

apella

BIRCHWOOD
KNIGHT

IF ONLY I'D KNOWN THAT THEN

LESSONS FROM CORPORATE
AFFAIRS LEADERS

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FOREWORD

BY BARONESS NEVILLE-ROLFE

When I joined Tesco as Corporate Affairs Director from the civil service, it was very challenging. A different culture, different skills, different ways of working, different expectations, a different pace and some hostile individuals in my team and elsewhere. But I soon recognised the value of being able to react quickly to events and take ownership of issues. I made myself an expert on BSE (mad cow disease) and foot and mouth; got to grips with the fuel crisis; and coordinated the response to several Office of Fair Trading inquiries. I also went to night school to gain my Company Secretary qualifications. This meant that even before being appointed to the Board, I was in the boardroom, learning and building valuable relationships. And it was a pleasant surprise to join the Board as an Executive Director less than a decade after arrival.

When Andrew and Wayne came to see me at the beginning of March this year, the potential scale of Covid-19 was just starting to become apparent. We have since seen it take a tragic human toll and change our way of life. But like many crises that have come before, and the many more that will sadly follow, I am certain it will also create opportunities for Corporate Affairs Directors to shape business decisions for the better. Because as we all know, communicating well and doing the right thing in business is good for society, good for the environment and good for shareholders. A great corporate affairs leader can make all the difference.

When you get the opportunity to take on the number one corporate affairs role, take it with confidence. Learn all about the business, create your own induction if you need to, including getting out onto the shop floor – in my case literally. Decide what sort of leader you are going to be and focus on building the team you need and want. Hiring bright people is key to delivering your plan. And develop that plan quickly; people want to be led. In my experience it is better to set the vision and direction of travel as soon as possible and then adjust the plan as you go. Invest time in building relationships with the CEO and Executive Committee. Your relationship with the CEO is critical. But at the same, don't be their "creature", develop relationships with the Chair and other Board members too. Make sure you are clear on the business priorities and set your own objectives. Above all, show how corporate affairs supports the bottom line.

Think about the skills you need to be successful. Senior corporate affairs people need to understand how government works and legislation is developed so they can influence it, particularly as fewer politicians now come from a business background. Digital skills are of course essential, and I can only see environmental, social and governance standards becoming more important. Build long term relationships of trust with journalists. Think long term and don't be afraid to find a mentor and to look for development opportunities. I ended up as a peer of the realm!

If you're about to embark on your next corporate affairs challenge, good luck and enjoy it. I'm sure you'll find some helpful advice in this report.

Lucy

Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG

June 2020

Corporate affairs touches every part of a business and, done well, is a key driver of an organisation's success. Done badly, and the consequences are all too visible. So the role of Corporate Affairs Director is absolutely critical. And taking it on for the first time can be daunting. There is certainly no place to hide.

That's why we set out to understand how some of the most accomplished corporate affairs leaders approached a new role. How did they prepare for their first day? How did they educate themselves about the business and develop a plan to support its success? How did they ensure their team was fit for the task ahead? How did they understand, and then manage, the expectations of both the CEO and their peers and how soon were they under pressure to deliver? How did they find the transition to the Executive Committee (ExCo) and being a leader of the business, not just of the corporate affairs function? What did success really look like?

To answer these questions we spoke to 30 corporate affairs leaders, all direct reports to the CEO and/or members of the ExCo. They came from a wide range of organisations, from financial services and mining, to entertainment and retail. And from across the world - from Australia and the USA to continental Europe and the UK.

We asked for practical advice and what they wish they had known when they first stepped up to the job. This paper summarises the six themes that emerged:

Understand the business.

You won't be able to do your job well if you don't really understand the business. Take responsibility for your own induction, get out and about and talk to as many people as possible, inside and outside of the business. Don't miss the opportunity to ask the questions only a new member of the team can ask and make sure you understand the commercial drivers and the balance sheet. Find the gaps in your knowledge and fill them.

Get your team right.

Build the best team you can afford, as quickly as you can - without it, you're going to struggle. Assess the skills and structure you need and have got. Where changes are necessary, trust your instincts and act quickly. Make sure your team know they are important to you and you've got their backs. And regularly review your team to make sure it is up to, and up for, the task ahead.

Have a plan, get stuff done, add value.

You need a plan, but it doesn't have to be perfect; it will always be a work in progress. Make sure that your vision is shared with and understood by peers and your function. Deliver some quick tactical wins to demonstrate your intent, but don't be tempted to make big decisions too early.

Relationships, relationships, relationships.

