

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE BOARDROOM

THE ROADMAP

PENINAH THOMSON
AND JACEY GRAHAM
WITH TOM LLOYD



Book A Woman's Place Is in the Boardroom

The RoadMap

Peninah Thomson, Jacey Graham and Tom Lloyd
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Recommendation

In their earlier book, *A Woman's Place Is in the Boardroom: The Business Case*, executive coach Peninah Thomson and management consultant Jacey Graham, working with Tom Lloyd, identified a universal problem in corporate boardrooms around the world: a dearth of female members. The reasons, they explained, are a shortage of qualified female candidates and a biased selection process. As a sequel to that book, *The Roadmap* plots a route guiding women executives to board positions. The journey includes eight main milestones they must pass on their way to landing their desired positions. The book is not without its detours, however, and some chapters meander slightly or delve into seemingly tangential topics. Some of the material is targeted only at women executives in the U.K. Still, *BooksInShort* considers this a trip worth taking for any woman seeking a coveted board position. Businesses that want to remove the roadblocks for women board candidates will also benefit from each chapter's "Reflections for Companies."

Take-Aways

- The FTSE 100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme offers a "roadmap" to help more women executives attain board positions. It outlines eight major milestones:
- First, weigh the benefits and responsibilities of board membership and make a firm commitment.
- Second, learn the rules and regulations of board governance.
- Third, understand board interactions, dynamics and corporate culture.
- Fourth, identify and research companies where you'd like to attain a board position.
- Fifth, make yourself board-ready by adapting the right persona and cultivating "gravitas."
- Sixth, create a "personal marketing plan" to convince the selection committee that you are a good choice for the board.
- Seventh, use self-reflection to gain insights about your strengths and behaviors and to reach your full potential.
- Eighth, get experience by sitting on a board in a community or industry organization.
- Chairmen and CEOs can pave the way for future women directors by implementing a few policies. For example, they can make sure every list of board candidates includes women.

Summary

"The State of Play"

A gender-balanced board is more than a diversity issue; it makes sound business sense. In fact, research shows that companies with three or more female board members achieve higher-than-average levels of corporate performance. Although the number of women board members in the U.S. and the U.K. dipped in 2006, the setback was temporary. In 2007, the number of *Fortune* 500 directorships held by women in the U.S. grew slightly to 14.8%. In the U.K. that year, women accounted for one-fifth of all new board appointments in the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 companies – a record high for the Female FTSE.

"Companies in all industries are engaged now on the new gender front in the war for talent, and are trying hard to attract and keep able women."

However, there's still plenty of room to grow. To address the shortage of women on U.K. boards, many FTSE 100 chairmen agreed to become mentors in the FTSE

100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme. This program helps women executives within two levels of the board become attractive candidates for directorship. Upon its 2004 launch, the program appointed seven mentors to the candidates. By 2007, the pool of mentors had expanded to 30. As part of the program's ongoing development, the authors created a "roadmap" to guide women executives in becoming a desirable board candidate. Its eight steps are:

Step 1: "Deciding to Engage"

Preparation for board membership begins long before a firm offers you an appointment. Ensure that you are emotionally ready for the role by carefully weighing its benefits and drawbacks. Then make a deliberate decision about whether to pursue it. Stay alert to signals that people may see you as board material. For instance, a seemingly offhand remark at a business dinner might really be an invitation to apply for a promotion. Condition yourself to react quickly and decisively. If you're not prepared, you may waste a strategic opportunity.

"If one woman is a token and two's company...it seems that three's a competitive advantage."

Be aware that the board member's realm is not just the physical boardroom, but rather "boardspace," which extends far beyond that room's four walls. Directors' work takes place in corporate hallways, on the golf course, in restaurants and around the water cooler. Understand the strategic importance of conversations that occur in these informal settings. The boardroom may be "the place where important decisions are made, but it's not generally the place where minds are made up [or] arguments are put forward." Boardspace is unavoidably political, and many of politics' "unwritten rules" seem to have "been unwritten by men." However, being political shouldn't mean subjecting yourself to constant discomfort or being untrue to who you are. Though you must "play the game," strive to find an approach you can stomach.

Step 2: "The Written Rules of Engagement"

All board members are subject to various rules and regulations. These codes and the principles of corporate governance are crucial knowledge for any board candidate. The "corporate governance system" includes:

- **"Laws"** – The U.K. Companies Act 2006 and the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act are prominent examples.
- **"Regulations"** – Entities such as the U.K. Financial Services Authority create and enforce these standards.
- **"Contractual obligations"** – These include "the provisions of listing agreements" with markets where a company is listed.
- **"Codes of practice"** – U.K. directors should be familiar with the Financial Reporting Council's Combined Code.
- **"Accounting standards and informal...controls"** – Accounting rules, as well as shareholder and public opinion, can influence decisions about executive compensation and other issues.
- **"The environment, and social and community responsibility"** – Directors must not neglect these vital considerations.

Step 3: "The Unwritten Rules"

In addition to corporate politics and governance codes, women board candidates must understand board dynamics and culture. In a 2007 *Harvard Business Review* article, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli outlined two challenges that the traditionally male "board milieu" presents for women. First, people tend to resist female leadership. Second, they consider women who exhibit "male" leadership characteristics, such as "aggression [or] ambition," inauthentic. Yet when women lead in a way that is conventionally feminine – for example, by being empathetic or soft-spoken – their peers consider them too weak to lead. What should women caught in this "double bind" do?

"It may be years before the right opportunity arises, but you have to be prepared, emotionally, when it does arrive."

