversity Council named her one of the Top 50 Most Powerful Women in Technology.*

### **Torrence Boone, Board of Directors at Macy's**

*As VP - Global Client Partnerships, Torrence is responsible for driving Google's strategy and multi-billion dollar business across a portfolio of the world's largest global advertisers, spanning the tech, health/beauty and CPG verticals. In this capacity, he leads a team focused on large scale global strategic partnerships that deploy diverse Google products and platforms to achieve business transformation and breakthrough marketing results. Torrence also co-leads Google's New York office.*

*Prior to Google, Torrence held senior agency leadership positions with WPP & Publicis. Before his tenure in advertising, Torrence was a senior manager at Bain & Company, where he advised a broad range of clients on corporate and business unit strategy, mergers and acquisitions, new product development, and interactive strategy.*

*Torrence holds a B.A. in Economics, with honors, from Stanford University, and a M.B.A. from Harvard Business School. He is a corporate director for Macy's (NYSE: M), a former corporate director for Finish Line (NASDAQ: FINL) -- a leading national specialty retailer, a board member of Pond5 -- a leading online marketplace for creative assets, and a board member of Effie Worldwide.*

*Torrence is a sought after international speaker and recipient of numerous business, advertising and philanthropic awards: Financial Times, UPstanding Power List; Savoy Magazine, Top 100 Most Influential Blacks in Corporate America and Power 300 Most Influential Black Corporate Directors; One Hundred Black Men, Corporate Award; A Better Chance, Dreambuilder Award; ADCOLOR, Advocate Award.*

*Both Courage and Boone highlight their professional philosophies, mission, and accomplishments in a concise yet engaging manner. If writing a captivating summary isn't one of your strengths, work with an executive coach or LinkedIn professional, and they can help you craft the perfect 'About' section.*

*Your headshot and summary may be the first things people will see when they search for you, but they aren't the only things on your profile that will attract attention. Spend the time filling out all of the areas in your profile, including education, experiences, skills, and update it with articles and engaging content.*

# CHAPTER 03

## THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

A thought leader is an individual who is recognized as an authority in a specific field and is considered the go-to for expertise in that area. Consider your organization and field; who are the thought leaders? Why do you believe they are thought leaders?

These individuals likely speak at conferences, are featured in podcasts, and write posts on the topics they are leaders in. If you look at the examples in Chapter 2 with Courage and Boone, they highlighted their speaking engagements, articles they were featured in and their awards – they are thought leaders. Thought leadership is an effective strategy that comes with many benefits and can put you in a promising position.

To be a true thought leader, you must capitalize on the executive brand equity that comes with it; that is, the rewards of thought leadership should be at the forefront of your initiatives (Price & Rogers, 2012). You need to take a proactive approach to gain a reputation as a thought leader and be clear on what you want to be an expert in. With a clear vision, you can seek various opportunities that provide social proof and enhance your brand. In partnership with Edelman, LinkedIn conducted their own research on the power of thought leadership and found that utilizing thought leadership as a part of your executive brand can positively influence those around you and create more career opportunities. More specifically, the research vided the following stats (Rynne, 2020):



·47% of C-suite executives say they exchanged contact information after reading through a thought leadership article.

·61% of C-suite executives say they are more willing to pay a premium to work with an organization with a clearly articulated vision.

·88% of decision-makers say that thought leadership is effective at enhancing their perceptions.

## HOW TO POSITION YOURSELF AS A THOUGHT LEADER

To position yourself as a thought leader and strengthen your executive brand you should be utilizing the following strategies:

### WRITE ARTICLES ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn has over 630 million active users that are looking for information and connections. Over 90 million of these users are senior-level executives, with 10 million being CEO (Iqbal, 2020). Writing and posting informative articles will increase your engagement and connections, which will increase your social proof. Social proof is a psychological phenomenon where people follow the masses.





So, if you have many connections and people like, comment or share your articles, others will follow suit. If people on LinkedIn see you as an expert in your field, so will those looking to fill a board seat. Articles on LinkedIn are like blog posts where you can share insights and information relative to your area of expertise. You should post a minimum of one article a month.

#### **CREATE AND/OR BE FEATURED ON A PODCAST**

Podcasts are accessible ways to present yourself as a thought leader. If you can invest the time to create a weekly podcast, you position yourself as the expert and can feature guests who will provide most of the content while contributing your expertise. Estimates believe that by 2022, podcast listenership will reach 132 million in the U.S. (Watsp, 2019). Others who are in your industry will listen in and follow. You can share your episodes on your LinkedIn profile to further your position as a thought leader.

If you don't have the time to create your own podcast, there are plenty of others who are looking for guest stars to interview on their show. Being featured on an existing podcast allows you to take advantage of other audiences. To get featured on a reputable podcast with a large audience you need to put together a pitch; a great story with a good hook that will grab their listeners' attention.

## **ENTER AWARDS**

Submitting yourself for an award may feel uncomfortable, but that is exactly how the majority of awards work. Self-submission is the only way you can be entered, and it typically requires that you fill out a short application online. There may be a fee to enter some awards, however these fees often include a ticket to an awards gala, which is a great networking opportunity. The nomination itself can be a credible source of social proof as well. Finding awards can be done with a quick Google search. Search for local awards as well as international awards in your industry. Some awards are specific to demographics like those under 40 years of age. A series of awards will help build your executive brand and portray you as a leader in your industry.

