



Non-Executive Directors, do you need one?

A non-executive could be a real asset to your firm and help deliver real value. They can bring real strategic vision, rigour and transparency; a well-chosen non-executive director can contribute strongly to your firm in a variety of areas.

The legal market is facing constant challenges the non-executive director can be a part-time appointment; contributing a wealth of knowledge, experience and contacts to the firm they join. Where firms cannot always justify the cost of a CEO or highly qualified FD, with the appointment of non-executive director, firms could receive high input for very little cost.

- **They bring out the best.**

All good boards have a range of personalities, strengths and experiences. It is possible for good suggestions to be lost or overpowered by stronger voices if they are not nurtured. A non-executive director can offer these members advice and support and help them have a voice that is heard when necessary.

It is not uncommon for your non exec to spend time with board members to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses and help them understand how they can work more effectively together by playing to those strengths.
- **They look at the big picture.**

It is easy for a board to get bogged down and lose track of wider issues. The non-executive director focusses on the big picture because they do not work with you full time. They think about the direction of the firm, are targets being met? Who is the growing competition and what are the plans to keep ahead? The non-exec will ensure that board members are aware and acknowledge changes in the environment and will help you implement a strategy to deal with it. They will be abreast of issues that will affect you and will help you place yourselves to achieve success. They will notice things that other board members miss because they are not drawn into the day-to-day issues.
- **How can they help your Board?**

However good and however experienced your board; it is easy to run into bad habits. Items are brought up that are not on the agenda and conversations get side-tracked. Time is important and a non-executive director can keep your Chairman on track, keeping meetings specific and on track.

The non-executive director will be a highly experienced and well respected business person. Sometimes a firm but constructive response from an experienced non exec can ease any potential tension.
- **They've seen it all before.**

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You can feel safe in the knowledge that no matter how troubled you may be by an issue, your non exec will have dealt with it before. As a result they will be able to rationalise any worries and assist your board and Heads of Department in setting clear tasks to achieve what needs to be done.

- **It's not always what you know.**

A non-executive director usually has excellent contacts. Many years in their chosen field has earned them the respect of their peers, banks, insurers and other businessmen and women. Networking can be time consuming and your non exec will have built a trusted network of contacts and can call on their expertise when needed. They will help you with important connections, not just to meet those connections but to maintain them.

- **They are not afraid to be honest.**

Not working with you day-to-day ensures that they do not engage in office politics and therefore they maintain their independence. At all times they are able to offer unbiased, constructive criticism.

All boards try to behave as professionally as possible but there are times when they are told what they want to hear. A non-exec will probe to get to the real detail. It is often easier for them to ask difficult questions because everyone understands that they are doing it purely for the good of the firm not for the benefit of a personal agenda within the firm.

This does not mean that they will constantly criticise, but they will encourage the board to be accountable for the decisions they have made and praise them when they have done good work.

The legal market is facing new demands and a non-executive director can bring a new dimension and direction to the Board. Bringing not just good corporate governance, but helping a firm to grow and prosper.

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