The key is to "be yourself," not a "woman playing a man's game." Don't be afraid or reluctant to engage in corporate politics. Look for things you have in common with others to enrich your conversations. Develop interests and hobbies that can serve as conversational topics. Lastly, don't confuse being charming with being manipulative. Most people in high-level leadership positions use their charm to get ahead; think of former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

"Being a director is more than having access to a particular room, to which nondirectors are denied entry."

As you get closer to directorship, become a diligent observer. Watch how board members interact, and try to understand the group's dynamic. Be selective in what you say; let your actions "weigh more." Finally, seek feedback. That is the most valuable tool for understanding your strengths and weaknesses and the impressions you make.

Step 4: "A Sense of Direction"

Now, define your aspirations to the board more specifically. For example, do you want to join a subsidiary or main board? And do you seek a nonexecutive or executive directorship? What is your timeline for advancement? Analyze your skills, experience, interests, talents and passions. Then consider which industries could use someone with your skill set. When selecting a target organization, do your homework. Visit its websites, read its annual reports, search for relevant articles in trade magazines or the general press, and study its mission statement. Identify who holds positions on its board. Are women serving as directors? Next, ask yourself what you need to do to become board-ready for that organization. Break your list down into manageable steps and place them on a timeline. For instance, you might create a plan to serve on a community board within one year to gain experience.

Step 5: "Cultivating Board Qualities"

Throughout history, women have masqueraded as men so society would take their achievements seriously. Charlotte Brontë submitted the *Jane Eyre* manuscript to a publisher under the pseudonym Currer Bell, since the literati of her time considered writing novels a man's pursuit. And French novelist Amantine Aurore Lucile Dupin went by the alias George Sand. Even Harry Potter series author Joanne Rowling goes by the initials J.K. because her publisher thought boys would prefer books

written by a man.

“Pre-presentations and corridor work, water-cooler chats, canvassing, lobbying – boards couldn’t operate without these.”

All humans assume different “personae” in various situations. In one environment, a woman may be a mother. In others, she might be a wife, a friend or a co-worker. So adopting different roles at work doesn’t make you inauthentic. Instead, think of the process as deploying different aspects of your character. To develop a credible board member persona, become aware of your actions and skills, then adapt them to the situation.

“Feedback provides the self-awareness you need, if you are to project the three Cs – confidence, competence [and] contribution.”

The word “gravitas” means “dignity or solemnity of manner.” For a board member, that means projecting qualities such as experience, authority, power, intelligence, confidence, astuteness and self-assurance. Gravitas is crucial to those aspiring to board positions. Candidates who demonstrate this quality will create a noteworthy impression on board selection committees. Look the part, act the part and project a professional image, so people want to place your name on the short list for board membership.

Step 6: “Setting out Your Stall”

Your résumé is an important part of your “personal marketing program” in that it represents you in the first step of the selection process. Always include three types of data: “qualifiers,” which include your educational and professional credentials and the skills that make you a viable candidate; “differentiators,” or the experiences and abilities that set you apart from competitors; and “personality markers,” or details about your life and interests that hint about your character.

“Ambition and aspirations gain power and energy when they become more specific.”

As you develop your résumé, think about what your target organization is looking for in a candidate. Know what you will say to persuade your interviewers that you are a good choice for the board. Many women struggle to “put their heads above the parapet” as they get closer to attaining board positions. Speaking at conferences, publishing articles and submitting letters to newspaper editors may help build your reputation and increase your visibility. Once you land an interview, emphasize your strong points by telling stories that demonstrate your successes.

Step 7: “Mind the Gap”

Women who wish to realize their potential in the workplace need to understand what makes them tick. Self-reflection is a powerful tool for understanding your own strengths and limitations and for “reading” others more effectively. Moreover, if you feel stuck, becoming self-aware will help you close the gap between who you are and who you want to be.

“Those with a plan do better than those who let their lives unfold and react to the opportunities and problems that fortune throws at them.”

Begin your “journey of self-discovery” by asking people you trust and respect for feedback. Personality tests, such as Johari’s Window or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, may also provide useful information. Confide in someone at work who is in a position to offer help and support, or urge your company to hire an executive coach to help you look at things from a fresh perspective. Acquire a mentor – someone to advise you and give you the benefit of his or her experience. Try new behaviors, even if that means operating outside your comfort zone.

Step 8: “Board Games”

Hundreds of organizations – including clubs, nonprofits, church groups, hospitals and industry associations – self-govern through boards. These groups present valuable opportunities not only to gain board experience, but also to network, learn about governing rules and conventions, and contribute to your community. A board position with these types of organizations also looks good on your résumé. However, take care to choose an appointment that provides the right experience for your long-term goals. Ensure that the board position will help you make a worthwhile contribution, gain new contacts, and increase your visibility in your community and industry.

“Don’t be tempted to regard your first board position as a reward for all your networking and hard work and start to coast.”

Although networking can help you make progress toward a board position, at some point you’ll likely need to enlist a headhunter. Find out which headhunters work in your field and make board placements. Introduce yourself and explain all your qualifications. Then, touch base regularly.

What the Business Community Can Do

Chairmen and CEOs can take steps to increase the number of women board members. For example:

- Make sure every list of possible candidates, even the short lists, includes women.
- Ask search consultants to look for female contenders.
- Help women executives find positions as nonexecutive directors in other companies.
- Emphasize diversity in all aspects of business.
- Keep old-boy networks and masculine pastimes from dominating networking and socializing within the firm.
- Remove biased selection criteria that exclude candidates from “pink-collar functions,” such as human resources.
- Promote a gender-neutral environment in the boardroom.

About the Authors

Peninah Thomson is an executive coach and partner at Praesta Partners in the U.K. **Jacey Graham** specializes in diversity strategy and is currently a partner at Brook Graham. **Tom Lloyd** has authored five books, including *The Nice Company*.
