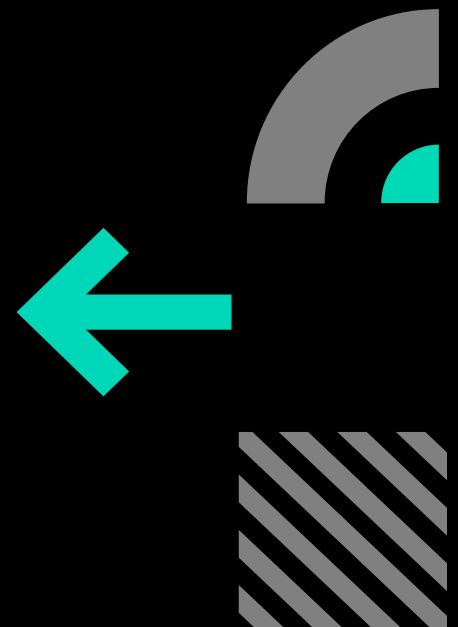




# The Executive's Guide to **SUCCESSFUL BOARD MEETINGS**

Maximize value from the most important meeting of your quarter.

A comprehensive guide by Andy Byrne (CEO, Clari) filled with strategies developed over 10+ years, to prepare for, deliver, and follow-up efficiently for all board meetings.



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## **THE JOB OF THE CEO IS TO LEAD THE BOARD, NOT MANAGE IT.**

Your goal isn't to seek approval or avoid criticism. Instead, you should call out operational shortcomings, share your plan for improvements, and get the board to pressure test your thinking on proposed solutions. It's your job to clearly outline where the company is headed. Sure, there will be varying thoughts on how to get there, but don't try to "manage" the different opinions into one collective vision. Your role is to lead by sharing your vision and direction. Inspire the board and your team by showing them how it will change the landscape and lead to massive prosperity for everyone involved.

## **FOREWORD: MY CEO JOURNEY**

I've been Clari's CEO for almost 11 years. In that time, we've felt the adrenaline rush of unexpected heights and the anxiety of uncertain times. We've grown Clari from the (garage) floor to a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. It's been a crazy ride. And I've learned invaluable lessons about leadership along the way.

### **One of the biggest: the power of the board meeting.**

When run correctly, board meetings can:

1. Unlock business insights
2. Solve critical problems
3. Unify your entire org

But Clari board meetings didn't start out this way. It took years of trial and error for me to master the process and flow of a successful board meeting.

Early on, I ran our board meetings like operation read-outs – showcasing every detail – leaving very little time for creative discussions and constructive debates. There was little to no deliberation. Board members left with a good understanding of what was happening, but my exec team left empty-handed. No insights. No help with big problems. No creative ideas.

About 2-3 years in, I realized we were wasting valuable time and our best resources. We needed change.

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So, we revamped our board meetings to be more collaborative, more strategically focused, and more of a platform to leverage the board's various areas of expertise. Our exec team received immeasurable value from each meeting. And every board member walked away with a clear picture of not only the next 90 days, but the long-term plan, and exactly how they were going to support and help execute that plan.

This transformation didn't happen overnight. But today, board meetings at Clari are well-designed and well-executed by our team (more on that in the future). Best of all, my exec team looks forward to our board meetings, recalling them as some of the best moments of their careers in terms of learning.

If you're new to an executive role or looking for ways to level up your meeting time, this guide offers real examples from Clari's boardroom to help maximize the value of your board meeting to help you connect with your board and find inspiration every quarter. We'll walk through:

**Preparation.** How to walk into every board meeting ready to optimize your time and move your business forward.

**Delivery.** How to keep your board conversations hyper-focused and take full advantage of your board's superpowers.

**Follow-up.** How to take action after the meeting and unify the company around shared goals.

This system has helped me get the most out of Clari board meetings. I hope it'll do the same for you. Remember, board meetings are NOT for the board. They are for your team.



Andy Byrne  
CEO, Clari

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# PREPARATION: SETTING YOUR MEETING UP FOR SUCCESS

A little planning goes a long way. To own the board meeting, it's critical to show up ready to maximize every minute. This means:

1. A high-level agenda
2. Informed participants
3. Actionable conversations

Insufficient prep, and your board meeting will go off the tracks. **You'll end with ineffective decision making, wasted time and resources, and worst of all, diminished stakeholder confidence.**

In Section 1 of the Executive's Guide to Successful Board Meetings, I'll share my exact preparation steps. The first one is this: **The board meeting starts long before the first word is spoken.**

## Key action items:

- Have your exec teams build detailed pre-reads.
- Align the "meetings between the meeting."
- Harvest an agenda that features no more than 2 strategic topics.
- Anticipate questions, and show up ready to answer them  
(aka know your sh\*t, and have an f-ing plan).

