

The Non-Executive Director

Photo: Getty images

How to write a resume for a NED role

Let's assume it's the right time for you to become an NED. You've sought out the right experience, you've built your brand and your values and you're ready to bear a different kind of responsibility. If you have reached this point, you are prepared for the road ahead, and now it is time to prepare your resume.

This, unfortunately, is where so many great executives stumble. Time after time, I have needed to send senior execs back to work on their resume before I can help them to get a NED role. It's dramatic – some of their resumes are little more than LinkedIn profiles, others are more like memoirs about their executive career.

Part of the trouble is that executives sometimes trust that non-executive boards will know who they are already. This isn't unfounded – there is often some connection or other between the candidate and the board.



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Undoubtedly though, there will be at least one or two people on the board who don't know them – and with them the resume needs to work much harder. So how do you make sure your resume is ready for a NEB level of selection?

Reframe your resume around NED-related content

Of course, when writing a resume for a NED role, many of the same principles apply as when you're writing an executive resume or forming your brand story. Common sense also still applies. However, some of the requirements for non-executives are completely different.

The most important difference between an executive board and a non-executive board is that the latter is made up of trainers, not athletes. They have already passed through the crucible of operational work, and they have now found a different way of being. Just as the best sports trainers aren't shouting from the sidelines but are saving their words for the changing rooms, NEDs lead with a calmer kind of energy, and they know how to guide and train instead of fix.

Therefore, when you come to write a resume for the nonexecutive board, you need to place emphasis on the right qualities. The coaching and training aspects of your experience should be at the fore, for instance. You also want to showcase your aptitude for managing crises more than your ability to increase turnover. Likewise, you want to demonstrate that you are a safe pair of hands, not just a dynamic personality that people will follow.

It's worth reiterating that not every executive is ready for this transition. If it is the right time for you to become an NED – [read my first blog in the NED serie](#) -your resume needs to demonstrate that you're the right fit for this kind of leadership.



Take your company out of the equation

Next, you need to focus on the essentials. Once you have collated all the relevant experience you have, you will almost certainly need to shrink it.

Everything should fit onto one two-sided page. That document will need to focus on what's strictly factual, while also inspiring curiosity in those who read it so that it leads to an invitation for a face-to-face interview.

What you definitely don't want is a book about your company. Non-executive boards are not so interested in what you have built so much as what you have overcome. So take your company context out of your resume and focus on the challenges you have faced – HR or product recall issues, for instance. Then you can show how this experience translates directly to the NED role you're applying for.

Adapt your resume to the company's present and future

It's worth noting that not every company has the same kind of governance. Some NEDs journey closely with executives and are responsible for appointing the C-suite; other NEDs assemble just six times a year to act as a sounding board. Often your responsibilities will be determined by the stage the company is in. So, before you begin tailoring your resume, you need to get your bearings.

Is the company building up or stabilising? Scaling down or preparing for M&As? If it's the latter, and you've never been through a merger or acquisition, or never completed due diligence, you should challenge yourself on whether you're applying for the right role. Likewise, if you've only ever been an executive in startup companies, you're unlikely to be a good fit for a holding company.



At the moment, I'm in the process of completing a search for a non-executive for a family office.

Their long-term view is to develop the assets of the foundation for generations to come, and right now they're in the process of writing documents that will act as guidelines for how the company is governed. If you were a candidate, your resume would need to demonstrate how your experience aligns with both the company's current stage and their future vision.

Too often, executives simply don't have time or don't take to rewrite their resume, but to apply for an NED role, you need to make time. Here I can offer some guidance. Get in touch with me to start bringing your way forward into focus.

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