



Writing Your First Board Biography

Positioning Yourself for Corporate
Directorship

With compliments from **EgonZehnder**



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Section 1

How to Write a Board Biography



How to Write a Board Biography

You already have plenty of experience writing an executive biography (likely multiple biographies), and you are now at the point in your career when you need to draft a Board biography. A Board biography is not the same as your executive biography. An Executive biography is a narrative of your resume. *A Board biography should speak to your specific skills in relation to serving on a Board.* It should include leadership, mentoring, profit and loss responsibility, governance knowledge, board exposure and management experiences. For some, this will also include speciality experiences like e-commerce, digital/technology, human resources, M&A, and marketing.

Your Board biography is the foundation for landing your first (or next) Board seat, and requires you to articulate the value you could bring to a company as a Board member. Over the years, we've seen many versions of Board biographies, and based on our 50 years of advising Boards, we've created this guide to help you draft your own Board biography.



What Should Be in Your Board Biography

- The first step in writing your biography is to take some time to reflect on your career and determine the most important experiences you could share with the Board. Your key skills and expertise should be focused on 3-4 areas of your career that you would be considered an expert in (by yourself, by colleagues, and by outsiders). This is more than a laundry list of regular corporate experiences; don't simply write "strategy and leadership." You must *show* this expertise in your experiences rather than simply *write* it. For example, your headline could be "Digital Leader," "Transformational Leader," or "M&A Expert," but you will want to provide details of how you achieved that expertise.
- If you have international experience, that is an important highlight. Give details about which markets and countries you have specific experience in and what your role(s) were. If you have specialized knowledge in a certain region, that is worth noting as well.
- Think about what your conversations would be like in a Board interview – what topics would you gravitate toward and what questions would you be interested in asking?

What Should Be in Your Board Biography

- Your Board biography should always answer three standard questions:

- 1. What is your role in your current (or most senior) reporting structure?**

The level at which you report to (C-level, C-1 or C-2) is significant and also dependent upon the size of your company. C-2 for a \$50 billion company means you can still have a sizeable P&L, face time with your Board of Directors, and critical exposure to the Street—all of which belongs in your Board biography.

- 2. What, if any, is your P&L experience?**

P&L is typically the most asked about experience for executives when we are recruiting Board Directors. It is not a requirement, but many companies believe that executives who have clearly managed profit and loss will bring something extra to the table. If you have had that experience – even a small amount – you should include that experience in your biography.

- 3. What exposure have you had to Boards and Boardrooms?**

Most executives have spent at least some time in the Boardroom with the Directors of their company. If you are presenting on a regular basis to the Board (particularly if you have a non-traditional P&L role), highlight the level of exposure and guidance you are receiving from your Board. Do you get regular feedback on your performance from the Board? Have you served on a Board? If so, have you held committee responsibilities?



What You Should Leave on the Cutting Room Floor

- If you have served on a board in the past (corporate, non-profit or other), don't inflate your experience.

For example, if you were on the board of a consumer packaged goods company, unless you have other experience specifically in CPG as an executive, you are not an expert in CPG and shouldn't write your biography as though you are.

- Avoid broad descriptors and industry jargon.
Don't simply say you were involved in strategy setting—explain what you did and how you helped the company implement and measure the effectiveness of the strategy. Try to limit your use of jargon and be deliberate and thoughtful as you describe your experience, especially if the Board seat you are seeking is in a different industry than your executive experience.
- Leave out your early career and minor roles you have held.
Focus on significant experience from the past decade.
- No need to give specific dates in the biography.
You will want to give a sense of time in terms of the number of years you held a role or when you began and ended roles, but you do not need the month and date. Save that for your resume.



Keep in Mind

- Tailor your Board biography for the type of Board you are hoping to join. The experiences and skills you highlight for a non-profit educational Board would be different than a public company financial services company.
- Indicate that you understand the difference between oversight and management. If serving on a Board, and ultimately building your Board portfolio is the next step in your career, take the time to make sure your biography shows that you understand the difference between being an executive (doing) and a Board Director (advising). A CEO's greatest fear is having a Board Director who gets too involved "in the weeds" and does not know how to share guidance and advice without trying to operate and lead.
- This is not your Board resume. That is a separate document. Your Board biography is an introduction to who you are and what value you would bring to that board.



Section 2

Sample Board Biographies

General Manager



CANDIDATE NAME

TITLE

COMPANY

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

CANDIDATE is TITLE for COMPANY, accountable for revenue, profit, and client satisfaction in Japan, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East and Africa. In his role, CANDIDATE has responsibility for COMPANY's worldwide results, which exceeded \$XX billion in YEAR.

