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Sarah Richardson

Non-Executive Director, First Vintage Limited

Sarah Richardson established [Sarah Richardson Consulting](#) in early 2004 to provide management consulting for small to medium sized firms. Sarah had previously held senior sales, marketing, strategic planning and general management positions over 18 years in several business-to-business and consumer branded companies in the US, France and Australia. This included managing the national sales, marketing, product development and customer service functions for three years for a small family owned importer and producer of craft products distributing to many small retailers and large chain stores across Australia and her personal involvement in the turnaround of the business from Voluntary Administration through new company ownership to sustained strong profitability and revenue growth



What boards do you sit on?

- First Vintage Limited

Tell us about your new board role?

First Vintage is a start up company offering award winning Australian wines from boutique wineries delivered to the customer's doorstep, either via a sample case or a customisable wine plan. All the wines are winners of the Royal Agricultural Society wine competitions across Australia and are not typically available in mainstream retail. I was approached in January 2013 and felt it was a perfect opportunity for me

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– FMCG sector, consumer brand marketing, concept and organisation in place but not finalised, a business which supports Australian farmers (the suppliers) and a dynamic, diverse, small, experienced and open board team. The proprietary Wine Cue technology also appealed – like a personal wine concierge service which evaluates more than 1,000 flavour markers and cross references them with the customer rating database to find wines that display the same attributes.

What skills do you bring to that board?

Strategic marketing was the identified gap but I think it's also been helpful to the First Vintage Board that I bring corporate governance skills, experience in the SME sector, an understanding of the dynamics of businesses that include family or friends, the ability to work with varied personalities in a professional manner plus hands on digital expertise.

What's the experience of being a new director on the board First Vintage?

It's been a fabulous ride so far – through some amazing scenery that continues to unfold, successfully navigating unanticipated bumps and detours, looking forward to meeting some new people at the next junction and relishing the next stage of the journey.

What got you across the line for the new role?

I think that the other two First Vintage Directors (both Executive Directors) met several candidates with some similar FMCG experience and all the candidates might have been able to do the 'technical marketing' part of the role. What was identified prior to the recruitment was that the company required a small Board able to energetically and creatively work together to commercialise a strong already somewhat developed proposition. So it was important for them to find a third (and Non-Executive) Board Director who would complement their diverse skill sets, be fun to work with and bring an infectious enthusiasm that would help shape the company's culture. It's had lots of challenges, not least one of the Directors being in Europe for a couple of months and the other managing to shatter his shin and patella and tear his cruciate ligament(!), but we're excited to now be in a position to unveil the brand over the next few months. WObers can check out firstvintage.com.au and participate in the journey.

As an executive looking to transition and hold a board portfolio what has your approach been?

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For me the challenge has been to have the ability to build up my formal Director experience and at the same time find the appropriate mix of paid and pro bono consulting and board work. For the first few years I felt it important that all my board work was pro bono and to take the opportunity to learn from experienced Board Directors. From 2008-9 I was a Non-Executive Director for Workability, a disability services sector provider in WA, and the Chair of two of their Board Committees, which was a time-consuming but fulfilling position – along with some other pro bono NFP and industry association roles over a number of years. I've recently resigned as Head of Marketing & Communications at St James Ethics Centre, a very rewarding part-time role I held for almost three years. So in recent times I've turned down or didn't pursue a few Board positions that I realised would require more time than I had available.

What do you enjoy about being a NED?

I enjoy the strategic orientation (recognising the impact of decisions on the company results), the diversity of the Board and the feeling that we're building the foundations of something significant and sustainable.

Have you had a support team along the way?

My parents have been great supporters plus good friends, colleagues and former bosses from various organisations and agencies I've worked with, along with industry associations, in particular Women on Boards. I started as an accountant for BP in New Zealand following my arts and commerce degrees, then worked for NutraSweet in strategic planning in the US after my MBA, and then in international marketing and local sales for Yoplait in France. When I came to Australia in the mid-90s I focused on building experience in line management and portfolio responsibility. So in some ways my career has had an unusual but important sequence and I feel that in the last decade I've come full circle to where I started with analysis and strategy.

When and why did you decide to become a director?

When I set up my management consultancy as a newcomer to Perth 10 years ago, I joined some professional associations to keep up with industry trends and Rotary to contribute to the community. I really enjoyed the strategic and practical elements of my consulting work – plus the flexibility and diversity of my life when combined with those additional community group and industry association activities and range of people. I'd had some interactions with boards including serving on one industry board committee in my earlier corporate roles, was on two board committees at Rotary and was an advisor to some boards in my consulting work. I'd enjoyed the strategic

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nature of these board interactions as well as the diversity of the people and scope of the boards. So it seemed a natural progression around 2007 to pursue a board career in combination with my management consultancy which is when I joined Women on Boards.

Can you outline the challenges and hurdles of getting on a board, and how you overcame them?

There were a few steps I needed to take ... almost like I had the tools in my kitbag, but need to shine them, acquire a few new tools, undertake some formal training, have the opportunity to learn from a few master builders and make sure the first projects are within my current scope and expertise – so perhaps a simple regional traditional one bedroom cottage not an inner city state of the art skyscraper. After joining Women on Boards and undertaking a number of their 'Getting Ready' programs, I was awarded the Women on Boards/AICD Corporate Governance Scholarship enabling me to undertake the AICD Company Directors Course in 2008, for me a must for any aspiring Board Director. I also completed some additional training including an AICD workshop on Board Committees as well as continuing to be an active member of Women on Boards and other associations.

Any interesting extra-curricular activities?

I belong to a couple of book clubs which helps me to enjoy my passion for English literature, my first degree. It's great to meet different types of people and hear their diverse perspectives on the same book. I also love to travel and over the years have spent a lot of time in North America (Canada, USA, Mexico), Europe and Scandinavia, plus Asia and far reaches of Australia.

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