

## Championing Diversity and Inclusion from the Top

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By NACD Editors

Investors, legislators, and director peers around the world notice that diversity and inclusion practices are slow to be adopted. While adopting diversity from the highest level of the company appears as a challenge for some boards, it is one worth overcoming. Enter Anna Catalano, a respected director and champion of greater inclusion of people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives in American boards and on boards around the world.

Catalano, an active corporate director with more than 30 years of experience, is a director of Willis Towers Watson, Kraton Corp., and HollyFrontier Corp., and advises still more companies. She is an NACD Board Leadership Fellow and board member of the NACD [Texas TriCities Chapter](#). In her work in the nonprofit sector, she is a director of the Alzheimer's Association, the Houston Grand Opera, and is an honorary co-founder of the Kellogg Innovation Network at Northwestern University.

Catalano's global business leadership experience is deep: she has held executive positions in Asia, Europe, and North America. She also is a proud champion of women in business and understands the role of diversity and inclusion in companies' ability to innovate.

NACD caught up with Anna Catalano to speak with her about diversity in the boardroom prior to NACD's 2018 Global Board Leaders' Summit.

**NACD:** Having held executive positions in Asia, Europe, and North America, how has working internationally influenced you?

**Catalano:** Living abroad really changes your perspective on the world. If you have the opportunity to work and live internationally, you should do it. An international perspective is crucial for members of boards at companies that are global or are considering expanding into global markets. It's important that companies recognize that not all countries develop in the same ways. If you have experiences working and living in different countries, it can help you understand how countries develop and what different populations are interested in within that market. One thing that has been reinforced for me in my global experience is that in spite of cultural differences across the globe, we all care about our families and our communities. I believe that perspective is needed on boards, and sadly it's really missing in many.

**NACD:** You've been recognized in *Fortune's* ranking of "The Most Powerful Women in International Business" and shared your thoughts on International Women's Day on your [blog](#). What advice do you have for female board members working to expand their international board portfolio? How can women break into the boardroom?

**Catalano:** It is crucial to get more women to serve on boards of all types and in all industries. If a woman is not on a board and is looking to join, I would advise her first to continue growing her experiences and seek out learning opportunities. My advice to people who want to get on their first board is to make sure you have a good story to tell about why you're qualified and what makes you a desirable candidate. It's imperative to be distinctive and able to add value to the strategic conversation. Second, you have to figure out how to become top-of-mind. You want to be the first person a recruiter or another director thinks of when a position opens up. How do you do that? Form relationships. The first time you call a recruiter should not be about how you're going to get onto a board. If you wait until you are 55 years old before you develop a relationship with a recruiter, it's probably too late. Start early and build relationships over time. Most importantly, women who already sit on boards need to help other women.

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**NACD:** Implicit bias and the idea of the bias of crowds hardwires a lack of inclusion into organizations. What steps can a board take to get serious when it comes to diversity and inclusion in 2018?

**Catalano:** Directors on a board need to understand deeply what diversity and inclusion are. It is not about numbers or getting a certain percentage of women or people of color in certain positions. The concept of understanding bias around diversity and inclusion requires delving into why you make certain choices and assumptions about people. My take is that in the majority of instances it's not intentional or malicious that women are primarily in functional roles and that men are primarily in profit and loss roles. Boards need to examine and understand why these trends happen, and that be willing to invest time into the process. If you ask most board members if they understand diversity and inclusion at their company, they will say they do but then they cannot really explain it. It is crucial to invest in learning about and understanding diversity and inclusion and having a board chair willing to spend some quality time on this topic.

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