



Shelagh Donnelly

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Biography

You can count on Shelagh Donnelly. She walked your walk for almost three decades and brings insights and strategies based on experience as well as education and current best practices. Authentic, engaging and positive in her approach to assistants' professional development, Shelagh (think "Sheila") speaks pragmatically about career challenges and opportunities – and does so with a sense of humour.

The founder of Exceptional EA, Shelagh delivers training on minutes, communication skills, cybersecurity, and governance. She also presents on business writing, honing influence, interview skills, career growth and more. She knows what she's talking about. She's been a direct report to four CEOs and accountable to four board Chairs. Long active in Canadian and US professional associations, Shelagh's been a mentor, launched internal networks, and served as the Chair of a national board of directors.

Now, she coaches and presents at conferences, in person and virtually, and has her own webinar series. Shelagh also delivers training for government, higher education, governance and business audiences, including corporations such as the NBA.

Session: Leveraging Influence: Making a Portal Pipe Dream a Reality

Lucy Brazier interviews Shelagh Donnelly of Exceptional EA

In the first year of her decade-long tenure supporting a board of directors, Shelagh Donnelly spent many evenings photocopying confidential documents and building dozens of board packages (“board books”) assembly line-style for each board meeting. She went through the same process for board committee meetings. Late submissions meant inserting colourful placeholders in each package and then storing stacks of agenda packages in a secure manner while waiting for additional documents to photocopy.

It wasn't long before Shelagh began advocating for acquisition of portal software. She wanted to put a halt to the assembly line inefficiencies and also recognised that a portal could afford advantages and provide value to both the board and management team. However, this was 2009. None of Shelagh's sector peers in her region worked with a portal, and this represented an unprecedented expense. There was some resistance to long-established practices, and not everyone was comfortable with the notion of preparing for meetings from a laptop or iPad screen.

To some, a portal seemed nothing more than a pipe dream. Yet, incrementally and in partnership with a board champion, Shelagh made it happen. Join Shelagh and Lucy for a discussion of how an assistant can deploy strategy, diplomacy, networking and perseverance to overcome obstacles and add value.

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