



2023 Green shoots of change

Reviewing the 2022 bold moves in the boardroom report

CASE STUDY 4: From the heart – why modern boards need a passionate customer perspective

The following case study is part of a series entitled 'Green Shoots of Change' which builds on insights from the 2022 report, Bold moves in the boardroom: skills and capabilities fit for the future. That report challenged boards to broaden their composition to include more board members with backgrounds in HR, marketing and digital. The purpose of this series is to highlight recent appointments of non-executive directors from diverse backgrounds so as to inspire other boards to act.

Heart of the Nation, a not-for-profit group that is campaigning to increase the survival rate of sudden cardiac arrest across Australia, understands that having board members with passion and customer-centric skills will be at the core of its long-term success.

Seek out passion for the cause when searching for directors

As the frontman of one of Australia's biggest entertainment exports, Greg Page knows what it takes to succeed.

Famous for being the original Yellow Wiggle in children's music group The Wiggles, Page says while talent and dedication are crucial in the business and entertainment world, the other non-negotiable ingredient is passion.

Page, who was a director of The Wiggles for many years, has reflected on that quality of passion in the past few years while setting up and strengthening the board of Heart of the Nation, an Australian charity dedicated to increasing the survival rate of sudden cardiac arrest across the country.

"For people on the board of Heart of the Nation, there's usually a connection to cardiac arrest and a passion for what we do, and that's essential," says Page, who suffered a heart attack during a Wiggles reunion in 2020 and was given life-saving CPR. "Without that understanding of why we're doing what we do, you really can't understand what we're trying to deliver and achieve."

Passion and governance experience were table-stakes for the latest appointment to the Heart of the Nation's board in 2023. Maria Scott brought both qualities, as signalled by her role as a director at the Michael Hughes Foundation – a not-for-profit group that also sought to raise awareness of sudden cardiac arrest. However, she also brought a critical skill that was missing from the boardroom – her marketing expertise.

Page says Scott's customer-focused career and enthusiasm for Heart of the Nation's cause has been a "gift" for the charity. He notes that running a not-for-profit and raising money is especially difficult – and you must prove your relevancy to potential benefactors.

"We know we're relevant, and we know that people are experiencing sudden cardiac arrest every single day around Australia. They just might not know that we exist. They might not know that we're part of the solution to helping people survive sudden cardiac arrest. So, being present in the community and being customer-facing is so vitally important to Heart of the Nation, and that's why Maria Scott is a great addition to our board."

Scott's appointment reflects key findings in the Bold Moves in the Boardroom report, which identified the need for new directors to have values that are aligned with other board members, as well as a complementary skillset. Bold Moves in the Boardroom observed that specialists from marketing and customer backgrounds are often missing from the board table, and this was something Page realised as well.

In Scott's case, her understanding of the customer experience was more than technical, with her mother having suffered four heart attacks and owing her life to quick access to an automated external defibrillator (AED).

"That basically saved her life. So, what I can see from Heart of the Nation and why I'm involved is because it truly makes an impact and has a difference in society."

Recruit directors who can understand, reach and influence customers

Page draws from his high public profile with The Wiggles – the group he co-founded in 1991 and which is still one of the highest-streamed Australian acts on Spotify across all genres – to attract media and publicity for Heart of the Nation. The charity's success cannot hinge on him alone, though.

“The thing with any charity is that you need to be present in people’s minds in the community,” Page says. “We’re blessed in one sense that I have a profile and it’s relatively easy for me to open doors, but we still need to connect with the community. We need to get our message across.”

In this regard, having Scott at his side is invaluable as Heart of the Nation pursues its vision to lead change around sudden cardiac arrest through education, training and universal access to AEDs.

“Without that ability to connect with the community, we can’t fulfil our role,” Page says. “For three years I’ve relied upon my own ability to open doors. Now, having Maria on the board, there’s a real opportunity for us to tap into her customer-service background and marketing and really strengthen our message and strengthen the service we offer the community.”
A veteran of three decades in the marketing and

communications industry, Scott combines her Heart of the Nation role with other directorships at Venues NSW and the Better Future Housing Foundation.

She agrees with the accepted wisdom that all boards should have a diverse group of directors covering skillsets that include legal, financial and marketing expertise, but endorses Page’s view that a customer-service perspective is also crucial.

“At the end of the day it doesn’t matter what board you represent, there is always going to be an end-user of a product you sell – so customer experience has got to be at the forefront and the board needs to recognise that priority.”

Rather than being too internally focused, boards need to develop a clear understanding of the customer’s needs. “When you are in a not-for-profit arena and you’re trying to raise funds so that you can do the good work that you do, I always look at it from the person’s (view) from the other side.”

In Heart of the Nation’s case, that means having a board that understands heart health issues in the community and can mount a strong case for why potential donors should back their cause.

Focus on getting a mix of generalists and specialists on boards

The Bold Moves in the Boardroom report makes an argument for rethinking the composition of boards and encouraging greater diversity of thinking to ensure boards are future fit.

Scott argues that there is a danger in having boards that are stacked with one or two skillsets, as would be the case with a board dominated by lawyers or accountants. While recognising their value, she asks: “Would they have the creativity or the ability to think outside the box that somebody from a customer service perspective would bring? So, I think generalists have their place alongside specialists, but the two are not mutually exclusive.”

Page also understands the appeal of having generalists on a board, “but there’s certainly a case for having specialists, particularly with somebody in customer service”.

He advocates having a board lineup that is closely aligned with the executive team. “A good board should mirror the executive team in some ways and mentor and help educate and bring them up,” he says. “Being on a board is similar but different to being on the executive team. We’re all trying to achieve the same thing. If you can mirror that in the skillset that you have on the board with the executive team, it’s a real blessing.”

With Scott joining as a director, he believes Heart of the Nation now has the diversity of skills it needs to be even more effective in executing its mission.

Final words

Given his success with The Wiggles, Page knows all too well that teamwork and harmony is a must-have for any enterprise.

He believes that harmony on the board, along with a diverse set of skills and a collective passion for its life-saving mission, is exactly what Heart of the Nation has, and he is excited for what they will achieve together.

For more insights on boards of the future, click [here](#) to read the Bold Moves in the Boardroom report.



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