CANDIDATE has over XX years of business leadership experience in multinational environments, having lived and held executive positions on four continents. During his career, he has built a reputation for operational excellence, innovative strategic thinking, working with the highest level of integrity, and a deep and passionate commitment to COMPANY clients.

He began his career at COMPANY in REGION in YEAR as a software customer engineer. His first significant leadership role for the company was leading the \$XX Global Services business in REGION in YEAR. After returning the unit to growth, he became General Manager of COMPANY in REGION, where he oversaw COMPANY's operations in 20 countries.

In YEAR, CANDIDATE moved to REGION to become General Manager for COMPANY. He was responsible for over \$XX in revenue and approximately 60,000 employees. He led all of COMPANY's business operations, had full profit and loss ownership, and ensured risk management, compliance and business controls across COMPANY's business units in REGION(S).

In YEAR, CANDIDATE became General Manager of a new business unit based in REGION. His mission was to drive business expansion in high growth economies across Asia Pacific, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East and Africa. All told, the unit encompassed over \$XX in revenue and 220,000 employees in 140 countries. During his tenure, the business delivered significant revenue and margin growth, gained share, outpaced the market, and increased at least one point per year as a share of total COMPANY revenue.

Currently, CANDIDATE is a member of the ADVISORY BOARD. In YEAR, ORGANIZATION named CANDIDATE International CEO of the Year. He holds a Business Administration degree from UNIVERSITY and a postgraduate degree from UNIVERSITY. He is fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, English and Italian. Today, he resides in CITY.

Compliance/Legal Executive



Candidate Name

Title

Company (\$ Revenue)

Fortune ranking (if applicable) Industry

Location

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

CANDIDATE is an accomplished business advisor of publicly traded global companies. With more than XX years of experience in highly regulated industries, including INDUSTRY, CANDIDATE has developed a deep expertise in identifying, evaluating and mitigating risks as a business advisor to the board and senior management and has a proven track record of leading compliance and legal functions as well as managing large teams across continents.

Since YEAR, CANDIDATE has served as the TITLE of COMPANY (a Fortune XXX company), reporting to the Board of Directors and the Chief Executive Officer. Her primary responsibilities include advising the company on governmental investigations and leading and managing a global compliance function, including setting strategic direction. Notably, CANDIDATE led the negotiation of a Corporate Integrity Agreement (CIA) with the Government and prepared the company for compliance with the CIA. During her tenure with COMPANY, CANDIDATE had frequent interactions with Federal regulators including a Federal Monitor. CANDIDATE'S global compliance function includes more than XXX legal and compliance professionals, which spans across REGION(S) with a budget over \$XX. She works extensively with the COMPANY board, including presenting and providing training to the full board, presenting at the almost monthly compliance committee meetings, and attending and presenting at the audit committee meeting.

Prior to joining COMPANY, CANDIDATE served as TITLE and TITLE in public and private companies and the government during times of significant change. She joined COMPANY to lead SEGMENT/GROUP and COMPANY as TITLE when each were under federal government investigation. She served as COMPANY'S TITLE prior to a major acquisition and transformation of the executive team.

CANDIDATE has large law firm experience, including FIRM, FIRM and FIRM. She is a member of the STATE(S) Bar.

CANDIDATE is serving on the ADVISORY BOARD of the ORGANIZATION and has served on the boards of the ORGANIZATION and ORGANIZATION. She currently resides in CITY.

Qualified Financial Expert



Candidate Name

Phone number(s)

Email(s)

COMPANY (\$XX revenue – Fortune XXX)

Executive Vice President

(DATE – Announced Retirement Date)

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Reporting directly to the CEO since YEAR, CANDIDATE has had a broad range of responsibilities in a highly complex and regulated industry which supplements her XX-year board experience at COMPANY. She has been one of the top three executives at COMPANY for over XX years. She had operational P&L responsibility over a business with EBITDA approaching \$XX and successfully implemented a strategy designed to mitigate its earnings volatility. She currently leads the SECTOR/GROUP, which includes DESCRIPTION. She also leads the department that is responsible for helping in the preparation of the company's financial statements and for translating those financial statements into information used to support all filings with regulatory agencies. CANDIDATE'S background would qualify her as a financial expert.

