

ACCENTURE CYBERSECURITY FORUM

WOMEN'S COUNCIL

**Prospects for women
in cyber on boards**

Virtual Roundtable Summary

DISCUSSION

On June 11, 2019, the Accenture Cybersecurity Forum (ACF) Women's Council hosted a discussion on prospects for women in cyber on boards. Women CISOs and senior security executives from several organizations and industries joined the conversation with our guest subject-matter expert, a principal of a global executive search firm. The conversation focused on the challenges that female CISOs face in attaining opportunities to serve on boards, and how women can prepare themselves for board nomination and service.

The session was conducted under the Chatham House Rule: ACF Women's Council members are free to use the information shared, provided that neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers or participants is revealed. Below is a high-level summary of the discussion, without attribution, for both attendees and those who were unable to participate.

The business case for board diversity

Publicly held companies are making progress in diversifying their boards of directors. According to research by a leading executive search firm, 40 percent of new directors added to the Fortune 500 in 2018 were women. Currently, the research found, 23 percent of all Fortune 500 directors are women, and there is significant demand by boards to add women directors.

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Preparing to be considered for a board position

CISOs can take a number of steps to put themselves forth as board candidates:

1. **Be proactive**—Keep executive search firms and your professional network apprised of your interest and expertise in board service. Serving on the boards of non-profits and trade associations can help build experience and exposure. In addition, talking with your CEO and members of your own board, speaking at conferences, and engaging at the local and national levels with the [National Association of Corporate Directors](#) and the [Women Corporate Directors](#) can be useful.
2. **Build breadth and depth**—The strongest board candidates have demonstrated a breadth of business acumen in addition to skills in a specific discipline, such as cybersecurity. Executives who have proven they can successfully manage a variety of business functions can add value at the strategic level and are familiar with the broader business issues facing the board and the enterprise. Ways of building breadth include:
 - Engaging in the governance of joint ventures
 - Taking on an operational role in a division or business unit
 - Seeking opportunities to participate in broader strategic decisions about the enterprise
3. **Build your case**—CISOs who have spent all or most of their careers at one company will typically have a longer story to tell about their accomplishments, qualifications and career progress. Executive recruiters are interested in hearing about a candidate's role in a company transformation, changes in scope of responsibility, contributions to company growth and other specific points of impact.

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4. **Leverage mentors**—CISOs should start their search for mentors internally. Talking with your CEO and members of your own board—people who have seen you in action—is one important way to raise your board candidacy profile. Conversations with the CEO should focus on mutual understanding of the value of having employees serve on boards. Be ready to articulate what you can bring to a board, and what perspectives you can bring back to your company.
5. **Be patient**—Think in terms of years, not months, in pursuing a board position. An executive recruiter's search for board candidates can take six months or more, and includes assessment of cultural fit with the rest of the board. CISOs interested in board service should plan steps in their journey and plant many seeds along the way.

The interview process

Cultural fit and competency are the key selection criteria. An evaluation of functional skills is usually possible by reviewing a resume. A candidate's first-round interviews with board members on the selection committee are conversational and in person; phone calls with other board members may also be required. The best candidates will want an opportunity to speak one-on-one with the CEO.

Red flags

Before accepting a position on a board, consider the following:

1. Do you have the approval of your CEO to accept an outside board position?
2. Do you and the CEO agree on how your board experience can contribute to your own enterprise?

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3. Are you confident about the integrity of the CEO whom you'll be overseeing in your role as a board member?
4. Will you be working with an organization and industry that interest you?
5. Who else is on the board? How can you contribute as a piece of the larger puzzle?

Working with a search firm

As CISOs progressively expand their business and strategic experience, they may find it productive to work with an executive search firm to find appropriate board positions.

The ACF Women's Council encourages members to get involved in council activities, such as contributing ideas for roundtable topics, volunteering as a subject-matter expert, and reaching out to other members. For questions or suggestions, please contact [Valerie Abend](#), ACF Women's Council chairperson, or [Lisa Harris](#), program manager.

CONTACT US

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Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world's largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With 482,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

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