

Constructive Counsel: Anne Bouverot is joining the board of Groupama after mentoring Sir Philip Hampton

CHRISTOPHER BROWN

# Advice that gets women on board

Mentoring women who are aiming for top management jobs is a powerful way to increase their presence in the boardroom. The experience can be revelatory, writes Alison Maitland

Alison Bouverot, head of international business development at Orange France Telecom, has first-hand experience of the benefits of mentoring by a senior corporate leader. She is about to join the board of Groupama, a leading French insurance company, as a non-executive director. "I really believe the discussions with my mentor and his advice have been key success factors," she says. "Over the past two years, his Bouverot has had regular meetings with her mentor, Sir Philip Hampton, chairman of J Sainsbury, under the FTSE 100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme. He has been very willing to discuss specific examples, such as the BP succession and the Hewlett-Packard boardroom leaks, as well as explain general matters such as board evaluations," she says. "This is particularly valuable for someone like me, in an executive position and with expertise in a particular sector, in understanding how a non-executive position in another sector would be different. Women hold just 12 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships, up from

5 per cent in 2000, and the mentoring programme was launched four years ago to try to redress this imbalance. "It is really important to speed the pace of change," says Sir Philip. "I and my fellow mentors believe that we need the best talent available, more so than ever in an economic crisis like this, and that women's participation has a beneficial effect on the culture of the boardroom." The main benefit of the programme is to put two groups of people – industrial, operational FTSE chiefs and competent, qualified senior women – in touch with each other, says Ms Bouverot. Typically, members of each group do not know many members of the other. "I really think that by establishing more contacts, more women will get into board positions," she says.

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Mentoring is a two-way process. From the start, Sir Philip has been very open and willing to learn, and asked me many questions about what it is to be a woman in the corporate world," she says. The 36 women who have been mentioned so far have achieved a range of successes. Eight have joined the main boards of their FTSE 100 companies and four have taken up non-executive directorships with other FTSE companies, says Peninah Thomson, who leads the programme on behalf of Patrista, an executive coaching company. Two have become non-executive directors of non-profit bodies, one a trustee of a government organisation, and five have been promoted in their companies. Alan Ferguson, chief executive of Tate & Lyle, the sweeteners group, has mentored a senior woman who has now been offered a non-executive directorship. He believes mentoring can build a woman's confidence about her particular contribution and help her set achievable objectives, such as starting with a FTSE 250 board and progressing to the FTSE 100.

## Two-way ticket to greater understanding

Mentoring programmes are as much about enabling crucial connections to be made as about helping potential directors understand how boards work. For instance, in the UK, Norway and Canada there are events where aspiring female directors can meet the people who influence board appointments.

As Sir Peter Ricketts, head of the UK Diplomatic Service says, "It only works if both sides get something out of it. Mentors act as highly experienced independent sounding boards for women executives to discuss issues confidentially, away from the day job. But mentors also usually learn things that enable them better to

understand and support women in their own organisations.

Sir Peter believes that being mentored helps a woman to come somewhere away from her business, her world, her colleagues and talk freely, knowing it's a supportive confidence and gets a different perspective.

Mentoring and boardroom training courses are useful for all potential directors – not just women – in unravelling the inter-connections of corporate governance and understanding how to deal with crises. Ian Ferguson, chief executive of Tate & Lyle, says: "I've got at least as much out of the programme as I hope the person I mentored has."

