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While Sarbanes-Oxley was implemented to reduce company fraud, Blythe McGarvie believes boards should keep a spotlight on audit committees. Even though the incidence of fraud was reduced after Sarbanes-Oxley was implemented, she observed that the number of fraud cases have started to tick up over the past four years. “Audit remains a hot spot where boards should continue to focus,” she said.

McGarvie serves on the boards of Accenture, Sonoco, L.K.Q. and Viacom. In addition, she recently became chair of the nomination and governance committee at Wawa Inc., a closely held company where she has been a director for 17 years.

“Culture is so important at Wawa. Culture impacts everything, including customers and especially employees who own 42 percent of the company through the E.S.O.P. [Employee Stock Ownership Plan]. I know a lot about governance, and I’m happy to take over that responsibility.”

She also noted that in the face of managing risk, Accenture’s high-performance board culture has developed a best practice to ensure that no risk falls through the cracks.

“Once a year we bring together three committees—finance, compensation and audit—to ensure that we know what part of risk each committee owns,” said McGarvie.

Boards evolve. From a focus on audit, compensation and even governance committees where board refreshment remains a hot topic for activists, the real game changer is proxy access, the chance for eligible shareholders (and activists) to nominate directors.

“Proxy access reached a tipping point,” said governance expert Peggy Foran. “More than half the institutional investors say they want it.”

As chief governance officer, vice president and secretary at Prudential Financial, Foran has had regular conversations with the board on governance issues for the past six years. They trust her for giving them a view of the world outside the boardroom. “I could be wrong, I told them, but proxy access is coming.”

As a result of discussion and board deliberations, the Prudential Financial board chose to be proactive: The board approved and adopted proxy access amendments to the company’s bylaws, enabling eligible shareholders to have their own director nominees named in the company’s proxy statement.

Proactive boards remain vigilant, knowing that there is more work to do.

How Being Authentic Accelerates Leadership in Women

Leading with greater authenticity, instead of adopting personae based on other people’s expectations, may unlock more leadership potential in women and accelerate their impact within their organizations, according to new research conducted by Korn Ferry.

Female executives who participated in the firm’s Executive to Leader Institute and Chief Executive Institute programs cited authenticity, as well as greater self-awareness, as important outcomes gained from engaging in these programs.

In interviews, the women often described themselves as having lived inauthentic or “divided” lives in the workplace—essentially acting in a certain way to meet the norms and expectations set by others within male-dominated cultures. “When I came out of business school in the mid-70s there were very few women,” one female executive said. “At work in particular, I felt I needed to have a persona that was not necessarily an authentic one.”

The women, nearly all of whom (91 percent) were mid-career (ages 35 to 51), acknowledged a desire to integrate more aspects of themselves that had been hidden or ignored in an effort to fit in. Becoming more authentic, however, was seen as a process, one that must be undertaken within the context of the organization’s culture. “It’s O.K. to be authentic... to take off the mask, but you will still need to wear the mask at times, because maybe your level of authenticity is not appreciated or some people have not gotten to that level of understanding,” another female executive said.

The dissonance caused by living an inauthentic or divided life can be a significant energy drain for women executives, and may be a factor in why some women opt out of the leadership track. By expressing more of who they are and their particular strengths,



women embrace a wider range of leadership characteristics needed to run an organization.

Women executives are equally qualified to lead organizations in top executive roles, as previous Korn Ferry research has found. They are rated higher than their male counterparts in 17 out of 21 critical leadership skills, including operating and interpersonal ones, courage and drive—competencies that enable women to connect with customers, engage employees and building talent.

The women executives interviewed also highlighted the importance of self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their underlying motivations and sense of purpose as being vital to leading more authentically. “My core purpose is not about the prestige, the title ... it’s about the ambition to get to where I am,” a female executive commented. “The times in my life I had the most fun were when I was helping people develop, or when I had a huge impact on the business and building or changing something and seeing the impact that had on people.”

Taking time for reflection, especially at critical career inflection points, can raise awareness of one’s self and one’s purpose. By checking in with themselves periodically, women gain better appreciation of the factors and circumstances that have brought them to

their current situation, while also helping them decide how they want to shape their leadership in the future. Specifically, women need to ask themselves:

What is the greatest impact I want to have going forward? How can I drive value for the organization and the people using my unique capabilities in ways that others may not?

Self-reflection also enables women to discover or re-engage with their sense of purpose, which becomes a powerful motivator of self—and helps leaders inspire others. Purpose transcends ego or, conversely, a lack of confidence. A driving purpose becomes a motivation to assume greater risks and take on roles that might otherwise be uncomfortable, and can energize them to be more resilient during challenges.

With greater authenticity, thanks to deeper self-awareness and a clarified sense of purpose, women executives can more fully embrace new opportunities to become their best and devote their full capabilities to their leadership.

REFERENCES: Orr, J. Evelyn. 2015. *Best Practice Series: Women in Leadership. White Paper.* Los Angeles: Korn Ferry Institute.