



Building Your Career Advisory Board



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Message From Michelle

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Helen Keller

Career success is never a solo venture. Logically, we all know that, but often we don't pay enough attention to whom we need to have alongside us, supporting, encouraging and challenging our career steps.

Your Career Advisory Board is a core group of people in your network who will help you throughout your career. They will provide advice, share insights, constructively challenge your thinking and actions, and provide connections and ideas.

They are particularly helpful as you embark on a Career Leap.

Who is on your Advisory Board will change over time, as your and their needs and circumstances change. This means you will review its composition and performance at least once a year.

This guide will step you through the key elements to consider as you construct, manage and review your Career Advisory Board.

Here's to your career success.

Enjoy!

Michelle

Introduction

Why you need one

Careers have an ebb and flow. There are good days and bad days. Successes and failures. That's always been the case. What's changing, more rapidly than ever, is how we work. With this rapid pace of change comes increasing expectations, ambiguity, flux and complexity.

To navigate this ever-changing working world, it's necessary to have a sounding board - a group of people you can turn to for insights and advice.

A Career Advisory Board is as essential for your career success as having the right skills and capabilities to do the job you are being hired for. It helps to expand your ideas and inspire you to new levels of action.

If you are still to be convinced that developing and maintaining a Career Advisory Board is a good use of your time, here's five primary reasons why it is critical.

Having a Career Advisory Board will help you to:

1. Expand your perspective on what's possible and practical with respect to your career.
2. Connect with people you don't currently know that will facilitate and accelerate your career.
3. Overcome challenges and remove roadblocks, particularly if you find yourself becoming complacent or looking for the easy way out.
4. Be inspired by hearing success and failure stories and seeing what's achievable when you put your mind to it.
5. Remain focused on what really matters when it comes to career and life success, and to not be distracted by shiny new toys.



How to do it

Good Career Advisory Boards don't happen by accident. They are considered and planned, and take time and effort to nurture. There's three phases to your Career Advisory Board:

1. **Construct the board** – in this phase you will map out the key characteristics for your ideal Board, identify potential candidates and make the approaches.
2. **Manage the board** – in this phase you will operationalise your board by deciding how regularly you will meet with each of them (either formally or informally), building a plan to make that happen, and then executing on it.
3. **Review the board** – in this phase, which usually happens once a year, you will critically review the success of your Board, determining what may need to shift or change to make it more effective.



Phase One: Construct The Board

Who should be on it

Your Career Advisory Board may comprise five to eight people, ideally from a range of backgrounds and perspectives, providing different types of advice.

They will also take on different roles, namely:

- **Mentor** - who has been where you want to go and can provide advice on what the next steps may look like.
- **Sponsor** - who advocates for you and will be in your corner cheering you on.
- **Career coach** - who will be a sounding board and provide moral support and encouragement when it gets tough or you encounter unforeseen challenges.
- **Advisor/s** - who will offer advice on core aspects of your career and life, and may include a financial advisor, technology specialist and marketing advisor.
- **Industry contact/s** - who will provide contacts in your current or desired future career field.

How to build it

Firstly, you need to outline the objective for the Career Advisory Board. Is it to help you land a new role or to leap to a new career? Is it to help you solidify your current position at work? Is it to help strengthen your longer-term career prospects? It could be a combination of all of those elements. You will likely find that your objectives shift as your career progresses and your life changes.

Write down the objectives for your Career Advisory Board.

The objectives of my Board is to:





Secondly, outline the key characteristics you are looking for from your Career Advisory Board members.

Usually, a good Career Advisory Board will comprise members who:

1. **Connect** – introduce you to people in their network, who can, in turn, broaden and strengthen your network.
2. **Challenge** – constructively challenge your ideas, thoughts, and actions so you deliberately construct the path forward rather than always taking the path of least resistance.
3. **Contribute** – helpfully share the lessons they have gleaned and the insights they have gathered throughout their career.
4. **Contextualise** – have a perspective and understanding on critical issues and ideas, and are willing to put those forward, but not in a way that is dogmatic or will hamper you from making your own choices.
5. **Cultivate** – can expand your mind and beliefs on what is possible and the opportunities that exist for you.

Write down your list of key characteristics.

I would like my Career Advisory Board members to be:



Thirdly, considering those characteristics and the needs/objectives you have outlined, contemplate the potential people you would like to have on your Career Advisory Board. Start by identifying for each category who the ideal candidate would be, and then consider other options should that first option not eventuate. Write these down using Table One – My Career Advisory Board candidates.