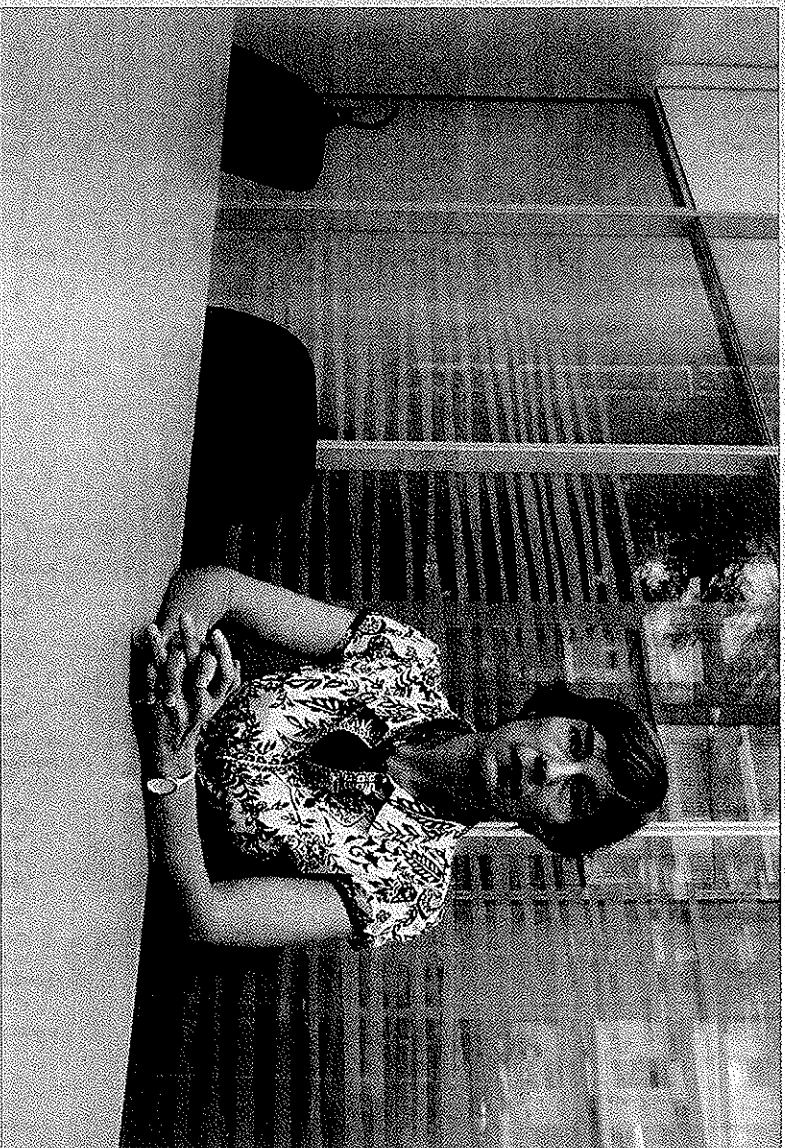
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senior manager reaching out to a woman and saying "You're really good, you could be extremely successful" can be a very powerful intervention if it is well targeted. The UK programme has inspired similar initiatives in France and Canada. Board Women Partners will be formally launched in France later this year, while Canada's Women on Board started last year and is now open to senior women from a wider pool than just the top 100 companies, says Thana Miller, programme director. Are such voluntary steps enough to accelerate change? The UK government last week called for faster progress in appointing women, saying that at the current pace it would take until 2050 to reach gender parity in the boardroom. The Spanish government is pressing companies to have at least 40 per cent women on their boards within eight years. In Norway, where government quotas have led to women now

holding at least 40 per cent of directorships of listed companies (up from 6 per cent six years ago), a range of measures including mentoring, boardroom training and media scrutiny of companies' progress has supported the influx of female newcomers. Elin Huvnæs runs Norway's Professional Boards Forum, which introduces candidly vetted, well-qualified women to chairs and chief executives at events that test the women's abilities in a simulated boardroom challenge. The Norwegian government and companies fund the forum. Ms Huvnæs spent a year establishing a database of qualified women, looking beyond senior corporate management to research and development, the public sector and entrepreneurs. So far, about 1,000 women have taken part in her events. "They per cent of the women who participated in the first couple of events got board positions within the next year," she says. "It's so much about connections."