Corporate affairs leaders succeed through influence. You need a broad network and a coalition of allies. Get regular quality time with your ExCo peers, the CEO, Chair and key Non-Execs. And always speak truth to power.

Be a business leader.

You are one of the leaders of the whole organisation. Use the opportunity to shape its direction, applying your corporate affairs lens to commercial challenges. Have a view on issues beyond your brief and speak up, but not just for the sake of it - less is often more. Believe in yourself; you have earned that place at the table.

Bring the outside in.

A critical role of the Corporate Affairs Director is to help the business understand how it is viewed by the outside world and identify emerging risks and opportunities. Use data – polling, social listening, external benchmarking. Bring in experts, be open to new ideas, engage widely and read extensively.

We hope the advice in the report will prove useful to anyone about to embark on their first or next corporate affairs leadership role, as well as to those aspiring to get there in the future. We believe it also provides some interesting insights for Chair and CEOs looking to get the most out of their corporate affairs leaders.

UNDERSTAND THE BUSINESS



Make sure you know how the business works but do so from first principles. Resist the temptation to apply the logic you have developed from previous roles.

CLARE WYATT, GKN AUTOMOTIVE

Understanding the business sounds obvious doesn't it? But how many people really get the business they work for? Where it has come from, how things work, where money is made, and lost?

Clearly you start learning through the interview process, if not before, and you never stop. Use what time you have between accepting the role and starting to learn as much as you can. "Really understand the journey the business has been on and why it is where it is," said Fran Barnes at the NFU. When you do start, take responsibility for your own induction. Even if a seemingly comprehensive one has been organised for you, ask yourself what is missing, and fix it.

Manuel Kohnstamm at Liberty Global points out that: "Corporate Affairs has a licence to stick its nose in across the whole organisation." Use this privilege to the maximum.

Shop floors, factory floors, trading floors, call centres, distribution centres, data centres... you get the picture. Spend time getting around the business and meeting a broad range of internal stakeholders in those early weeks and months. Build a clear picture in your mind of every aspect of the firm by asking questions only a new employee feels comfortable asking. Katja Hall at Capita comments that: "If you don't find the time to network internally early on, it probably won't happen."

As a member of the ExCo, it is essential to understand the financial and commercial make-up of a business. What does a good profit margin look like? What are the variable costs? In most organisations you'll be expected to know your way around the balance sheet and understand cashflow, working capital, and more. For corporate affairs directors with responsibility for investor relations, this is already a core part of the day job. As Mark Phillips at BAE said "You can't do an ExCo level job if you don't understand what drives the numbers. You don't need to be overly numerate, but you do need a grasp of the commercial drivers of your organisation."

As well as the numbers, you also need to understand your organisation's customers. Who are they? What do they want? What do they think about the business? Who owns the relationship with them and who is responsible for communicating with them? The same goes for other external stakeholders, from local MPs and civil servants to members of the public and the regulator. What does the organisation's stakeholder map look like? Do you have the right tools and access to data to be able to understand what they think and want?

Data is your friend, so get your hands on as much of it as you can, as quickly as you can. Combine this with everything else you've learned and test yourself. Can you clearly, yet succinctly articulate what the firm does and how it does it without boring a friend? Could you deliver a detailed and incisive presentation about the business to a room full of MBA students?

It may seem obvious, but no one regretted any of the time and effort they invested in really understanding the business. Many wished they'd done more. Those who make a half-hearted effort, or simply accept what is put in front of them, will find it more difficult to succeed. Those who do it well, will gain the knowledge they need to influence the direction of the organisation. And of course, you can't effectively communicate what you don't understand.



Work out what internal structures there are and how you are going to get the information you need quickly, and develop personal networks.

KATE HILL, BABCOCK INTERNATIONAL GROUP

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Get out and about and talk to as many people as possible, inside and outside the business
- 2 Don't miss the opportunity to ask the questions only a new member of the team can ask
- 3 Make sure you understand the financial and commercial drivers
- 4 Build a stakeholder map and develop your network
- 5 Test yourself, find the gaps in your knowledge, and fix them

GET YOUR TEAM RIGHT



You will be judged on the quality of the people you hire. Fine isn't good enough; you need the best people possible in each key post.

ED PETTER, BT GROUP

You can't do it all yourself. You need a team, and one that can stand on its own two feet. Your job is to build a function that is more than capable of handling business as usual. This will give you the time and space needed to be able to look beyond the short term, and identify, plan for and avoid or exploit those medium to long-term risks and opportunities.