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## 1. BUILD OUT EXTENSIVE PRE-READS

As an executive, you spend most of the quarter working in the business. But when it comes to board meetings, it's time to work on the business. It's time to shift from operations to strategy. The most effective way I've found to do this:

### Pre-reads.

The pre-read process is where the executive team pulls back from daily efforts to ask the question, "How are we doing?" The answers are shared in a highly detailed document and distributed to the board. At Clari, we use this approach:

1. Ask every department head to dive deep into the workings of their departments and explain what's going on.

Revenue	Product	IT	Ops
Finance	Engineering	Security	Customer
Marketing	People	Strategy	Operations

2. Assess how we're doing against our plan across every department.

- Where are there gaps?
- What's slowing us down?
- What wins should we spotlight?

3. Compile a collaborative document (Clari's is typically about 60-70 pages) featuring the nitty gritty details.

- Include all relevant data and ensure that data is distilled into key findings and POVs.
- Highlight ideas, context, risks, and opportunities.

4. Surface the red (aka identify current or potential issues).

- Ask executives to evaluate progress toward their commitment from the previous quarter and to highlight what's going well and what's not.
- Figure out what we can fix versus what needs to be brought to the board's immediate attention.

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## A pre-read isn't just about getting the right information to the board.

It's a forcing function that drives continuity, reveals cross-functional gaps, and enables alignment across the company – making us better.

The pre-read process drives each executive comprehensively to understand what's going on within their department/business unit and how it rolls up into the bigger picture.

What did we say and commit to at the last board meeting?

How are we doing against our goals?

Are we meeting our commitments to the business? And how are they affecting the overall company goals?

Do we need to consider changing our goals? If so, why?

How are we measuring up and holding ourselves accountable?

Once pre-reads are ready, it's time to get in the weeds.

### **PRO TIP:**

Read every page. Being detailed is critical to help your executives win. And it helps you show up ready to discuss any aspect of the business with your board.

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## 2. BOARD 1:1 CALLS: GET THE MOST FROM THE MEETINGS BETWEEN THE MEETING

The board meets once per quarter. How are you engaging them the rest of the time? Over the years, I've learned one of the best tactics for running board meetings is to get outside the meeting altogether. To hold regularly scheduled 1:1 meetings between the meeting.

Here's why:

**Every board member has a superpower.** A strategic skillset you can deploy to solve problems and unlock opportunities. For example, consider a board member with 20 years of experience as a CFO, who sits on three public boards and two private boards. Their superpowers are operational metrics and discipline.

They will know things like:

- How best to mature internal systems
- How to create and structure the process of an audit committee
- The data, cadences and checkpoints (aka Operational Scorecards) needed to keep the company ahead of plan

Another board member might be a former CEO who excelled at scaling an enterprise GTM. Their superpower is how to recruit enterprise sales talent, design a strong organizational structure, and create winning capacity and incentive plans.

These board members bring tremendous value to the organization. Don't let them sit on the sidelines between board meetings every 90 days. Put them to work on your toughest challenges.

At Clari, the Chief of Staff is responsible for knowing board member superpowers and scheduling meetings based on critical challenges we seek to address or new opportunities in front of us.

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Examples include:

**Challenges:** Going from a single product to a suite to a platform offering, to turning on a Global Systems Integrator (GSI) channel

**Opportunities:** Expanding internationally, M&A diligence, executing the category playbook

Then, I work with the Chief of Staff to build a tight agenda for the call.

## Exception to the Rule

**“Can you spare 15 mins this weekend?”** This is code for: The CEO has an issue and needs support. All Clari board members have executive operational backgrounds, so they understand the stress and uncertainty CEOs endure. My board members understand this. There are certain moments when I need weekend time for a hot topic, and my board is always there for me.



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### 3. HARVEST STRATEGIC TOPICS

As the business scales, so do possible board topics. How do you decide which ones make the cut?

Here, it's helpful to be curious, to zoom out and take interest in the bigger picture. For many CEOs, the tools you need are already in place.