In the UK, Lorraine Heggarty, who is being mentored by Rose Carr, chairman of Cadbury and Centrica, says she has not yet been offered a board position and is playing the long game. "Chief executive of Talkoedumes, the television production company and former controller of BBC1 she says: "It is not going to happen overnight – it's a lengthy process."

However, she has found it hugely beneficial in her executive job to be able to draw on Mr Carr's business acumen, connections and independence. Could this kind of mentoring be seen as special treatment? Ms Bouverot denies it. "There is nothing that says 'You'll get these women on to boards' or quota linked with it," she says. "Sir Philip was not asking for special treatment for being a woman, just for the opportunity to be treated fairly based on performance and experience."



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Alison Bouwerot, head of international business development at Orange France Telecom, has first-hand experience of the benefits of mentoring by a senior corporate leader. She is about to join the board of Groupama, a leading French insurance company, as a non-executive director. "I really believe the discussions with my mentor and his advice have been key success factors," she says.

Over the past two years, Ms Bouwerot has had regular meetings with her mentor, Sir Philip Hampton, chairman of J Sainsbury, under the FTSE 100 Cross Company Mentoring Programme. He has been very willing to discuss specific examples, such as the BP succession and the Hewlett-Packard boardroom leaks, as well as explain general matters such as board evaluations," she says. "This is particularly valuable for someone like me, in an executive position and with expertise in a particular sector, in understanding how a non-executive position in another sector would be different.

## Two-way ticket to greater understanding

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understand and support women in their own organisations. Sir Peter believes that being mentored helps a woman to come somewhere away from her business; her world, her colleagues and talk freely, knowing it's in complete confidence, and get a different perspective.

● Mentoring and boardroom training courses are useful for all potential directors – not just women – in unravelling the inter-connections of corporate governance and understanding how to deal with crises. Ian Ferguson, chief executive of Tate & Lyle, says: "I've got at least as much out of the programme as I hope the person I mentored has."

6 per cent in 2000, and the mentoring programme was launched four years ago to try to redress this imbalance. "It is really important to speed the pace of change," says Sir Philip. "I and my fellow mentors believe that we need the best talent available, more so than ever in an economic crisis like this, and that women's participation has a beneficial effect on the culture of the boardroom."

The main benefit of the programme is to put two groups of people – industrial, open-minded FTSE chiefs and competent, qualified senior women – in touch with each other, says Ms Bouwerot. Typically, members of each group do not know many members of the other. "I really think that by establishing more contacts, more women will get into board positions," she says.

From the start, Sir Philip has been very open and willing to learn, and asked me many questions about what it is to be a woman in the corporate world," she says.

The 36 women who have been mentored so far have achieved a range of successes. Eight have joined the main boards of their FTSE 100 companies and four have taken up non-executive directorships with other FTSE companies, says Peninah Thomson, who leads the programme on behalf of Parastar, an executive coaching company. Two have become non-executive directors of non-profit bodies, and a trustee of a government organisation, and five have been promoted in their companies. Alan Ferguson, chief executive of Tate & Lyle, the sweeteners group, has mentored a senior woman who has now been offered a non-executive directorship. He believes mentoring can build a woman's confidence about her particular contribution and help her set achievable objectives, such as starting with a FTSE 250 board and progressing to the FTSE 100.

He agrees that mentors can learn

too. "You realise some of the behaviours of self-selecting groups are very difficult for people not in that group to penetrate," he says. "It can add to our long-term competitive advantage if we use diversity better than our competitors."

Sir Peter Ricketts, head of the UK Diplomatic Service, is also mentoring a senior woman in the private sector. There are striking similarities between the issues she faces and those faced by senior women in the public sector about how to make an impact and succeed in what is still a very male-dominated culture," he says. "A

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Could this kind of mentoring be seen as special treatment? Ms Bouwerot denies it. "There is nothing that says 'You'll get these women on to boards'. There's no sense of entitlement or quota linked with it," she says. "Sir Philip told me he was happy to find I was not asking for special treatment for being a woman, just for the opportunity to be treated fairly based on performance and experience."