Having a great team will also enhance the value and reach of your corporate affairs function. It will mean your people are invited into the room when important decisions are being made, rather than just being asked to draft the press release at the end of the process or smooth things over with a disgruntled MP.

Over time you may find it easier to hire great people as your function becomes a more desirable place for corporate affairs professionals to grow and develop. This new intake will also encourage others to raise their game.

There was broad consensus among those we spoke to that getting your team right is one of the top priorities. Now that you understand the business and its strategic objectives, you will have begun to work out how your function can best support them. What skills will you need your team to have? How many people and at what level? How should you organise them?

Too much capacity (too many people) is not just expensive, it can often lead to narrower jobs with less accountability, making it harder to attract the best people possible. Too few, and you risk over-working your people and under-delivering for the business.

Wherever you end up on the shape and size of your team, you need the best people you can find. As Jane Goodland at Quilter noted: "A few good people around you will make the world of difference. It's not a numbers game, it's about capability."

With luck, you will already have one or two superstars in the ranks. You should also look for untapped potential. Consider shuffling the deck, moving people out of their comfort zone and into new roles. Or asking for volunteers for projects. Keenness goes a long way.

Where changes in personnel are necessary, the message from those we spoke to was clear: trust your instincts. Rarely do leaders regret making these decisions or acting on them too quickly.

Building a high-performing team is more than structure and people, it takes leadership. David Shriver at Ocado says: "Build a team that inspires you and establish a common mission with your people. If you have an office, always keep the door open or better still, just take down the walls." Maxine Taylor at King's College London echoed this: "Make time for your team, if you can, every single member. They matter to you, so demonstrate this as often as you can."

Getting your team right is essential for your success at ExCo. It's a top priority when you start and requires constant effort as the needs of the organisation and the individuals evolve. Get it right, and your plans stand a good chance of success.



Make sure your team know you're motivated by them being successful.

ALEX COLE, BUPA

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Assess the skills and structure that currently exist and what you need
- 2 Build the best team you can afford, as quickly as you can
- 3 Trust your instincts
- 4 Make sure your team know they are important to you and you've got their backs
- 5 Regularly review your team to make sure they are up for, and up to, the task ahead

HAVE A PLAN, GET STUFF DONE, ADD VALUE

“ You do need to deliver but it’s a mistake to think you need to do it immediately. You are only as good as your next achievement so make sure you do it well.

RICHARD TAYLOR, POST OFFICE

It’s day one, the adrenaline is pumping, and you’ve got a big smile on your face. You look sharp in your new outfit and are raring to go, full of ideas.

Slow down, take your time.

Yes, people are watching - your team, your peers, the boss. But you are not under as much pressure as you think you are. Or as Tori Cowley at HKEX puts it: “Show value from day one but that doesn’t mean you have to change the world in your first week.”

Earlier we highlighted the need to really get to know the business, so take time to formulate your plan. But don’t spend months and months drafting the perfect plan. It doesn’t exist and will soon go out of date. Instead think of it as a constant work in progress, adapting and improving it all of the time.

Speed of delivery was a key area of discussion, with many saying it’s a mistake to think you need to deliver immediately. One of our interviewees spoke about being seen to recognise, understand and face into the challenges ahead, even if you are not yet fixing them. Clare Wyatt at GKN Automotive put it like this: “Deliver quickly without making decisions you can’t go back on; big decisions need to be informed decisions.”

You have been hired because the business, the CEO, is looking for something new, better and different. In our discussions, a consensus emerged that while you are not under pressure to deliver at pace, you should look to put down an early marker or two.

Look for areas where you can quickly and simply add value. This may be as straightforward as improving the quality of the writing, your internal reporting and information sharing, the accuracy of the media monitoring or the crisis comms plan. In fact, tackling the crisis plan early is often a good idea. Ed Petter at BT Group said: “Your CEO will take comfort that this has been done, but even more importantly, if a crisis hits and you cock it up, you’re toast.”

Another good place to start is with issues raised by your peers on the ExCo. They will be reassured by evidence of action. Show them how corporate affairs can support their goals and is commercially relevant. But keep your wits about you, one interviewee said that the first ExCo peer to pounce might want to use you to get something through that’s been stymied for ages.

Stephen Whitehead at Standard Life Aberdeen observed: “If you’re on the ExCo, you’re clearly being hired to do a strategic role, but in your first year you earn your spurs tactically.”

Everyone accepted the need to have a plan, to develop it with key members of your team and to gain input from your peers. But there were different views on the usefulness of the infamous first 100 days.

