

NAVIGATING THE FIRST 90 DAYS ON A CORPORATE BOARD

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INTRODUCTION

Your first ninety days as a new corporate board member will define how you are perceived for years to come. Whether you're joining as a cybersecurity expert, risk strategist, or technology advisor, this initial period is not about proving knowledge: It's about demonstrating **judgment, humility, and composure**. Those who navigate this phase well establish themselves as trusted contributors to enterprise governance. Those who stumble can spend years rebuilding credibility.

The transition from executive to director is among the most profound shifts in a CISO's career. As an executive, you're conditioned to act. As a director, you must **govern**, which means asking the right questions, not giving the right orders. Understanding that difference is the first test of your **Board IQ**.

Phase 1: Listen, Learn, and Observe

Every director enters a new board with a steep learning curve. The first few months should focus on **orientation and observation**. Read everything: prior meeting minutes, committee charters, annual reports, and proxy filings. Study the composition of the board. This includes who's a former CEO, who chairs audit, who represents investors. Learn how the organization defines risk appetite and who shapes culture at the top.

During these first sessions, resist the temptation to speak early or often. The best way to demonstrate maturity is through **listening intelligence** – namely, absorbing dynamics before contributing. Observe the rhythm of discussion, the tone of debate, and the informal alliances that influence decision-making. Directors remember new members who respect that rhythm.

Ask for one-on-one briefings with the general counsel, CFO, and internal audit lead. These conversations will teach you how information flows and where your expertise adds value. But keep your questions exploratory, not evaluative. You are learning the ecosystem of governance, not auditing it.

One more thing: During meetings in Phase 1, you will find the urge to speak during meetings to be strong. Our advice is to try as best you can to minimize the speaking. This might seem counter-intuitive, but other directors will be watching – and you are better served to listen than to speak.

Phase 2: Build Relationships of Trust

The next few months are about **connection**, not contribution. The most effective directors establish rapport with fellow board members and senior executives before asserting viewpoints. Schedule informal conversations with committee chairs. Express curiosity about their perspectives. Offer insight sparingly, in context, and only after confirming you understand the company's strategic priorities.

At this stage, your goal is to become a **trusted peer**, not the "cyber expert in the corner." The board will have recruited you for your knowledge, but they will keep you for your temperament. Directors value humility over brilliance. They look for colleagues who strengthen collective confidence, not personal visibility.

You'll also begin to recognize the cultural signals that shape discussion. Every board has its unique tone – some are data-driven, others narrative-driven, still others consensus-driven. Tailor your communication to that cadence. When you do contribute, link cyber or technology topics to the language of **enterprise resilience and fiduciary duty**. This is how you quietly reposition yourself from subject-matter expert to **governance advisor**.

Phase 3: Contribute with Precision

Once you've established situational awareness and trust, begin to **contribute deliberately – but very, very carefully**. Select a few high-impact moments rather than frequent interjections. Offer insights that tie technology risk directly to business continuity, regulatory posture, or brand trust.

For example: "As we expand digital automation, it may be useful for the audit committee to confirm that AI governance controls are being tested for explainability — it's becoming a new fiduciary expectation." That kind of comment positions you as strategic, concise, and value-additive — exactly what other directors hope for in a new colleague.

Avoid the trap of answering every technical question. Directorship is not a second CISO job. Instead, guide discussions back to **oversight principles**: how management is assuring controls, not what tools they are using. When you demonstrate the discipline to stay in the governance lane, you earn lasting respect.

The Power of Composure

Across all phases, your most visible attribute will be composure. Directors observe how new members respond to challenge, ambiguity, or disagreement. If you are questioned sharply, pause before replying. If a topic feels unfamiliar, acknowledge it and request background rather than speculate. Nothing builds trust faster than measured restraint.

Remember: boards value equilibrium. The enterprise relies on this group to remain calm during crises, including whether a ransomware incident, regulatory investigation, or CEO succession. Your demeanor in ordinary meetings tells them how you'll behave in extraordinary ones. A composed new director becomes an anchor when pressure rises.

Create a Personal Learning Log

We often advise new directors to maintain a **log**, which is a private document (or something you tap into your phone) capturing insights, relationships, and follow-up actions. Record which topics recur, which committees align with your strengths, and where you see emerging risks that deserve attention. This habit

accelerates your assimilation and provides reference material for your own growth as a fiduciary.

Revisit that log periodically. Over time, you'll notice your questions evolving from technical to strategic, from *how* to *why*. That shift marks your progression from executive perspective to governance mindset, which is the core of sustained Board IQ development.

Avoiding Common Missteps

The first phases – usually running over the course or a year or so (boards move slowly) – can be derailed by good intentions. Avoid these pitfalls:

Over-talking: Filling silence to prove relevance undermines credibility. Less is more.

Over-researching: You are there to guide, not to investigate. Leave auditing to management.

Over-identifying: Remember that you represent shareholders, not the security team.

Over-promising: Never commit to an initiative or position before understanding its governance implications.

Each of these errors communicates misalignment with board norms. Directors are quick to sense when a newcomer is still operating like management. The antidote is self-awareness and restraint.

From Orientation to Influence

By the end of your first three phases – again, probably a year or so of service, the measure of success is not how many words you spoke but how much **trust** you earned. Trust that you understand the company's mission, culture, and obligations. Trust that you know when to speak and when to listen. Trust that your perspective elevates rather than distracts.

That foundation allows you to contribute meaningfully in your second year – perhaps chairing subcommittees, mentoring executives, shaping disclosure policy. But it all begins with quiet mastery of those first three phases.