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Executive Search & Board Advisory

2% MORE WOMEN ON BOARDS



"When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity" John F. Kennedy

A common theme in business conversation is gender diversity, with a focus on the percentage of women to men in the Boardroom. A number of senior Executives believe that to achieve an increase in women in the Boardroom they need to ACT NOW, but the reality is that such an approach is too late. Rather they need to START NOW in building a long term sustainable pipeline of female talent that will achieve this increase in the future.

The current statistics highlight that 26% of the total Directors in the ASX 100 are female (Figure 1: November 2016). This is a 2% increase on the numbers from a year earlier. However, is the discussion around numbers more of a distraction rather than a remedy for dealing with the why and how behind appointing women to Boards.

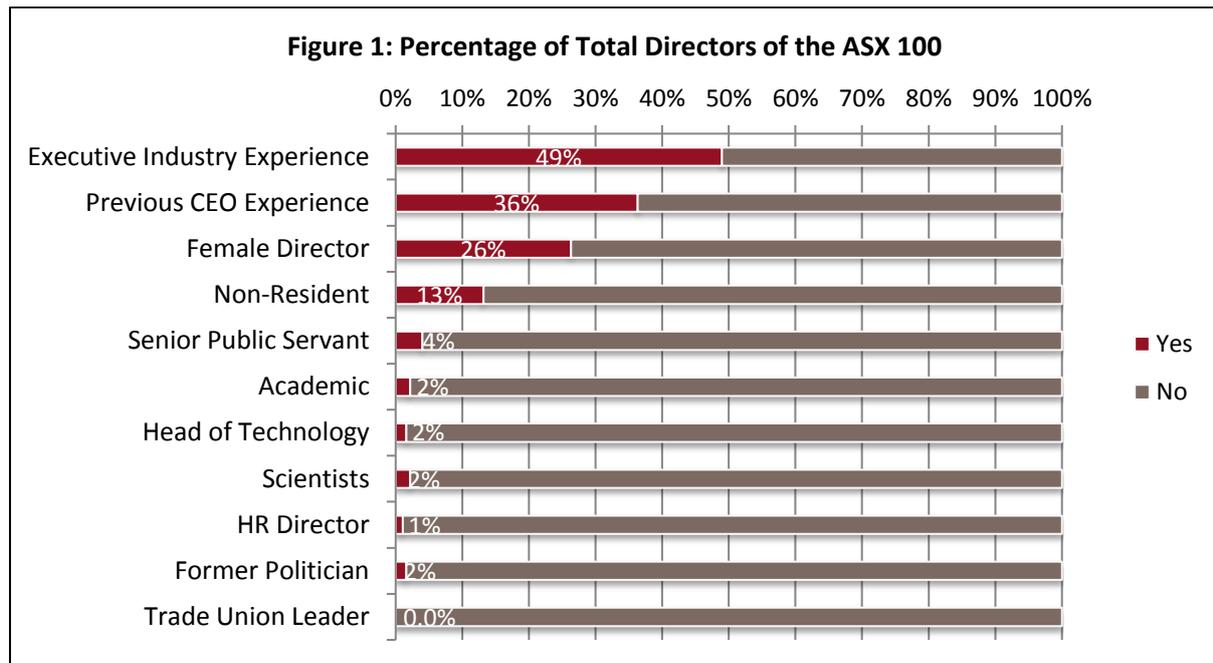
As Boards seek new Directors they tend to prefer those who have had P&L management responsibility in their career; that is, executives who may have been a Chief Executive Officer ('CEO') or a business unit, regional head, or General Manager.

When you examine the composition of executive teams in the ASX 100, the number of men directly reporting to the CEO far outweighs women, thus, limiting the pipeline of female talent for CEO and Board roles. This is exacerbated by the fact that women tend to have

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greater representation in functional support roles reporting to the CEO, as opposed to P&L or revenue roles.

Thus the obvious current issue is that there are few women in P&L leadership roles. A medium to long term solution is for organisations to concentrate on these issues around the current gender pipeline, by building a long-term plan that provides a comprehensive career path for women to develop and succeed as senior executives with P&L responsibility and ultimately Board directors.



Thus to impact the debate around women in the Boardroom more work has to be done in designing appropriate career paths for women. Otherwise, the discussion will not advance. While it does sound obvious, there is serious concern in the Executive ranks that currently there are simply very few women with P&L responsibility, leading sizeable divisions, regions or business units.

This leads us to examine broader issues, including education. With the world moving to an ever increasing reliance on technology and science, the number of women undertaking science or computer science degrees is less than men, and, the amount of girls studying sciences at high school is less than boys. We, therefore, have a pipeline challenge, not just in the Boardroom, but at the grass roots across our current and future industries.

“As opposed to focusing on today’s numbers we encourage a greater discussion around the how and why,” said Gregory Robinson, Managing Partner, Blenheim Partners. One Board Director commented, “We don’t need any more lawyers or accountants in the Boardroom, it is desperately in need of Executives who have had ownership of a division or company. We need people who can bring heavyweight experience to the Board to help us for the future. It is hard to appoint women to such roles if there are so few with that type of relevant experience. We need to think this through.”



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