Many felt this was unhelpful and clichéd, more suited to politicians and less to today’s fast-paced digital world.

Not all agreed. Some welcomed the rigour and structure it brought to the planning and delivery process. HS2's Aileen Thompson said: "Creating and updating a 100-day plan is essential – I use it to hold myself to account as much as anything else. It's a good discipline."

As starting points go, it is probably as good as any. George Mayhew, Thames Water suggests "Arrive with the outline of a plan. Then fill in the gaps as you gain the knowledge to do so." So, don't become too attached to it. Be open to change, especially if events change.

Rather than an arbitrary deadline, it is perhaps more appropriate to align your plan to the organisation's own cycles and timescales. If it operates on a daily cycle, then you probably need to move faster. If the business works over longer cycles, then you can afford to take more time. As Endemol Shine's Patrick Keegan suggests: "Set your own timeframe. Rarely does a 'one size fits all' approach ever work".



If you achieve only one thing in your first 100 days, then make sure it demonstrates how your function is a commercial driver for the business as a whole.

DAN MOBLEY, DIAGEO

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Make a plan quickly and share it
- 2 Don't make the plan War and Peace, and keep it constantly under review
- 3 Match your delivery timescales with those of your organisation
- 4 Get some quick tactical wins under your belt
- 5 Don't be tempted to make big decisions too early

RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS



Invest in building great relationships across and through the business. It's hard, but it will help you.

VICTORIA MCKENZIE-GOULD, M&S

As someone who has built a career cultivating strong relationships on behalf of the organisations they represent, this should be easy, right? Erm, hopefully.

Mark Phillips at BAE Systems says: "Corporate Affairs Directors need to be good at understanding and exercising soft power to build relationships throughout the business." You don't have the same levers as the CFO (holding the purse strings), the General Counsel (threatening fines or prison) or the CEO (just do it). You need to persuade and influence. Bring people around to your way of thinking.

First, you need to understand the relationship dynamics at play. Don't be naïve in thinking that the ExCo is beautifully aligned. They'll probably be on their best behaviour in your first meeting, but odds are they'll be back to "robust debate" by the next one.

Use your corporate affairs experience to map the senior internal stakeholder environment and work out who influences who and how. In your early days use the insight of your team and constantly challenge any assumptions you may have made.

As you build your picture of the internal structures, you will get to know how information flows around the organisation. From that you can work out where you need to build your personal network. For Nick Fox at Virgin Group this is key: "Get out there and see [people] in their own environment, that way when problems arise they're far more likely to pick up the phone and tell you about it or ask for help."

A critical shift in dynamic is that you need to get used to the fact that your team is no longer your team. Of course it still is, but it isn't your only team. As Barney Wyld at National Grid put it: "As Corporate Affairs Director, your team is the ExCo. Seek their counsel and secure a bedrock of support and understanding."

Work hard on building trusted relationships among your peers who you can then rely upon for support when the going gets tough, as it inevitably will at some point.

But be careful to avoid aligning yourself with specific groups because, as Fiona Thorne at Flutter says: "...it will limit your ability to act as an honest broker."

Your most important relationship will be with the CEO. Of course it is, they're your boss. They clearly rate you as they just hired you. And hopefully you like them. If you don't, you're in for a bumpy ride. Victoria McKenzie-Gould at M&S cautions: "It seems obvious, but really make sure you like the CEO, and that they get and need what you do."

Almost everyone we spoke to stressed the importance of speaking truth to power. Do it with a light touch, do it with diplomacy, but do it you must. You have a responsibility to put what's best for the business above all else. In the same vein, don't be tempted to fall into the "consigliere trap" - overtly prioritising the needs of the CEO above all else. Many of our interviewees made this point.

Mark Henderson at the Wellcome Trust offered the following: “A helpful way is to see yourself as a consigliere to the entire ExCo, equally. Get that right and you’re heading in the right direction.”

One final piece of advice that a number were keen to highlight, was to not forget about the Board, and especially the Chair. You work for the organisation, not the CEO, and are there to look out for the best interests of the business. Increasingly the Chair is concerned with reputation. They will look to you for advice and counsel.

It’s a difficult balancing act, but you need a strong working relationship with the Chair and the CEO. There is also an element of self-preservation in this. The Chair needs to trust you through a CEO change, and if they feel positive about you, that will help in building a relationship with the new CEO.



Make sure you are clear on the problem(s) that your boss is trying to solve, and make sure that your plan is helping them to achieve that.