## **SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

Conferences and tradeshows are always looking for new speakers that will pique the interest of attendees. Apply to speak at an industry conference on a topic you are an expert in. This past year, more conferences have gone virtual, allowing you to speak to viewers from home. Search for conferences, tradeshows, and summits in your industry and look at their speakers' application process. Many will require a paper or abstract on your topic, as well as your background and resume. A carefully crafted LinkedIn profile will help get you a speaking slot at top conferences.

## **CREATE ENGAGING CONTENT**

Create content using different mediums, including videos, photos, short and long articles, white papers, podcasts, and eBooks. This will position you as an expert and can be shared across all your social platforms. Last year, LinkedIn launched a new video feature that allows you to host Q&A sessions that can be promoted through your channel. Consider LinkedIn your personal website, a place where you can share free, valuable content that will encourage others to follow and engage.

You cannot become a thought leader overnight. It takes consistent effort and is a reputation grown with time. You may capitalize on the above strategies and enhance your executive brand, but it is not a one-time deal, and you must manage your reputation and continuously evolve your brand.



C H A P T E R

0 4

# MANAGING YOUR REPUTATION

Your executive brand is largely your digital presence, one that instills trust, influence, and credibility. Creating a solid reputation that positions you as boardroom-qualified takes time and must be maintained. You can put in months of consistent effort to be ranked for your keywords in LinkedIn but could be out-ranked just as fast if you stop posting and putting in the work. The same goes for search engines like Google and Bing.

Managing your reputation and growing your executive brand is an on-going process. Just as your career evolves, so will your reputation. To manage and grow your reputation, you should also do the following:



### **GOOGLE YOUR NAME**

Potential employers, board recruiters, clients, and coworkers will Google you, just as they would a brand. It is important that you know what they are seeing. Google will show the most relevant information and images that contain your name. Conduct a digital audit of the results that come up and ask yourself if these results align with your executive brand. Your LinkedIn account should be one of the top results, and all the remaining articles and links should be relevant to your career trajectory.

For those with a very common name, it will be more challenging. In this case, you can add a modifier like your organization or position, following your name. This will bring up search engine results specific to you.

If your results aren't aligning with your brand, you will need to make some adjustments. The priority should be to get your LinkedIn profile ranking at the top. To improve your ranking, ensure all your information is filled-in, the summary has a minimum of 250 words, connections are over 500, and you are posting the articles you want to rank on your LinkedIn page. Most importantly, ensure your profile is set to public, otherwise it will not show in search engines. You can also create a simple website or About.me page, then link to this with your other social accounts to help push relevant content.



# CREDIBILITY

## **CONNECT WITH CENTERS OF INFLUENCE**

Centers of influencers (COI) can be a person or organization; they are well established and have an expansive network, and are able to increase your credibility through testimonials and referrals. There is a great deal of opportunity in cultivating a relationship with COI, such as:

- Being exposed to new opportunities.
- The ability to grow personal network.
- Opportunity to affirm and developing existing relationships.
- Becoming a source of referrals.

You first need to identify your COI and then establish a connection. Think about the people you want to be connected with, and then figure out who is at the center of those individuals. Consider where these individuals spend time or what associations they belong to. When you approach your COI, you should do so with a strong understanding of their values, what motivates them, and where they are from. Then, approach by framing what you can give them, not what they can do for you. This will help establish a solid rapport and lasting relationship.

### **HOST TRAINING**

By facilitating a training session, you position yourself as an expert and thought leader. Online courses or 40-minute webinars are easy to create and will help maintain your reputation. You can host training courses on LinkedIn Learning that will be advertised through the platform and on your page. Another option is to post a quality training program on a reputable platform like SkillShare. By doing so, you will increase your audience and improve your search results, as we discussed earlier. LinkedIn training is typically shorter, where SkillShare would be suited for longer, multi-module training courses.

Too often, aspiring executives focus all their efforts on building their executive brand, but their efforts fall off once they feel they've updated their LinkedIn profiles and shared a few posts. Maintaining your reputation and executive presence is essential to having a brand that will get you in the boardroom. These three strategies, used along those mentioned in Chapter 3, will put you in a promising position when done consistently.

### **CONCLUSION**

Baby boomers fill the majority of board seats and are increasingly leaving these positions as they retire. These positions are being filled by ambitious professionals who can help guide an organization's future. Holding a board seat is a rewarding position with countless personal and professional benefits, making it a highly sought-after role. The competition for these roles is significant, but these seats are not out of reach if you position yourself correctly.

You have the ability to finesse your executive presence and build your personal, executive brand. With time and effort, you can position yourself as a thought leader and enhance your reputation through social proof and your digital presence. Several strategies, like posting articles on LinkedIn to guest starring on podcasts, from entering awards to speaking at conferences, will give you the competitive edge needed to fill the board seat.

# LEARN MORE ABOUT



**Crowned Marketing & Communications** is the industry leader in Executive Branding & Cultural Communications. We help organizations ranging from small to mid-sized enterprises to Fortune 10 companies effectively communicate with their stakeholders through our proprietary training, assessments, leadership development programming and award-winning cultural communications toolkits. We help our clients become futureproof. We even wrote the #1 bestselling book on it. Future-Proof: The Blueprint for Building a Brand GenZ and Millennials Love. Available everywhere books are sold.

## Some of our signature programs include:

- Multicultural E.D.G.E
- Millennial E.D.G.E
- FutureProof Leadership
- FutureProof MarCom



**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW WE CAN HELP YOU INCREASE YOUR INFLUENCE, IMPACT AND INCOME VISIT: [CROWNEDMC.COM/STRATEGY](https://crownedmc.com/strategy)**



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