

CHAIR Q&A

SARAH O'CONNOR

FORMER CHAIR OF
BOARDMATCH IRELAND



"If you believe in what the organisation is looking to achieve, that you can work with both your fellow directors and the executive team, and have time, do it. You will get much more than you give!"

Why did you decide to go forward for a Chair role?

I was asked to do it. Honestly, I am not sure that I would have taken it on if I hadn't been approached and encouraged. The Board was going through some transition at the time. Whilst still a relatively new Board member, I felt I had already benefitted a lot from both my fellow directors and the executive team and was also passionate about what Boardmatch Ireland is trying to achieve so I was happy to step up to assist with that transition.

How did you find the transition "diving" into the Chair role?

At the time, I was the CEO of a not-for-profit myself and so was conscious of the need to serve as challenging friend to the leader of the executive team and build a strong relationship. Taking over the Chair role turned out to be a baptism of fire, in that there was a change in the CEO just as I took over as Chair. The impact of that transition cannot be underestimated in a small organisation. The Board, however, was strong and had both depth and diversity in skill set that helped us steer the organisation through the changes. In many ways the transition was done before I had time to even think about it.

Did you undertake any training?

I had completed the Chair and CEO training with Boardmatch Ireland, run by Dorothy Dalton. The course remains some of the most impactful and insightful training I have ever done. I couldn't recommend it highly enough and it is something that I have leaned on in many situations that have arisen throughout my career.

What piece of advice did you get as a Chair that was key in your role?

The piece around the role of the Chair as a challenging friend to the executive but also, in many cases, with fellow Directors too is the nugget that resonated most.

Has there been any challenges?

The challenge, if any, comes from the responsibility I felt, amplified perhaps by having been a CEO of a not-for-profit. For me too, the time given the stage my professional and personal life were at.

What has been the positive aspects to the role?

The experience as a whole and the confidence you derive from having served as Chair, particularly given the incredible people I served as a Director with in Boardmatch Ireland. They are people I admire and respect and to whom I feel you could always turn to even though I am no longer a Director - having served my three terms. Serving as Chair also makes you even more acutely aware of your responsibilities as a Director. The value of the different perspectives that people can bring based on their backgrounds and experience is perhaps, one of the most important things I learnt as a Director too, but particularly as Chair. Hand in hand with this is ensuring that you provide an opportunity for everyone to get a chance to voice these opinions, something that as a society as a whole we are thankfully putting increased emphasis on.