BRENDAN O’GRADY, GUARDIAN MEDIA GROUP

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Always speak truth to power
- 2 Find your coalition of allies, but maintain your independence
- 3 Remember that your team is now the ExCo
- 4 Get regular quality time with the Chair and key Non-Execs
- 5 Start to worry if you stop liking your CEO

BE A BUSINESS LEADER



Be prepared for a huge amount of additional work. You are now there to help run the business as well as your function. It will be a steep learning curve.

SIMONE NIVEN, RIO TINTO

That promotion to the ExCo is something you have been working towards your whole career. You knew it would be a big step up, but everyone we spoke to said that when the time came, they were surprised by how big that step was. Going from being the head of a functional department to one of the leaders of the whole organisation can be quite a shock.

But the advantages of having a seat at the table are huge. As Anik Michaud at Anglo American points out: "You are in the room shaping the decisions before they are made, instead of just having to deal with the (occasionally messy) aftermath."

"Remember you are there to contribute to the whole business, not pop in to present on a comms agenda item – you need to be able to form a view on almost everything," says Brendan O'Grady of the Guardian Media Group. ITV's Paul Moore had a slightly different view: "To truly become a valuable member of the executive you have to be a dispassionate judge of your own ability and be clear about which topics you can add value on and which you can't."

Like an MP's maiden speech, do not underestimate the impression your first remarks will make. They will set the tone. Alex Cole at Bupa has this advice: "Talk out of your brief. Do not allow yourself to be pigeonholed as the comms person. Make your contribution early, but not first, and off topic. Research, practice and check it out beforehand with experts. That will set out your stall."

Also think about not just what you say, but how you say it. "Fluency in the language of business leaders is important to be successful at ExCo", says Stephen Doherty, Barclays.

Blanca Juti at Heineken spoke about always striving to bring together the needs of the business and those of its stakeholders. She says: "Where you achieve this, you create virtuous circles which have positive commercial outcomes."

Don't be afraid to challenge your peers. But do so respectfully, and expect to be challenged back, particularly if you have yet to get your own house in order.

Beyond the ExCo things are different too. Your team walk taller in the knowledge that what they do must be valued by the CEO if you are at the top table. Colleagues from beyond your function seek out your advice more than before, and when you go on a site visit you're considered a VIP. Don't let this go to your head!

Two things will help you make a successful transition to your new role: self-belief and self-awareness. You have earned your seat, believe in yourself. As Dan Mobley at Diageo says: "You are there for a reason, trust your judgement, you don't need to ask permission anymore." And just as you need to understand the business, you also need to understand yourself. Self-awareness is an important attribute for a successful corporate affairs leader, as is taking responsibility for finding solutions. Identify your development areas, prioritise and work on them. Perhaps an intensive course, a mentor or a coach can help. Victoria McKenzie-Gould at M&S says: "Work out what sort of leader you want to be. Be clear on your mandate, why are you there?"

You need to believe in yourself and the value of your function. You will be challenged on many fronts and in many ways, accept this and be ready for it. Others around the table will think they know how to do your job, but it is a specialist skill. Rowan Adams at Tate & Lyle says: "Push against others trying to do your job: You wouldn't put me in charge of tax or legal, I wouldn't tell you how to run an audit process or restructure the manufacturing sites, so butt out!" Done with humour, you'll gain their respect.



You don't need to know everything. So stop trying, or your head will explode. But make sure you quickly establish where the experts are who you can ask.

JANE GOODLAND, QUILTER

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Prepare to be stretched more than you have ever been before
- 2 Have a well-formed view and be prepared to express it, but don't feel you have to. Less is often more
- 3 Quickly assess the tenor and tone of the room. Work with it before trying to change it
- 4 Apply your corporate affairs lens to commercial challenges
- 5 Believe in yourself – you have earned that place at the table

BRING THE OUTSIDE IN



Corporate affairs can shine a light on what is important, it can also cast a shadow. Crucially, we can highlight the things no-one wants to talk about but really should.

ALEX COLE, BUPA

Events that ruin companies often occur because the firm has lost touch with the outside world. Yet many firms struggle to look beyond what is happening within. This can lead to poor decision making.

A critical role of the Corporate Affairs Director is to help the board and your peers see how the world views the business. Brendan O'Grady from Guardian Media Group says: "Corporate Affairs should be the ears as well as the mouthpiece for an organisation."

How might a shift in society and potential changes in government policy affect the business? What opportunities might present themselves? What new threats might emerge? "You should help lift everyone's gaze," says Paul Moore at ITV.

