



From CEO to Boardroom: lessons in transitioning to a Non-Executive role



Mark Rollmann
Non-Executive
Director



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In a recent session hosted by Pedersen & Partners, **“Transitioning from an Executive to a Non-Executive Role,”** **Mark Rollmann**, an accomplished retail executive, shared his personal and strategic journey from Chief Executive Officer to Non-Executive Director (NED). Moderated by **Tomasz Maczynski, Client Partner at Pedersen & Partners**, the conversation addressed both the practical and psychological complexity of this unique career pivot.

Core lessons from transitioning to a Non-Executive role

Mark offered a series of reflective insights and recommendations – many of which are highly applicable to executives considering similar transitions:

CLARIFY YOUR MOTIVATION EARLY

“You can’t do it just because everyone else does it,” he cautioned.

Mark’s decision was rooted in wanting to remain connected to the business world while reducing intensity and regaining quality of life. For him, there was no compelling reason to pursue another CEO role.

TREAT THE NED ROLE AS A PROFESSION, NOT A HOBBY

"We're there to fulfill a very specific role... and we should take that very seriously." Mark cautioned against underestimating the intensity, especially when working with private equity boards or family-owned businesses.

START PREPARING EARLY AND CONSCIOUSLY

Anticipating this career pivot, Mark deliberately sought out a private equity context at SMYK and attended a preparation course. He underlined value of such programs to prepare future board candidates.

SEEK A MENTOR OR ROLE MODEL

A significant influence in Mark's transition was the Chairman who mentored him for three years prior to his NED role, helping him prepare for the structural and interpersonal shift of boardroom dynamics.

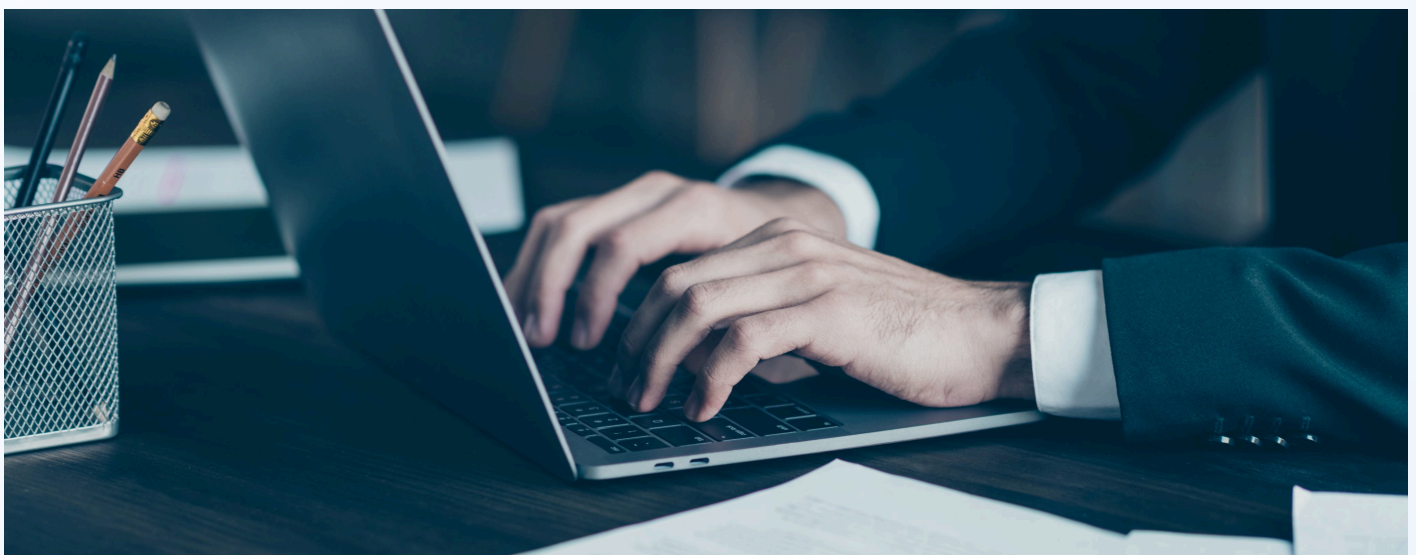
BUILD A NON-EXECUTIVE NETWORK

Mark advised attending board-level conferences and networking events well in advance of transitioning.

Managing the transition: Practical Implementation

Mark's experience also yielded specific operational lessons:

- **Define the plan upfront:** The success of his transition was largely due to a clear, pre-agreed succession plan that included milestones, financials, and board governance structure.
- **Ensure crystal clear role differentiation:** "It's not a part-time CEO role," Mark emphasized. The NED's function is to "advise, support and enable the CEO/executive Board as well as challenging, supervising and controlling".
- **Avoid the "Detail Trap":** "This is the biggest, biggest, biggest risk," he repeated. To manage his tendency to get involved, Mark physically wrote "Stay out of the detail" on every board agenda.



- **Manage emotional sensitivities:** Mark described the internal tension that can arise when new strategies are implemented, often implying that prior approaches were flawed. He admitted needing occasional reminders from the chairman not to defend the past too strongly.

"It takes emotional intelligence and confidence – from both sides."

- **Reframe relationships with the Executive Team:** Mark took initiative in reintroducing himself to former direct reports as a board member, encouraging them to support the new CEO fully and signalling his new boundaries clearly in daily communication.

- **Communicate openly with the new CEO and Chairman:** Mark actively invited feedback:

"Tell me if I overstep the mark," he told them. This helped avoid friction and build trust.

- **Address CEO insecurity proactively:** Especially for first-time CEOs, the presence of a former CEO can be intimidating. Mark made it clear from the outset that he had no intention of stepping back in, thereby reducing tension.

Final thoughts

Mark's story was not just about changing titles, but redefining one's role, purpose, and approach to leadership. His case illustrates that successful executive transitions – particularly from CEO to NED – require not only professional planning but also personal introspection, emotional agility, and trusted partnerships.

For organizations and advisors alike, the message is clear: investing in the transition process can deliver significant long-term value. And for executives, the next chapter can be just as meaningful – if approached with clarity and intention.