For the advisor and industry contact categories, you may need to list a couple of people, since there may be several areas you want covered. You may also include people in categories specific to your needs. If so, note that down in ‘other’. Remember: the people you are listing don’t need to be people you know - yet! They could be people already connected to your network.

Table One: My Career Advisory Board candidates.

CATEGORY	THE IDEAL CANDIDATE	OTHER POTENTIALS TO APPROACH
Mentor		
Sponsor		
Career Coach		
Advisor/s		
Industry Contact/s		
Other		



Make the approach

Once you have your list of candidates, the next step is to make the approach. This approach needs to be:

- **Personal** – be clear on why you are approaching them and what you feel they offer that is unique. Tailor your approach for each person. You don't want it to look like a mass mail-out, where they have been randomly targeted. Instead, you want them to feel special, important and valued.
- **Professional** – be respectful of their time, profession and expertise. Show them how much you value their expertise and what they have to offer, and that you'd like to reach out to them on occasion for their advice. You want to make it clear that you won't inundate them with requests or make any unreasonable demands or expectations. For example, don't expect them to find you a job.
- **Practical** – don't be too fixed on how the relationship needs to work in terms of how frequently you meet and in what format. Ask them for their preference and fit it to what works for them. They are doing you a favour, so you need to be flexible and accommodate their needs and availability.

If you know the person, you can approach them directly. However, if you don't, and you need to approach them indirectly, consider who in your network is best placed to make the introduction. A personal introduction will go a long way to helping you get your foot in the door.

When you discuss the possibility with each person, they are likely to want to know:

- Why did you select them?
- What do you expect from them?
- How frequently would you like to meet?
- What time commitments will this involve?



In preparation for the conversation, for each candidate, write down the key factors to consider when making the approach. To the extent you can, think about any concerns or objections they may have about becoming involved. Use Table Two (below) to complete this activity, and compile your thoughts.

Table Two: Candidate factors to consider.

CATEGORY	KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING THE APPROACH
Mentor	
Sponsor	
Career Coach	
Advisor/s	
Industry Contact/s	
Other	

This process will continue until you have each of your Career Advisory Board roles filled.

Confirm their role

During your conversation with each person, you will gather details about their expectations and needs. Be sure to note these down so you don't forget. If you agree to a specific way of working together, you'll want to ensure you stick to those commitments. Use Table Three (below) to record relevant notes during your conversations, and discuss and confirm their involvement.

Table Three: Member expectations.

CATEGORY	KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN MAKING THE APPROACH
Mentor	
Sponsor	
Career Coach	
Advisor/s	
Industry Contact/s	
Other	

After a person has accepted your offer, make sure you follow up with a thank you note. It can be a lovely idea to do a hand written note and send a small gift. Perhaps a book you know they'll like, a bottle of wine or something that connects with the work they do. Always be appreciative.

Phase Two: Manage The Board

Once you've made the approach and have the list of people who are ready and willing to be on your Career Advisory Board, you can operationalise by putting your Board into practice. Unlike other Boards, this isn't the type where members gather, notes are taken, and decisions are made. It is more informal than that. In fact, most members of the Board won't know one another and will never meet.

Design the schedule

There are some logistical matters you need to decide on, taking into account both your objectives and your Advisory Board members' expectations. These include:

- How frequently will you meet with each person?
- Will it be casual/informal or more formal?
- Will you meet face-to-face, via Zoom/MS Teams, or over the phone?
- Will you have regular, set meetings, or will it be on an 'as needed' basis?

It can help to write up a rough schedule of when you are going to be in contact with each person, so you can track your contacts and the regularity of connection.

Table Four: Advisory Board engagement plan.

CATEGORY	WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN FROM THIS PERSON?	FREQUENCY OF CONTACT	THEIR PREFERRED MODE OF CONTACT
Mentor			
Sponsor			
Career Coach			
Advisor/s			
Industry Contact/s			
Other			

Build the relationship

Building a healthy and sustainable relationship is critical. The relationship isn't just one-sided and all about what you need. Always seek out ways to add value to the relationship. You want the members of your Career Advisory Board to find their participation valuable.

You may want to consider:

- Sending them relevant articles on topics they are interested in.
- Inviting them to lunches or industry events.
- Sharing interesting knowledge and insights with them.
- Connecting them with people in your network who may be of value to them.

"You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want"

Zig Ziglar
American Author and Salesperson

As well, always consider how you can show your appreciation for the effort they are putting into the relationship. This includes respecting their time and being considerate of their needs.