To achieve this, you need to use your experience and your instinct, but crucially you need data. Reputation analysis, polling and opinion surveys, media sentiment, feedback from external stakeholders, social listening and more. Make data core to your decision-making. It will give you a stronger voice at ExCo and help you make your case.

National Grid's Barney Wyld says: "Our job is to bring really well sourced and analysed data and insight to ExCo discussions, to change and mature the debate". Simone Niven from Rio Tinto comments: "Data is right up there in importance as a lever to run the business, especially in an organisation full of engineers."

As well as data, don't forget your external network of Corporate Affairs leaders. Talk to them. What trends do they see coming down the line? How are they engaging with their stakeholders and measuring success? What have they done that works? What should you avoid? Do some external benchmarking. Learn from them and steal best practice with pride. And share what you have learnt with your CEO and colleagues. They will be measuring themselves against other businesses and CEOs, and any insight you can provide will be gratefully received.

Be prepared to invite external experts into the discussion with your CEO and ExCo colleagues. Do they need to focus more on climate change? Bring in a scientist. Do they not really get social media? Let them hear about it from a digital native. Getting a third party to make your case doesn't weaken your standing, as some might fear, but strengthens it. It shows the value you can bring by opening their eyes to the outside world.

Finally, don't forget to think and read widely. Research and be open to new ideas, new perspectives, new thinking. Bringing those to the board table, at the right time and in the right way, will take the debate and ultimately the strategic decision-making to a new level.

Obviously, all the data, conversations, articles and books will only get you so far. They need to be coupled with wisdom and good judgement. Which, at the end of the day, is why you are where you are.



Strategic challenges that ruin companies are rarely internal factors. Corporate Affairs should give insight into what might be coming down the track.

ROWAN ADAMS, TATE & LYLE

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Use data to understand what's going on in the outside world
- 2 Do some external benchmarking and share case studies from other businesses who have done something well, or badly
- 3 Bring in experts to help make your case
- 4 Build and nurture your Corporate Affairs network
- 5 Read, read and read some more

We've used all the conversations with our interviewees to draw out the six themes in this report. But there were lots of nuggets too good to leave out. Here's a selection:

ROWAN ADAMS ON DEALING WITH A NEW CEO

"Do your research about them before they arrive, and when they do help them navigate the firm, the culture, its structure and process. And then help others work them out."

MAXINE TAYLOR ON HOW TO LEAVE YOUR OLD JOB

"However tempting it may be to take your foot off, you owe it to those who remain to maintain momentum to the very end. People will remember their last interaction with you the most."

ED PETTER ON OUR FRIENDS IN HR

"To work hand-in-glove on employee engagement you need a strong working relationship with your HR Director. If you are not together as one it will create friction."

RICHARD TAYLOR ON GETTING STUFF DONE

"There is a time to be collegiate and a time to just crack on. That comes from experience and having got it wrong before. If something obvious is missing get it in place, don't hang around, don't seek permission."

PAUL MOORE ON DOING SOME GENTLE DIGGING BEFORE DAY ONE

"Speak to journalists and other external stakeholders before you start; get a feel for what they think about the business, key people and your team."

TORI COWLEY ON GAINING THE TRUST OF PEERS

"Corporate Affairs is not a linear function... which makes defining [it and] the role hard. Often the best approach I think is to 'show and tell' by example – show what is possible through excellent delivery."

AILEEN THOMPSON ON TAKING A BREAK BEFORE YOU START

"If you can, take some time off between roles – you'll be grateful for it."

MARK HENDERSON ON NOT BECOMING THE REPUTATION POLICE

"Very much like a libel lawyer at a media outlet, remember you are there to facilitate the business doing things, not stop it."

MANUEL KOHNSTAMM ON BEING ABLE TO EXPLAIN THE COMPLEX, SIMPLY

"If you don't have this skill, develop it, urgently. Get help."

STEPHEN DOHERTY ON NOT FORGETTING WHAT THE DAY JOB IS

"The primary thing the organisation want you to do is lead and drive the performance of the Corporate Relations function to support the business's goals."

GEORGE MAYHEW ON THINKING ABOUT YOUR CAREER

"Don't overlook your own personal development. Look beyond your first 12 months in the role, are you still growing and learning?"

SIMONE NIVEN ON GETTING GOOD PEOPLE

"Don't regret moving quickly on people who are either not performing or not bought in to your vision. You'll need the very best people around you."

BLANCA JUTI ON KEEPING THINGS SIMPLE

"In your everyday interactions around the business and with stakeholders use normal language. Explain things like you'd explain them to a friend. Ditch the jargon."

