

Leadership insights

Keys to successful board service

By Allison Nordberg

AS PART of its initiative to recognize nurses in board leadership roles, the American Nurses Foundation interviewed Marla Salmon, ScD, RN. Currently, Salmon is a professor of nursing and global public health at the University of Washington. In 2014, she joined the board of Grifols, S.A., after serving on a subsidiary board. Grifols is a global healthcare company based in Spain, specializing in the development of plasma medicines, diagnostic systems, and hospital pharmacy products. Here Salmon describes her path to her position on the board.

My path has not proceeded in a stepwise fashion. Several factors converged in my development as a nurse that engaged me in governance and leadership across sectors, including the following.

Understanding how organizations advance social good. My early career acquainted me with the power of policy, systems, and institutions in social change. Organizations (regardless of corporate status) can foster or stifle the contributions of individuals, groups, communities, and even nations. I came to believe that having organizations that are ethical, perform well, and do good requires leadership at all levels—including the too-often-invisible governance level.

Knowing how your expertise and experience benefit the organization. One of the best pieces of advice I ever got with respect to board service was that I really needed to be clear on what I knew and could do that would benefit the company. Any nurse interested in board service needs to be able to identify specific ways in which she or he can add value to the enterprise at the board level. This means both industry-relevant knowledge and competence as a board member. My experiences in various leadership roles and on nonprofit boards were very helpful, as was my experience in the health

sector. However, each organization is different and has different needs, so being a good match for a board is also about fit in very specific ways.

Learning that who you know and how you relate to them matters. The most important opportunities that have come my way happened because others helped make them possible. There is no question that board appointments often reflect “who you

know.” Having others be willing to put you forward for opportunities is often a reflection of two things: what they know about you and your own capacity for seeing opportunities that may go beyond your daily scope of activities.

Being aware of the need to be a statesperson without a country. This may be somewhat controversial. However, I believe that at a board level, it is crucial that members park narrow agendas at the boardroom door. While we can each bring experience, perspectives, and resources associated with our disciplines, being a “one-horse rodeo” isn’t going to serve the interests of anyone involved. My own board service has evolved in ways that reflect these factors all working together over time—and never in a partic-

ularly organized fashion. I think an important part of all of this has been my ongoing belief that good governance in all sectors is crucial to social progress, regardless of where it takes place. And good governance requires board members who are both committed and capable.

Read the full interview at www.anfonline.org/nurseboardleadership. To learn more about the American Nurses Foundation, please visit www.givetonursing.org.



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Marla Salmon, ScD, RN