

Member Profile

An Interview with WCD member, Estelle Metayer, Chapter Chair, WCD Montreal

By Judy Macdonald



Q1. What was your first corporate board and how did you obtain the seat?

My first board was with Ubisoft, a publicly quoted company, based in France. I was contacted directly by the chief of staff of the company, offering me a board seat. Although I had never worked with the company previously, they had noticed my expertise during a short informal discussion on future trends we had a couple of years earlier.

Q2. What is the one thing you wish you knew before coming onto a board?

I wished I had more background on family businesses and the particular role of the independent board member in that context, even if the company is publicly quoted.

Q3. What is your favorite quality in a board colleague?

Fierce independence and critical thinking.

Q4. Your background is in competitive and strategic intelligence. What are some of the key trends boards should be mindful of when using predictive analytics to identifying the next issues?

The challenge for board directors is the array of trends they have to be aware of. Apart from those affecting the specific industry of the company for which they are on the board, we should monitor macro-economic trends, consumer trends (digitization etc...), technology, societal etc. The trends I am closely following now because of the boards I serve include: new technologies (blockchain, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data protection, sensors and robotics), consumers (millennials, the new customer journey and relation to a brand, etc...), economic (the rise of Asia, urbanization, wealth distribution) as well as supply chain new practices emerging around the world.

Q5. You seem to love travel and you are an accomplished pilot. How did you become interested in such pursuits and where are your favorite places to visit?

Flying was a way for me to exercise a different part of my brain- as I am dealing in my professional with mostly intellectual issues, I find it soothing to be able to have my hands into an aircraft engine, and shift to a different mindset. Canada offered a wonderful playground to that effect.

In terms of travelling, Italy is probably on my favorite list of places- most particularly Venice, which I always find magical, and Northern Tuscany. There are also gems in Canada- Vancouver Islands, the Okenagan Valley etc...

Q6. What piece of advice would you give to yourself 20 years ago?

To stay fit.

Q7. You are fluent in an amazing six languages, how do language skills help you as a board member and do you believe being at least conversant in two languages is an advantage for those seeking board placements?

It has in fact been essential in my career as a board member. Many companies wish to include foreign board members- even if meetings are held in English, speaking the local language is essential to build rapport with the executive team and fellow local board members - as well to employees on the shop floor. It also avoids having to have all documents translated and saves time for the management team.

Speaking French for example, positions me well for French or Swiss boards wishing to include someone with experience in North America, but who understands the language and hence the culture of the head office.

Q8. What is your advice for aspiring board members?

Seek out board positions- identify the companies you would like to serve and define your strategy to get the decision makers to know you. Companies will not approach you based on your CV alone- they need to have seen you act, make decisions, and interact with peers. So get involved in events or activities where you will have the ability to work aside decision makers.

I would add that you need to identify the skills you could bring that are unique to a board- when many equally qualified candidates get reviewed, those will make the difference. On top of mind, I see a growing need for directors who are experts in supply chains, IT, the Asian market, and M&A.

Q9. What is one thing people would be surprised to know about you?

I am an introvert. I have learned to understand that my influence at the board table will never be based on multiple and repetitive comments.

Q10. The Montreal chapter seems to have lots of members who have recently gotten on a board. What is the secret to the success? Does your

chapter help its members to surface opportunities?

We have carefully looked at who is appointing board members and are creating opportunities for them to get to know our members, as well as prospective board members. For example, we have organized meetings with institutional shareholders where our members could be introduced, which have resulted rapidly into new board appointments.

On those occasions, we also suggested that each member brings a guest, a woman who they think would have potential to be a board member.

We will also invite high potential executives to attend one WCD chapter meeting as guests - hence they have the opportunity to get to network. Most of them ended up joining our chapter once they got their first board seat.

In addition, we have over the past three years, created a circle of trust between members - when a board position is open, we will intensively refer each other. Personally, when asked, I only refer women candidates to companies who contact us for suggestions.

Finally, the timing is right - with abysmal diversity numbers on boards, Canada has a lot of catching up to do, and more companies are pressured by stakeholders to increase diversity in their boards. Our members have developed a tight connection and are opening doors.