BARNEY WYLD ON BEING ALIGNED WITH THE BOSS

"Understand the level of ambition the CEO has for the firm and become aligned to it. With a clear sense of their agenda you will be able to work out how you can best help."

ANIK MICHAUD ON SAYING SORRY

"Identify and deliver quick wins in your first three months. But apologise quickly when you get things wrong, which you will. And that is okay"

STEPHEN WHITEHEAD ON DOING YOUR RESERACH

"For listed businesses there really is no better way to get under the skin of a business than to read the investor analyst notes. They get right to the heart of the current challenges and future prospects."

KATJA HALL ON BEING SECOND BEST

"At ExCo decide what you want to be second best at, for me this was people related areas and I do all that I can to support the HRD's priorities."

BRENDAN O'GRADY ON KEEPING THE WAGON ON THE ROAD

"Quick wins are over-rated, take your time, but make sure the wheels don't fall off whilst you get your feet under the table."

CLARE WYATT ON INTERVIEWING WITH CLARITY

"During the recruitment process always be crystal clear about who you are."

KATE HILL ON THE BENEFITS OF A GOOD CRISIS

"Done right Corporate Affairs removes blockages and helps organisations succeed. We can shine in a crisis; issues management ensures a problem doesn't become a disaster."

FIONA THORNE ON THE BENEFIT OF DETACHMENT

"Don't become emotionally attached to the business. By being emotionally detached you will offer better advice."

DAN MOBLEY ON AVOIDING IMPETUOUSNESS

"Establish credibility quickly, but don't act in haste."

ALEX COLE ON RE-HIRING YOURSELF

"Each year I recruit myself for the job I'm currently doing: am I still up for the challenge, do I have the skills and experience necessary, do I want to work with the people around me? Ultimately, would I hire myself? I find it a very useful way to self reflect."

MARK PHILLIPS ON GIVING YOUR PEOPLE SPACE

"Once there is mutual trust with direct reports, give them the space to get the things done that you need them to be doing. Be clear on expectations, but don't tell them how to do it."

FRAN BARNES ON TAKING YOUR TIME

“Don’t be pushed into doing something too quickly that may make you look good but causes chaos elsewhere. You’ll just be storing up problems further down the road.”

NICK FOX ON BEING COMMERCIAL

“Communications can never be done in isolation. It is important that it supports the commercial goals of the business.” Take into account the financial implications of anything you say.”

VICTORIA MCKENZIE-GOULD ON INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

“Make sure you understand what and where the powerhouse of your business really is. Then make that core to what you do.”

PATRICK KEEGAN ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

“The default when in house can be to prioritise external over internal comms. Challenge yourself on the balance.”

READING LIST

Our interviewees also shared the books that have helped and inspired them along the way. We have left in the reasons they gave for their choices, but given some of the comments, names have been removed to protect the innocent.

'LIFE ON AIR' BY DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

"Of passion, opportunity and quiet, understated leadership. It demonstrates how taking risks and doing what feels right, is almost always worth it"

'THE BLAIR YEARS: EXTRACTS FROM ALASTAIR CAMPBELL'S DIARIES' BY ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

"Fascinating insight into the political world and the mind of the best political Director of Communications of the modern era"

'WINNERS: AND HOW THEY SUCCEED' BY ALISTAIR CAMPBELL

"An inspirational read, but the first chapter especially is a masterclass in defining strategy"

'BAD BLOOD' BY JOHN CARREYROU

"A riveting story of the biggest corporate fraud since Enron, a tale of ambition and hubris set amid the bold promises of Silicon Valley"

'GOOD TO GREAT' BY JIM COLLINS

"A truly brilliant management book that gives real insight into what a true leader looks like"

'TIPPING POINT' BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

"An exploration of the factors that when combined create momentum for change, it's always helpful to consider a communications leader in this context"

'THE CICERO TRILOGY' BY ROBERT HARRIS ('IMPERIUM', 'LUSTRUM', 'DICTATOR')

"Inherently instructive about politics, navigating power structures, strategic thinking, great oratory and storytelling, leadership, and brutally murdering your enemies. Almost all relevant to our role"

'LEADERSHIP BS: FIXING WORKPLACES AND CAREERS ONE TRUTH AT A TIME' BY JEFFREY PFEFFER

"A great guide to communicating and leading like a human being, not a corporate machine!"

