

# STARLA SIRENO

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Executive and Team Coaching, Leadership Development, and Training

## Building and Maintaining a Board of Directors

Hard work is not an effective career management strategy. It can be painful to realize that “keeping your head down” isn’t enough to get you to where you want to be.

Countless clients have expressed their frustration at their ability to influence. They lobbied, without success, to get the budget or headcount they needed. They watched as lesser ideas were adopted over their own. Or even more meaningfully, many have watched as others, sometimes less qualified, got chosen to lead high profile initiatives or got promoted.

[Research](#) suggests that promotions, bonuses, and one’s ratings at work are only weakly correlated to actual performance. Instead, factors like “political skill” and how we’re perceived by those who make decisions can matter much more to our success. Even more, research has also found that those with high political skill believe they can effectively influence people and outcomes. They therefore have higher [self-efficacy and job satisfaction](#), [greater impact](#) on organizational outcomes, and are better at [managing stress](#). (For further reading, see [“Why You Should Be Playing Positive Office Politics.”](#))

### What is a Board of Directors?

A Board of Directors (BoD) is your informal team of trusted advisors. Each person plays a different role and some may play multiple roles. They help you get things done, but more importantly, they help increase your visibility and credibility within the organization.

### What are some of the ways your BoD can help you?

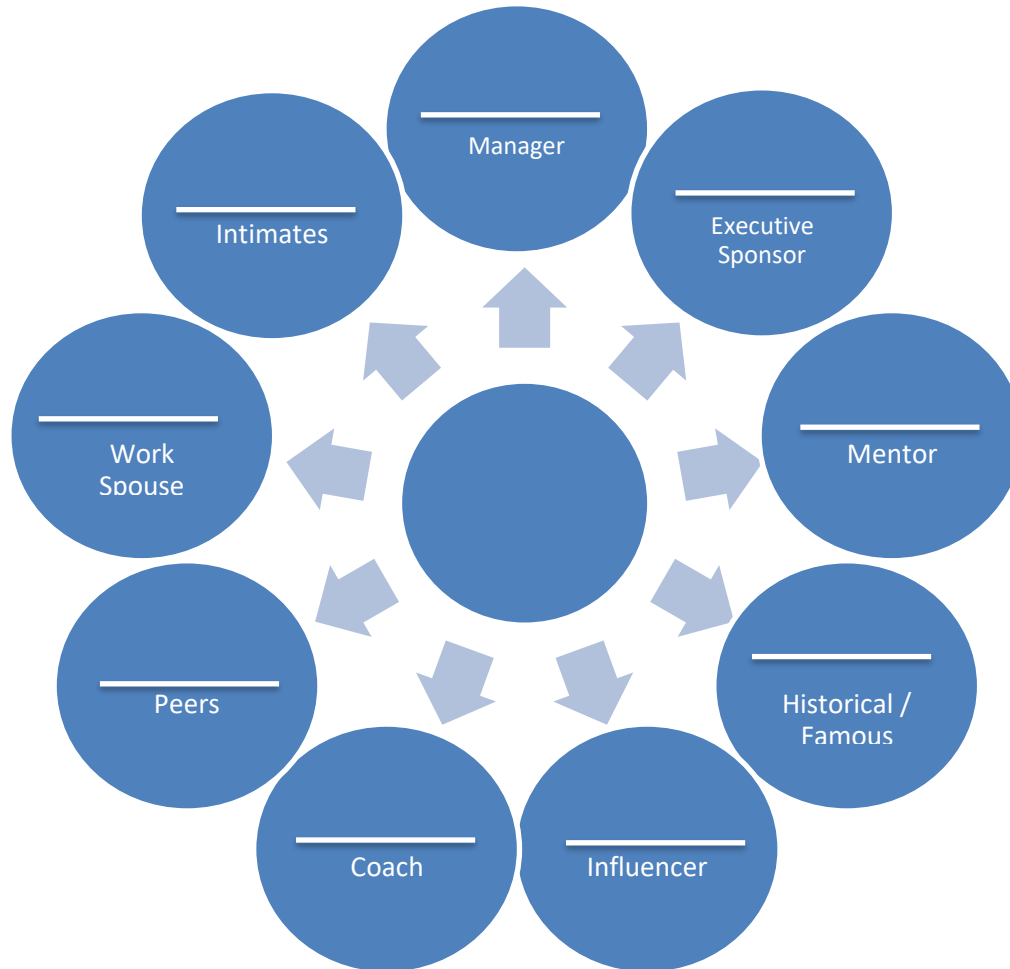
- Help you understand who has formal and informal power
- Help you foster relationships with influential people within the organization
- Be a sounding board to brainstorm approaches
- Advocate for you, your team and your projects
- Keep you apprised of opportunities in the pipeline, whether projects or roles
- Be a proxy in the room

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### Types of BoD Members



**Mentor:** Someone further along in their career and has experienced the situations and challenges that you are currently facing. Can offer technical insights specific to your field, or more political insights about how the system works. A source of professional growth and knowledge particularly interested in investing in your development. [Research](#) shows that people with mentors perform better, advance in their careers faster, and even experience more work-life satisfaction.

**Influencer:** Has a finger on the pulse and a voice that may help you make your case. Someone with whom to seed and cultivate the projects you want to make happen. Backs your work and ideas.

**Coach:** This could be a former executive coach or an objective third party within your organization who will challenge you and help you achieve your goals. Someone who will hold up a mirror to your blind spots, help you clarify your focus and priorities, and hold you accountable to yourself.

**Connector:** Imagine a hub and spoke. A connector sits solidly in the hub. They seem to know everyone; how to get things done; and are tuned into how people are feeling about what's happening organizationally. They may often be informal influencers, as well.

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**Executive Sponsor:** Everyone wants one, but unlike a mentor, you can't ask for an executive sponsor – they happen through a more consistent relationship (they choose you). They are willing to put their reputation and political capital on the line to put your name forward and advocate on your behalf. Backs you and your potential as an individual. [Research](#) shows that professionals with sponsors are 23% more likely than their peers to get promoted.

**Proxy:** Someone who can commit or make decisions on your behalf. Someone you trust and can enable enough to be in the meeting *for* you. Your personal “Chief of Staff.”

**“Reverse” Mentor:** Someone more junior and with a highly diverse perspective from your own. Someone who can continue to provide a deeper understanding of and connection to what's going on “on the ground,” especially as your role becomes higher and more strategic. According to [research](#), reverse mentoring can also promote diversity and drive culture change; promote digital skill development among more senior leaders; and increase retention among younger employees.

**Work “Spouse”:** Someone with whom you can be authentic and vulnerable, and who will provide emotional support or be your cheerleader when needed. [Research](#) shows that people who have a best friend at work are happier and seven times more likely to be engaged.

**Intimates:** Friends, family, and others who are also within your larger emotional support system. The people you can always turn to, whether it's to recharge, lean on for support, or simply unload.

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### My Board of Directors

Take some time to identify who might already be on your Board of Directors; where there are gaps; and, how to proactively nurture these important relationships.

BoD Member	What is important to them? What can I offer them?	What insight/support can they provide? What is my request?	Next step in the relationship

### Allyship

Who will I mentor or be an ally for? How?