To ensure you maintain a good relationship, there are also a few cardinal rules that are worth sticking to:

- Never be late for meetings/catch ups you have with them.
- If you are meeting over coffee or dining out, always offer to pay.
- Operate on the basis of 'Chatham House' rules whereby you do not divulge or share with other people any details that the members of your Advisory Board share with you.
- Be grateful for their time and don't waste it with questions you could have discovered yourself by googling the answer, using AI or doing basic research.
- Come to the meetings prepared.



Target and track

Keeping your Career Advisory Board active and effective requires effort and focus.

That's where the planning discussed in the last section comes in. It can also be useful to have targets to track your progress.

These targets may be:

- A list of key objectives you want to achieve through regular engagement.
- The frequency of contact.
- How frequently you share useful ideas and content with them.

As the work year gets busy and you get focused on deliverables, work schedules and life in general, it can be easy to let these connections slip.

Schedule in calendar reminders – through Outlook, Gmail or your smartphone.

You want to set reminders so you don't forget to reach out and stay connected. It's about you building a routine that works for you – and of course, the members of your Advisory Board.

Phase Three: Review The Board

The final phase of this plan is to review the Board. It's important to understand what's working and what's not for you (and the participants), and to adjust as needed. Your Board needs to be a good use of your time and theirs.

How to know if it's working

You'll know if your Advisory Board is working because you'll derive so much value from the interactions, and you'll see the impact it is having on your career. There will be a high degree of trust, such that you are willing to ask for help and show vulnerability with each of them. There will also be a mutual exchange of value.

You want an Advisory Board where there is an appropriate level of:

- Advice, challenge and support.
- Responsiveness to requests for input.
- Willingness to connect you with people in their network.

Sometimes, with the best of intent on both sides, relationships don't pan out as expected.

The same might happen with your Career Advisory Board, so it's helpful to look for the warning signs that something's not working and to act quickly.

These warning signs include:

- There's little or no sense of connection or rapport with an Advisory Group member/s.
- There's a mismatch between your objectives and what a member/s are willing to offer.
- You encounter a repeated lack of responsiveness to requests for help.
- You don't look forward to catching up with a member/s of the Advisory Board.



When to change it

As the saying goes, 'All good things come to an end'. There will be a time when aspects of your Career Advisory Board will naturally shift, either because it's not meeting the desired objective or you've outgrown it in some way.

Your Advisory Board membership will change over time, as your and the members' needs and circumstances change.

As your career progresses, the type of advice and support you need will naturally change. This means there will come a time when you've outgrown your Advisory Board members. That is, the advice they are best placed to offer is no longer what you need.

You may also find that your objectives have changed, so you want members on the Board who can provide different types of support and challenge. At the same time, your Advisory Board members may find that their needs have changed as well. Changing roles or life circumstances may mean they no longer have the time or inclination to play the same role. Just as you may want to change, they may want to change too.

When you've reached this point, the best thing to do is to handle it professionally. Thank the person for their involvement and quietly, with no fuss, move on.

This doesn't mean you cut them off and disconnect with them on social media. It simply means that at this stage in your career, you have less contact with them than you did before. It also doesn't mean the relationship can't spark back up at a later stage. You never know, they may need you for something down the track.

Always think long-term when it comes to relationships!

Your Next Steps

If you want your Advisory Board to get up and running, then the person who will make it happen is you.

Set a target date to keep your Advisory Board development on track.

Bear in mind, it may take some time to get everyone on board. The good news is you don't need every role filled before you can start engaging with the members that are already in place.

You will find that each Advisory Board member has different expectations and needs, so you want to be flexible and adapt to their varying styles and needs.

Successful careers don't happen by accident, and neither do they happen alone.

You need good people – and great people – around you to inspire, challenge and support you to new levels of success and achievement.

Your Advisory Board is a core element of that success platform.

"You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality."

Walt Disney
American Entrepreneur

Enjoy building your Advisory Board. It's a fun and rewarding experience.



About Dr Michelle Gibbings

Dr Michelle Gibbings is an award-winning author and globally recognised workplace expert who helps leaders, teams and organisations elevate their strategic influence and impact. With over 30 years of experience - including in senior executive roles - she understands how organisations operate from the inside out.

As a sought-after keynote speaker, executive coach and trusted facilitator, she works with forward-thinking organisations seeking to unlock potential, lead with impact and accelerate progress.

Michelle's approach is pragmatic, inspiring and anchored in insight and action. She helps people stay cool, calm and collected amidst complexity - and bold, brave and balanced in the face of disruption.

She gets organisations, leaders and teams ready for tomorrow, today!





Want to Work With Michelle?

If you're interested in working with Michelle, individually or in a team setting, we'd love to hear from you.

E: support@michellegibbings.com
www.michellegibbings.com