'EVERYTHING I KNOW I LEARNED FROM TV: PHILOSOPHY FOR THE UNREPENTANT COUCH POTATO' BY MARK ROWLANDS

"An old one but a good one. Plus, it will make you chuckle"

'START WITH WHY' BY SIMON SINEK

"So often we lose energy on the What and How, without knowing the Why. The Why helps you focus"

'CONNECT: HOW COMPANIES SUCCEED BY ENGAGING RADICALLY WITH SOCIETY' BY TOMMY STADLEN, ROBIN NUTTAL AND LORD BROWNE

"Still the most practical (and inspirational) guide I have come across that that defines the role for business in society"

'TIME TO THINK' BY NANCY KLEIN

"Bringing the "Two ears and one mouth, use them in that ratio" saying into the 21st century – how effective listening can create a thinking environment and transformation of the highest quality"

'INTO THIN AIR' BY JON KRAKAUER

"His account of the Mt. Everest Disaster of 1997. A compelling story of human ambition, madness, horror and unbelievable courage. See any parallels?!"

'THE LEOPARD' BY GIUSEPPE TOMASI LAMPEDUSA

"One of the greatest literary examinations of change and how to deal with it (something you will have to deal with in your new role). It contains the memorable line: "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change"

'THE PIRATE INSIDE' BY ADAM MORGAN

"About innovating and bringing change to an organisation"

'THE ROAD' BY CORMAC MCCARTHY

"Both brutal and beautiful it will remind you that however tough a time you think you're having, it's really not the end of the world"

'TEAM OF TEAMS' BY STANLEY MCCHRYSTAL

"Strive to be radically transparent with your teams, the downsides of which are more than offset by the positives"

'LEAD YOUR TEAM IN THE FIRST 100 DAYS' BY NIAMH O'KEEFFE

"The original and still the best guide to building a 100-day plan"

'THE WISDOM OF CROWDS' BY JAMES SUROWIECKI

"An antidote to the notion that a camel is a horse designed by committee, that the mediocre many is often better than the informed few"

'BRILLIANT BUSINESS WRITING: HOW TO INSPIRE, ENGAGE AND PERSUADE THROUGH WORDS' BY NEIL TAYLOR

"A must read by for anyone who puts fingers to keyboard"

'THE REPUTATION GAME' BY DAVID WALLER AND RUPERT YOUNGER

"Made me realise that others own your reputation, not you, not your firm. And because of that it cannot be managed. Made me rethink entirely what and how the function operated"

'WATERHOUSE ON NEWSPAPER STYLE' BY KEITH WATERHOUSE

"The most entertaining manual of tabloid journalism, as important and relevant today as when it was first published in 1989"

CONTRIBUTORS

We are indebted to the 30 contributors listed below. While this project was conceived and kicked off before Covid-19, the interviews took place during the first weeks of the crisis, so we are especially grateful for the time everyone took to speak to us.

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FINAL THOUGHTS

There is no right or wrong way to launch yourself into a new Corporate Affairs Director role. To be a success will take time, effort and readjustment as you find the right balance. In those first few months there will be highs and lows, joys and frustrations, successes, and disappointments. You will never have worked harder in your entire career. You will need adaptability, authenticity, determination and stamina.

In this paper we have put together the collective wisdom of some of the most respected and successful leaders in corporate affairs right now. We found much agreement, yet also some differences. As you settle into your new role it is up to you to decide what advice you take, what you ignore and how you then apply it to the wonderfully unique opportunity in which you find yourself.

We wish you good luck, and also ask that in the future you too pass on what you have learnt.

ABOUT US

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Andrew has more than 20 years' in-house corporate affairs experience across regulated and unregulated sectors, in more than 100 countries.

Formerly Director of Communications and Public Affairs at Ageas Insurance, Director of Communications at energy company Drax Group plc and Group Corporate Affairs Director at IWG plc (formerly Regus).

Apella's advisory capabilities centre on how reputation can create sustainable value.

To achieve this it provides strategic communications advice underpinned by an essential combination of data-driven evidence married to the deep expertise and experience of its people.

The Apella logo consists of the word "apella" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter 'a' is significantly larger than the other letters, and the 'l' is also larger than the 'e' and 'l' that follow it.

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WAYNE REYNOLDS

Wayne founded Birchwood Knight in 2009 and has established it as a leading independent executive search company specialising in corporate affairs leadership.

With a dedicated team of researchers and a focus on in-house roles, they have a strong understanding of the talent in the market and the skills needed to be a successful corporate affairs leader. Over 95% of the people it places are still in post after two years.

Birchwood Knight also provides specialist corporate affairs consulting services.

This includes team development, recruitment process design and appointing senior corporate affairs directors into broader leadership roles.



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