



Finding a Mentor to Guide You in Your Appointment **Diana J. Mason, PhD, RN, FAAN**

So you want an appointment but are not sure that you'll be prepared for the tough challenges that can arise, whether on a governing board, a political appointment, governor-appointed commission, local city advisory council or other policy-related body. While reading about or attending programs on "board"¹ service or political appointments can help, there is nothing like the guidance of an experienced appointee to guide you.

A mentor can help you in a two important ways. First, the mentor can help you to get the appointment. Consider a nurse who is seeking a political appointment and asks a former mayor to mentor her. The mentor can not only find appropriate opportunities but undoubtedly has the connections to facilitate the appointment—perhaps a call to the mayor's office or the chair of the board of directors of the hospital. The mentor can introduce you to other key stakeholders and players who can be helpful in your appointment, whether someone on the Governance Committee of the board or a powerful legislator who would write a letter of support for your nomination.

Second, the mentor can coach you on how to bring your best self to the appointment and handle some of the challenges that may arise. This is particularly so if the mentor knows the organization to which you are seeking the appointment. For example, a politically experienced mentor will be a great asset when you are unsure of how to manage a conflict of interest or possible improper financial transaction by the organization that merits scrutiny by the board or legal counsel. This is crucial on governing boards since you have a fiduciary responsibility as a trustee or director. But it's also important when you're serving as a political appointee and are confronted with possible unethical or irresponsible actions or inactions by staff for the commission or the chair of the commission who was appointed by the governor.

How do you find the right mentor? First, you may need more than one mentor. One colleague has a wonderful nurse mentor with deep experience with appointments and leadership; but she understood the importance of connecting with political players in her state and asked a non-nurse who headed up the state's Democratic Party to serve as her mentor. He has helped her to network with important political players, opened doors for new opportunities for positions and appointments, and coached her in how to respond to difficult scenarios and issues. Coaching is not telling you what to do; rather, look for someone who can skillfully pose the questions that will help you to reflect on the solutions that will work best for you in the context of the organization you're serving.

The American Academy of Nursing's Institute for Nursing Leadership National Advisory Council recognizes the importance of mentors for even nurses who have some experience with appointments to boards. As such, the Academy is developing a "Wisdom Circle" that will identify Academy fellows who have deep experience with myriad appointments and pair them up with fellows who are new to an appointed role. Stay tuned for more on this important work.

¹ For the purposes of this essay, the term "board" is defined as the governance board of a non-profit or for-profit organization; or a political position, commission, task force, or other policy-related entity that may be appointed by a government official or body.

In the meantime, whom do you know—nurse or non-nurse—who has experience with the kind of appointments you are seeking? You might invite the person to breakfast and talk with them about their advice for securing and serving in a new appointment of interest. At the end of the breakfast, ask them for their help in obtaining the appointment and if they would be willing to meet with you on a regular basis to coach you in developing the knowledge and skills in being an outstanding appointee. Few will turn you down.