CANDIDATE has been responsible for leading COMPANY through its most important challenges and opportunities, often in complicated and highly visible regulatory, investor and media environments, including crisis management events, such as DESCRIPTION. She has been central to the company's most significant regulatory, operational, financial and M&A events, including DESCRIPTION. She works closely with COMPANY'S board and is knowledgeable about current governance practices and has actively participated in all board meetings since YEAR. She also participates in the board's Audit Committee meetings and has been one of four active participants on the company's quarterly earnings calls for XX years.

In addition to her P&L, strategy and financial background, CANDIDATE has extensive regulatory experience with numerous federal and state agencies. For well over XX years, she DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE. She also chairs the COMPANY'S Foundation.

CANDIDATE has served on numerous Steering Committees, which provide management oversight over certain key functions at COMPANY, including FUNCTIONS.

She was recently elected to the Board of Directors of COMPANY, DESCRIBE COMPANY AND COMMITTEE ROLES. She served as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of COMPANY, a XXXX employee, \$XX revenue TYPE OF COMPANY, where she served as chair of the Compensation Committee and was a member of the Audit & Compliance Committee. CANDIDATE also served on the board of directors of COMPANY, DESCRIBE COMPANY AND REVENUE.

She completed UNIVERSITY program. She also completed director development programs at ORGANIZATION.

Technology Executive



Candidate Name

Title, Company

CANDIDATE has served on the following boards:

COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

CANDIDATE has more than XX years of INDUSTRY/SPECIALIZATION expertise. He founded and serves as CEO of COMPANY, a non-profit organization that has funded XX portfolio companies across the SECTORS in REGION(S). CANDIDATE has now raised more than \$XX of funding for the program. He leads relationships with local community and policy leaders as well as with executive and innovation teams from COMPANY's Global Partners: DESCRIPTION OF WHO PARTNERS ARE, THEIR SIZE, REVENUE AND REGION(S).

CANDIDATE has more than a decade's worth of energy, policy, and technology expertise. He founded and serves as CEO of COMPANY, a non-profit organization that has funded 82 portfolio companies across SECTORS in REGIONS. This multi-stage portfolio has raised over \$XX of funding following COMPANY'S initial investment. The organization was seeded with funding from ORGANIZATION, and CANDIDATE has now raised over \$XX of funding for the program and its associated venture capital fund. He leads relationships with local community and policy leaders as well as with executive and innovation teams from COMPANY'S Global Partners: DESCRIPTION OF WHO PARTNERS ARE, THEIR SIZE, REVENUE AND REGION(S). COMPANY works with these companies to navigate their innovation and clean energy deployment strategies.

In addition to leading COMPANY, CANDIDATE is TITLE at ORGANIZATION, an investment and philanthropic platform where he shares his company's model with communities around the world.

Before moving to LOCATION in YEAR, CANDIDATE served as a TITLE at COMPANY, where he led DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES. He was appointed by NAME to Chair the NAME OF ADVISORY BOARD.

CANDIDATE has received numerous local and national awards, including AWARD(S). He graduated cum laude from UNIVERSITY with a DEGREE(S). He received his POST-GRAD DEGREE from UNIVERSITY.



Section 3

Board Biography Template

Areas of Expertise

AREAS OF EXPERTISE



Section 4

About the Egon Zehnder Board Practice



Egon Zehnder is the world's leadership advisory firm, sharing one goal: to transform people, organizations, and the world through great leadership. We know what great leaders can do and are passionate about delivering the best leadership solutions for our clients. As One Firm, our more than 450 Consultants in 68 offices and 40 countries bring our individual strengths to form one powerful collaborative team. We partner closely with public and private corporations, family-owned enterprises, and nonprofit and government agencies to provide Board advisory services, CEO search and succession, executive search, executive assessment, leadership development, and organizational transformation. We share a commitment to and pride in doing work that contributes to successful careers, stronger companies, and a better world. For more information visit www.egonzehnder.com and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

The Egon Zehnder Board Practice

Boards today face more complex challenges than ever. They must balance many issues, from shareholder activism to cybersecurity and from compliance issues to diversity and innovation. With our more than 50 years of experience in executive search, we know what it takes to put together an effective board. We also know that no one person has all the types of expertise needed today, which is why bringing together a diverse set of perspectives and backgrounds is more critical than ever. Our clients — who include many of the most prestigious and innovative organizations in the world — trust us to find the right fit, wherever that search may take us. We are also deeply committed to diversity and inclusion and feel passionately about bringing the value of multiple views and differences into the boardroom. Our team leads more than 500 boardroom engagements annually.

With a truly global network of consultants and a commitment to finding not just the obvious candidates but also those who are less known, we are able to bring you deeply qualified leaders with the skills to handle today's biggest issues.

Get in Touch

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