

## MEMBER INTERVIEW

# We must connect with the big players

Sharon Constançon, chief executive of board evaluation business Genius Methods and managing director of foreign exchange adviser Valufin, on the benefits of the Chartered Director qualification

## What's your business background and when did you join the IoD?

I am chief executive of Genius Methods, a corporate governance consultancy specialising in board development, board governance, and board risk management, and also managing director of Valufin (previously Constançon Currencies) – an independent foreign exchange advisory firm. At Valufin we offer SMEs a complete in-sourced foreign exchange treasury management solution. I founded both businesses myself – Valufin in 1988 and Genius Methods in 2009. Prior to that I worked in roles including chief dealer at financial services group Société Générale in the Eighties. I was the youngest South African chief dealer – and the first female. I joined the IoD in South Africa in 1984.

## Why did you decide to undertake the Chartered Director qualification?

I left South Africa after a nasty security incident, and decided to come to the UK in 2002. I felt it would be valuable to refresh my technical knowledge as I hadn't studied since I'd finished my MBA in 1991. I felt that this respected qualification would provide improved credibility, so I undertook the course in 2006. I am also a chartered secretary so it made sense. It was a chance to focus on good business, board direction, and leading an organisation successfully.

## How has the course benefited you and your businesses?

It gave me confidence and a reference point in a new country and helped me refresh my technical knowledge. I saw the Chartered

Director as a very good education opportunity and a chance to gain recognition. At Genius Methods I work with FTSE-level board directors and it gives them confidence that I have the right abilities – balancing technical and business knowledge – as their equal.

## What aspects of the course did you find most interesting?

Employment law was the most interesting, but also the most challenging because it is very technical. I didn't know that much about UK employment law so it was extremely valuable to me, and probably the most rewarding part. I found the finance module

enjoyable too because I knew what I was doing. However, when I got to the exam I was more challenged than I expected.

## What would you say to other directors about to embark on the course?

Get on with it as quickly as possible. It is one of the most valuable educational experiences I have had. The most useful benefit I gained from the course was the directing aspect. It taught me about being a director rather than simply being an executive sitting in the boardroom – there is a distinct difference.

## How can the IoD stimulate demand for Chartered Director, both nationally and regionally?

Chartered Directors can help educate other business leaders and IoD members by working with the regions and sharing knowledge. But I think the biggest focus for the IoD should be about reaching FTSE companies, financial services, large family businesses, housing associations, and the NHS – the big players whose boards could do with educated, qualified directors. Raising the profile of the qualification is critical and that means marketing and PR, and using Chartered Directors like myself to spread the word.

**Broad appeal: the IoD needs to reach more FTSE companies and the NHS, says Sharon Constançon**

