



The AWTE's *Boardroom Ready* programme aims to equip women with the skills and attitudes necessary to secure a place on the board - and what to do when they get there.

The seminars and workshops have covered issues such as: getting to grips with finance, boardroom responsibilities, self-esteem and confidence, and HR/the Equality Bill. Forthcoming topics include presentation skills/handling panel sessions, choosing your board, and more on finance.

Two AWTE members discuss how taking part in the programme has benefited their skills, knowledge and confidence levels:

Debbie Dale, director, Debbie Dale Development

My objectives for taking part in *Boardroom Ready* were to gain more knowledge about the responsibilities of non-executive directors, and to learn from prominent businesswomen. There were three key learning points for me:

1. The eye-opener was the session held by Pricewaterhouse Coopers on the legal responsibilities of non-executive directors. I had no idea that, in a non-exec role, I would have the authority to question the directors on the financials. It's within a non-exec's responsibility to hold board members accountable, and put them on the spot, if necessary. Knowing it definitely made me question more and feel more comfortable about doing so.
2. The half-day seminar on Finance for Non-Financial Managers had both personal and professional benefits for me, as I had direct access to experts who could advise on my own situation. Having a forum with other business professionals on the same subject helped with the overall grasping of a topic that's important, but not a favorite of mine.
3. Confidence tips from all of our speakers were very useful, but for me Sunny Crouch made the most impact on me personally. She has been on several boards, and was very honest and open about how to handle mistakes, home life and feelings of self doubt. She said that, when you make an error, continue in a professional way. "Don't beat yourself up or let emotions overtake the issue at hand," she advised. This resonated with me as, at times, I tend to over-think some things I feel I shouldn't have done or said rather than the positives of what I did do well or right.

Taking part in the programme has given me the confidence to offer some of my clients the option of making me a non-executive director rather than working for them as a retained consultant. A few had never even thought of this option and one of my clients is seriously considering this as an option for them. They have taken it to the board, which currently has no non-execs!

As well as running my own business, Debbie Dale Development, I am also in the throes of setting up a brand new business, which has developed from an original idea of taking a new product to market. Initially I was in talks to be a consultant for this new product, however after gaining more knowledge, feeling more assertive in terms of 'the board' and learning from experienced professionals I have decided to be an Executive Director of the business. I am not sure that I would have done that this time last year before I took part in the *Boardroom Ready* programme.

Karen Ramírez, managing director, Lingo

I took part in the programme because I wanted to find out more about the responsibilities of a board role - both to ensure I was fulfilling what was needed for my own company, and to establish whether I might want to put myself forward for a board position in another company.

The two key learning points for me were about politics and power:

1. I'm not a political person: I have never been interested in the political aspects of a company - and, having worked in both an international institution and a large private sector bank, I felt that politics were rife and often a huge barrier to progress. However, Boardroom Ready helped me realise the value of the conversations that take place in advance of an official board meeting, sounding out your colleagues and 'getting the deal done' so that the board meeting itself is effectively a rubber stamping of the decision; the pre-work is more important in many ways than the board meeting itself. Will I ever be political? Probably not - I just want to see a good job get done. But maybe now I go about it slightly differently.

2. The saying that knowledge is power is so true. I can now go into board meetings feeling secure of my role, and knowing what I should - and, just as importantly shouldn't - get involved in. I have also been instrumental in helping others understand how a board meeting should run when they have joined a board with little or no expertise.

I was already managing director of my own company, but am also a director and chair of AWTE, and a trustee of a charity, and director of the business arm of the charity.