

Spotlight on Tony Chamberlain

TONY CHAMBERLAIN IS A HIGHLY EXPERIENCED AND INNOVATIVE CHAIRMAN, NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND BOARD MEMBER WITH EXPERTISE IN BUSINESS STRATEGY, CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS GROWTH, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE.

He has a proven track record of delivering profitable outcomes and driving shareholder returns. With over a decade of experience as CEO and Board Member, Tony has led several successful turnarounds and transformations, building brand equity and enterprise value. Tony has held several board appointments, including Chairman Advisory Board at DataBoss (ChainCollective), Non-Executive Director at Force Fire (AnaCacia Capital), and Advisory Board Member at Merlin Investments Ltd and Janellis Australia Pty Ltd. He has also served as Board Member at Staging Connections Group Ltd, Chairman at Gearhouse Staging Connections Dubai, and Advisory Board Member at St Vincent de Paul CEO Sleepout. Tony is highly regarded for his leadership, strategic thinking, and ability to navigate organisations through periods of change and uncertainty.



WHAT DO YOU SEE AS MAJOR CHALLENGES & RISKS IN THE BOARDROOM IN 2023?

1. Cyber Security

One major challenge that businesses face today is ensuring that their systems are protected from cyber attacks. This is not something that can be delegated solely to the CIO; it is a significant business threat that requires attention from the board. With the number of threats and scams increasing, it is crucial for the board to set the tone and take proactive steps to protect the business.

The culture of the business plays a crucial role in protecting it against cyber threats. If employees are on board and actively helping to protect the business, it is an important part of overall security.

To mitigate the risks of cyber attacks, the board must ensure that the business is prepared in the event of an attack. This includes implementing strategies to minimise risk, testing systems regularly to identify issues as early as possible, and having a clear procedure in place to respond to any incidents.

I recall an experience when I sold an Australian company to a large American company a few years ago. Prior to the acquisition, the Australian company experienced about 120 cyber attack attempts

per week. However, during the first week of new ownership under the American company, the cyber attack attempts jumped to over 450 per day. If successful, the impact on employees, clients, and suppliers would have been very real. This highlights the importance of taking proactive steps to protect businesses from cyber threats.

2. Employment markets

Throughout my career, I have not witnessed the current dynamics we are experiencing in the employment market. Employees are now dictating their desired number of office attendance days, as well as required salaries and benefits. While Covid has taught us how to work from home, which is not necessarily a bad thing, it is still important to foster teamwork. Working together is a fundamental aspect of organisational life.

As a leader, walking the corridors of the business and talking to team members was always valuable. It provided insights into the great things happening in the business, as well as the not so great things that could be addressed. However, working from home makes this much more challenging today.

One business where I am a NED is on a growth trajectory, and hiring talented people has proven

to be a significant challenge. Increases in the cost of living, interest rates, groceries, fuel, and other expenses are very real, and prospective employees' salary demands have increased dramatically. Furthermore, the desire to work from home has added to the challenge of building and maintaining a strong company culture. As a board member, it is crucial to understand and support business leadership in working through this challenging period.

3. Succession

Currently, I am working across four distinct businesses. However, one common issue they all face is the absence of succession planning. In case of a few key individuals being unable or unwilling to continue working, there is no risk mitigation strategy in place. It is important to note that implementing succession planning is a straightforward process that not only mitigates risks for the business but also provides a clear career path for key employees. As a board member, it is our responsibility to mitigate such risks and despite the challenges posed by the current employment markets, investing time and resources in this area is a worthwhile endeavor for business leadership.

HOW ARE BUSINESSES VIEWING THE ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC HEADWINDS?

The businesses I am involved with are not significantly impacted by international headwinds, as we have robust backlogs and order books. While there are some domestic challenges, our economy remains strong. We are currently facing inflation, which has led to a rise in interest rates to combat the inflation. This has had an impact on salary and wage demands, but I believe this is a short-term issue that will eventually subside.

WHAT ARE THE KEY AGENDA ITEMS IN YOUR BOARDROOMS?

My current responsibilities are quite varied. Firstly, as a NED for a start-up, my role involves recruiting the right talent, establishing robust processes, setting financial budgets and targets.

Secondly, I am involved with a mature business that is actively acquiring other businesses. In this capacity, my responsibilities include conducting financial reviews, risk analysis, overseeing safety measures, and managing personnel.

Thirdly, I am also involved in selling a part of the

business, and in this role, I review key aspects such as safety, finance, and personnel to ensure we remain on track. Additionally, I provide regular updates to prospective purchasers.

Finally, I am also involved in a turnaround project. My responsibilities in this role include closely monitoring key change projects, ensuring safety measures are in place, managing finances effectively, and overseeing personnel management.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE MOVING FROM A LEADERSHIP ROLES INTO A BOARD CAREER?

I have found the most difficult part of being a board member is remembering you are in the role to represent shareholders and assist leadership in running the business, you are not there to lead the business in a day to day sense. Its demotivating for executives if they have NEDs who get into the kitchen. Once I recognised my role as a NED it becomes more enjoyable being able to offer advice and to be investing the strategies of the business involved.

HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE YOUR TEAM/BOARD IN CHALLENGING TIMES?

Dealing with the cards we are given can be challenging, but it's important to focus on what we can change or impact. Collaboration is key, as none of us are as good alone as we are together. Working as a team to tackle challenges is rewarding and motivating because everyone brings their unique strengths to the table.

As a board member, it's crucial to work effectively together and set the tone for the rest of the business. By doing so, we can help leadership foster a problem-solving culture. I once worked with a leader who taught me to treasure problems, as solving them can make the team stronger. While there's a lot more to it than just a few lines, I hope you understand my point.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

Being part of a team is something that I absolutely love. There is nothing quite as fulfilling as helping people grow and develop while simultaneously creating a strong business. As a CEO, this has been an incredibly rewarding experience for me. However, I am also thoroughly enjoying my role as a NED. As time passes, I am learning more and more about how to excel in this position, and the motivation and enjoyment that comes with the job continues to grow.