

## Fishing for female directors? Try fresh waters

SUSAN PINKER

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**Dear Susan,**

I head the nomination committee for our corporate board of directors. We are seeking candidates to fill two posts that will be vacant later this year. We already have one female director, and are under pressure from stakeholders to increase female representation on the board. But we're having trouble finding qualified candidates with experience in our industry. Advice?

*-Name Withheld*

**Dear Name,**

There's no doubt that the current gene pool for corporate directors is too small. Two ideas come to mind.

First, start looking in novel places for new blood instead of always fishing from the same pond. Restricting yourself to the places male board members are usually sought - stretched-thin CEOs and those with prior board experience in your industry - is akin to religious leaders seeking new converts among people who already dress, eat and think exactly the way they do.

Instead, I suggest looking for female board members where you're most likely to find them - in the public and non-profit sectors. Twice to three times as many female as male lawyers, for instance, work in government and the not-for-profit sector, according to Ronit Dinovitzer, a sociologist at the University of Toronto, and, while figures were not available, I'd hazard a similar split in other professions, too.

If there's a hole in the expertise of your current board, why not look for qualified professional women with transferable skills outside your industry?

Quebec premier Jean Charest used this strategy when he plucked Kathleen Weil, a furloughed lawyer and a rookie MNA, as his justice minister in December. It was her first time in public office but she had nearly 20 years of experience in the volunteer and non-profit sectors, directing social and community agencies and sitting on or chairing the boards of huge, fractious health and charitable foundations.

When I looked at her résumé online, I felt the way *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart did when he interviewed Peter Orszag, budget director in U.S. President Barack Obama's cabinet, whose first-class résumé cited Princeton, the London School of Economics, and experience in Bill Clinton's White

House.

"You're way taller than you're supposed to be," Mr. Stewart said to Mr. Orszag.

"I've been reading all these articles about you.... The doctorate in economics, and the jogging, and you're six years younger than me," he added, miffed about being shorter, too. "I don't care for this. It is not right."

What is right is that people with backgrounds such as Ms. Weil's and Mr. Orszag's be offered positions that allow them to exert their influence in the public and private sectors.

This brings me to my second point. You need goodwill, a good strategy and, perhaps most important, a good recruiting firm to increase female representation. I learned this from Guylaine Saucier, a chartered accountant who is a corporate director for Petro-Canada, Axa Insurance, Bank of Montreal, Dannon Co. and Areva, and a former chairman of the board of the CBC.

"If you go to a good search firm and tell them this is the kind of expertise we need, you'll find women," she said in a telephone interview from Paris, where she was attending international board meetings for several of these companies.

Still, neither Ms. Saucier nor a new governance group she's advising, The Institute for Governance of Private and Public Organizations, believes in forcing the issue. A recent report by the institute advises ramping up Canadian female board memberships to 40 per cent from 15 per cent, but suggests that companies do so at their own pace. As for Ms. Saucier, "I've never been one for quotas," she says. "With quotas, people feel they have to find women, so they just do it. But you really need someone who adds value."

Having just been appointed as a new director to Dannon, Ms. Saucier described facing an all-too-familiar scenario. "Dannon produces yogurt, baby food and Evian water, but I am the first woman on the board" she exclaimed.

Even though she was appointed to chair the auditing committee and not to offer a woman's line on baby food, she thinks she offers a different perspective.

Her dance card - as well as Ms. Weil's - seems to be full, but the message is, seek and ye shall find.

*Susan Pinker is a psychologist and author of *The Sexual Paradox: Extreme Men, Gifted Women and the Real Gender Gap*. Send questions to:*

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*No attachments please.*