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## HOW HEADHUNTERS CAN HELP YOU FIND YOUR NEXT NED ROLE

I'm often asked how to break into the mysterious world of NED recruitment, which can seem like a closed shop to those on the outside. But let me reassure you that with the right connections, contacts and understanding about how it all works, you can use the headhunting system to your advantage in finding your first NED role.

Firstly, it's important to understand that a headhunter's role is not to find you a job. Specialised headhunters are employed to search for the best candidates and approach them directly. They work for the hiring organisation – not the candidate. This is very different from the type of recruitment agency who act on the candidate's behalf.

However, if you are targeting NED positions, then executive search consultants (headhunters) are likely to play a key role in your journey. So firstly, you'll need to make yourself visible to them. Understanding how the system works is the rest of the jigsaw.

### WHY COMPANIES USE HEADHUNTERS

The companies looking to fill top NED roles are often discreet about their hiring intentions. They don't advertise, so you can't apply in the normal way.

Headhunting is an expensive game – but companies understand that using a specialist to search the market for a small pool of top candidates is well worth the investment. This is a tried-and-tested approach, with headhunting firms filling a significant proportion of NED vacancies every year. And if you make yourself known to the right people and forge the right connections, doors will open.

It's also worth noting that the NED recruitment process is much more independent these days, as roles are no longer appointed based on "who you know". This means getting noticed by the top headhunters is more important than ever.

## USING HEADHUNTERS TO FIND YOUR NEXT NED ROLE

One of the methods headhunters use, is making connections with people like me, who are in touch with a large number of emerging NED candidates.

I'm connected with over 100 recruiters and headhunters, who regularly send me opportunities that I pass on to NED prospects. I enjoy bringing people together and get great feedback from people who've been able to raise their profile, expand their network and secure NED roles from joining my community.

## 5 STEPS TO GETTING NOTICED BY NED-SPECIFIC HEADHUNTERS

### 1. RAISE YOUR PROFILE

The first step is learning how to market yourself. Marketing always starts with brand awareness, so think of yourself as a personal brand. You need to be active on social platforms, develop a strong USP, a great photo and highlight specific experience/expertise, related to the roles you're seeking. LinkedIn is where recruiters actively search for candidates. Not only do you need a current profile with a recent, high-quality photo, you'll also need to tailor your profile, to ensure you're discoverable by the right people.

### 2. LEARN ABOUT THE SECTOR

Breaking into the world of becoming a NED may seem daunting, but the more you learn about it, the more successful you're likely to be. Coaching and training absolutely put you on the right path, but it's also important for to build up a more general understanding of what's happening in the industry. Recruiters such as Korn Ferry and DirectorBank have regular subscription newsletters to keep you abreast of developments, new insights and opportunities.

### 3. BUILD YOUR NETWORK

Networking and marketing yourself are key to the NED recruitment game. If you want to be in the NED consideration set, you'll need to know the headhunter – or they will need to find you. There are no other options.

Your personal network is a key pillar of NED success. My community helps candidates develop strong networks, with exclusive access to my industry connections and companies. These organisations want to benefit from board members with a strong network of their own, and this can be crucial to making a hiring decision. So, nurture your own "little black book" to boost your prospects.

### 4. FORGE DEEP RELATIONSHIPS

Quality is better than quantity here, so taking the time to build 1:1 connections with the right people is as important as attending networking events, if not more so. Going for lunch or coffee allows people to understand far more about you as a person, than a quick introduction at a large event or social media exchange could.

### 5. MAINTAIN YOUR PROFILE

Once you've made connections, it's important to keep yourself in the forefront of recruiters' minds. Headhunters connect with hundreds of people, so it's important to strategise how you can stay on their radar. A check-in email, sharing an article you've written, or an invitation to an event, will all help to keep your profile high and put you in the running when relevant opportunities come up.

Are you a Senior C Suite executive looking to find their first NED role and to start to build their portfolio career?  
Contact Sharon to start your journey, and follow us on social media for the latest NED insights.



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Sharon is a Senior Business Leader with a track record in driving sustainable revenue growth, restructuring businesses and developing iconic brands across global markets. She has honed her leadership and advisory skills in Board & Executive roles at the BBC and Microsoft Corporation, and through her work as a Chairman, Non-Executive Director and executive coach.