



Board Mentor Bites

Featuring **Catherine O'Connell**

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Aspiring CFOs must master financial storytelling, act as strategic architects of future decisions, and leverage mentoring and external perspectives for guidance, resilience and problem-solving.

Q: What are the key qualities or competencies you believe an aspiring CFO should develop to effectively work with the Board?

Aspiring CFOs should develop **financial storytelling** to connect numbers with strategy, explaining the "why" behind financial figures. They need cognitive flexibility to shift between detailed analysis and big-picture thinking, plus cross-functional insight into operations, marketing and HR. Emotional intelligence is key for building Boardroom trust and anticipating the Board's blind spots. Being a **cultural translator** ensures clarity across diverse perspectives, fostering alignment and preventing miscommunication in decision-making.

Q: How can a new CFO effectively position themselves as a strategic partner to the Board?

To be a strategic partner, a CFO must **be the architect of what's next**, shaping future decisions and outcomes. Instead of only reporting past performance, they should connect financial insights to long-term strategy, helping the Board visualise future opportunities and risks. Bringing in external perspectives, such as market trends and case studies adds value, while shifting conversations toward growth and actionable solutions **positions the CFO as a proactive leader driving sustainable success.**

Q: What value does mentoring provide to executives who are transitioning to a CFO role, or any other senior leadership position?

Mentoring provides transitioning CFOs with a **safe space to discuss vulnerabilities** and learn from real-world challenges. Mentors offer tailored advice on navigating Boardroom dynamics and strategic decision-making, plus insights into **unwritten leadership rules**, such as managing Board interactions or influencing key decisions. Mentoring broadens strategic thinking, fosters **emotional intelligence**, and helps leaders build resilience, enabling them to confidently **embrace their new leadership identity.**

Q: How important is it for aspiring CFOs to have access to an external reference points while preparing for such a significant leadership role?

External reference points from peers and mentors **breaks internal echo chambers**, bringing **fresh perspectives** that **challenge organisational biases.** Informal peer benchmarking helps aspiring CFOs assess readiness and identify areas for growth. Mentors provide candid, unbiased advice free from internal politics, ensuring critical gaps are addressed. Cross-industry insights foster creative problem-solving, while learning from the collective experiences of peers builds resilience, preparing them to handle Boardroom challenges and financial decisions with broader, strategic foresight.

As a trusted reference point and impartial sounding board, Criticaleye Board Mentors help navigate the many challenges of leadership, so executives know what questions to ask. **Get in contact with our team to find out more about how we can support your leadership journey.**