



Leading Through Disruption

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Judy Reinsdorf

A Director's Role Is To See Around Corners And To Think Longer-Term



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Judy Reinsdorf, a director at Enpro Industries, Nurix Therapeutics, and NACD NJ, shared her key leadership lessons with me in my latest "Leading Through Disruption" interview. [Subscribe here](#) to receive future interviews.

Lauterbach: What are the best ways to onboard new directors?

Reinsdorf: There is no such thing as one-size-fits-all. You need to customize the onboarding experience, leaning heavily on the management team to share knowledge of the company. The company history and current strategy is a

vital piece of onboarding.

A healthy boardroom culture will enable the assimilation of new directors in a way that allows them to speak up as soon as possible because they understand the dynamics in the boardroom. One of the best practices is assigning a mentor to a new board member. This facilitates a dialogue before board meetings and gives the new director context for the upcoming discussion.

Lauterbach: How does a board become a team?

Reinsdorf: There's no replacement for a strong, effective, and seasoned lead director or chair. Your chair sets the tone in the boardroom, ensuring everyone's voice is heard; they facilitate reaching a consensus after a healthy, robust dialogue. Knowing and deeply respecting each other enables directors to challenge one another's views in a skillful way that is not personal. It is a balancing act of always keeping in mind what's best for the business and the company's stakeholders.

Lauterbach: What has changed in demands for the qualifications of directors today versus ten years ago?

Reinsdorf: As the risk landscape evolves, we see more non-traditional profiles in the boardroom. Marrying the risk landscape with the skills matrix is vital. Ten years ago, you were used to seeing sitting or former CEOs, CFOs, and COOs as a typical board profile. Today, you are likely to also see functional leaders in the boardroom, as well, such as CHROs, CIOs, CMOs, and CLOs. This reflects the changing risk landscape.

Lauterbach: What is the most effective way for a board director to learn about a company's culture?

Reinsdorf: The hardest part of being a director is making sure you have an understanding of the company's culture and that you can influence that culture. It is challenging because the board meetings are infrequent, and a director shouldn't get into the weeds or become too operational. The management runs the company day-to-day. That's their job. Your job is to have big-picture thinking, see around corners, and think longer term while providing insights from the

different boards you're on or many other situations you've been in.

Sometimes, boards are either criticized for not understanding the culture or perhaps supporting a culture that is too aggressive regarding sales practices or not robust enough regarding safety. Boards need access to unfiltered data about the culture. What are you experiencing when you're visiting a site, a location, or talking to a customer? Are you getting insights from the employees? What is said about the company on Glassdoor?

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Creating the opportunity to meet with employees is important. In that way, you can pressure test what you hear about the culture from management, comparing the information to the data in culture surveys. There is a narrative that surrounds the data. For example, you review the company's hotline calls and see how many employees stay anonymous while raising a significant concern.

If most employees are making anonymous complaints, it doesn't add up with a culture where people are supposedly comfortable raising an issue with their employer. It is important to triangulate the data points that you're getting and make sure that they are in sync. If they aren't, you should trust your instincts and go deeper.

Lauterbach: How do you address the talent portfolio in a boardroom?

Reinsdorf: Boards have three major data points while reviewing the talent. You watch people presenting in the meetings, and it gives you some insights into how they manage complexity and how they analyze topics. This is your first data point.

The second point is your formal talent reviews, which happen at least once a year. Boards want to see succession plans for all critical roles in the business and understand how executives develop their bench, their talent pipelines.

The third point is data from the employee surveys. High

employee engagement scores in a functional area or business unit would indicate that the executive has solid leadership skills and has built a good rapport with employees. Finally, boards can be proactive and get to know the executives acting as a sounding board aligned with their individualized expertise.

Lauterbach: What are recurring topics in your conversations with executives that you did not come up three years ago?

Reinsdorf: The business and the personal worlds are not as separate anymore. How we support executives and employees in managing stress is an important topic—mental health was not really on the agenda before the pandemic. Social, political, and cultural issues have found their way into the boardroom.

Lauterbach: What X-factors would you look for while hiring a new CEO?

Reinsdorf: Leadership is about articulating the vision. Does a candidate have a clear path to enable his/her vision? Personal resilience and the ability to pivot and navigate complexity are much more prominent skills on the job description after COVID.

I look for somebody who is transparent and willing to be vulnerable about their shortcomings because these low-ego qualities can also lead to employee engagement. People do not want to work for a robot. No offense to the AI experts out there. They want to work for somebody who has made mistakes, picked him or herself up, and kept going. The vulnerability enables likeability, which is critical for a leadership role.

Lauterbach: What are the early influencers that shaped you as an executive and as a director?

Reinsdorf: I had a boss who I didn't admire. He was all about the show—having the visibility but not necessarily doing the work. An early lesson from this experience was that the job should not be about one person. Instead, it should always be about the company's mission. I learned that the rest would follow if I worked hard on mission and purpose.

As a director, I learned a lot from the selfless ways in which experienced directors I've served with have approached their board work. Again, it was never about them and always about what was best for the company.

Lauterbach: What advice do you give first-time directors?

Reinsdorf: Before agreeing to serve, you should ask yourself whether you can devote your time and focused attention to further the mission and purpose of this particular company. If the answer is yes, then I would say roll-up your sleeves and dive in.

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