#### **1:1s with board members and executives.**

You meet with board members and top leaders throughout the quarter. What are they interested in? What's keeping them up at night? The simplest way to uncover this: Ask them.

With a curious mind, you'll begin to harvest strategic topics that have the potential to move the company forward in a big way. Then, whittle them down to two strategic topics.

Topics like:

**M&A pursuit:** Review of the strategic landscape and possible chess board moves.

**Competition & Category:** Discussing what additional moves we might consider making to extend our lead in the category we created.

**Roadmap:** Evolving our long-term vision, market assumptions, and product roadmap.

**GTM channels:** Turning on new GTM channels to drive more growth. Cost, activation time, and key talent considerations.

#### **Keep it strategic, not comprehensive.**

Lastly, board meetings are about key strategic topics.

A comprehensive overview of the business is death by 1,000 cuts. It doesn't deliver on the mission of the board and the time investment they're making.

Keep it focused and targeted.

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## 4. PLAN FOR QUESTIONS

As the CEO, you don't get many opportunities at a board meeting to say, "I don't know."

For every question, you need an **answer** or an informed point of view.

At Clari, I always walk in prepared for questions. As you'll see in the next section, I encourage them.

Questions like:

**Company performance.** Where is the company strong and where are there opportunities?

**Action items.** What updates can you provide on key action items from the previous meeting?

**Macro trends.** How is the company going to navigate any major economic and industry changes?

For each topic, I show up prepared and ready to speak with confidence.

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# DELIVERY: FACILITATE FOCUSED CONVERSATION AND ACTIONABLE OUTCOMES

Finally, it's the day of the meeting. Some of the best and brightest minds of the organization are in the room together. It's time to make the meeting count.

To maximize the board meeting, we:

1. Set the tone
2. Spark debate and activate collective intelligence
3. Schedule check-ins

We keep the conversation moving forward at a steady pace. But we also welcome constructive tension. This tension allows discussion around topics and issues to surface in a collaborative manner.

If people aren't engaged, you've missed a key opportunity. Walk away with too many nodding heads, and you've missed critical input.

Remember: You own the agenda. You decide whether it's a high-impact meeting or just another head-nodding conversation.

## Key action items:

- Walk in with a clear structure for the board meeting.
- Set the tone with intention.
- Activate healthy debate across strategic and tactical topics.

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## 1. START WITH OPENING REMARKS

As the CEO, it's my job to ground the board on key points I want them to consider during the meeting.

Opening remarks are about:

1. Taking stock of what we have accomplished.
2. Reminding everyone of our working context.
3. Calibrating minds toward the most important topics.

Sometimes, I open by sharing what's on my mind — often from my morning reflection — and other times, I revisit the Clari mission. We have a mission and vision to become a world-class software company. That is our North Star.

And our most important Clari Value is “Revenue Rules”. We help our customers realize their fullest potential by transforming their revenue process — enabling them to do more for their employees, customers, communities and the world.

This reminds us that the topics we cover in these meetings are strategic, forward-looking. Not just 90-day issues until our next meeting.

My goal is simple: Set the tone and deliver a productive opening based on our focus for the meeting, which in turn is based on our agenda and the big rocks in front of us.

### PRO TIP:

If you aren't getting what you want out of your board meetings, make changes. Trust your gut instinct and try something new.

Experiment until you find what's right for your board. Then, document it and execute it.

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## 2. BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT THE OPEN/CLOSED DESIGN

Board meetings have both open and closed sessions. Be thoughtful about how much time you need for the closed session(s). These generally contain sensitive topics that your e-staff does not need to be part of (e.g. personnel decisions, exec comp plans, etc.) Your open session includes your e-staff and other select members of your leadership team.

Generally, Clari's meetings are Open, followed by Closed. But there are times when I prefer Closed, Open, Closed.

Here's what that looks like:

1. **Open Session:** Generally led by the CEO or Chief of Staff, featuring the executive team and board members to discuss customary updates and strategic sessions:

**Customary updates:** How is the quarter going? Are we still on track for annual plans? Any operational concerns where we need board feedback?

**Strategic sessions:** Focus on two topics – M&A, fundraising, turning on an international operating hub, etc.

This allows for transparency and helps stakeholders understand the organization's activities and decisions.

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**2. Closed Session:** Only board members and certain invite-only individuals participate.

This session is about achieving clarity and alignment across a number of more confidential and sensitive topics. We work swiftly through the admin/operational tasks (see below), then dive into detailed board feedback about the open session and additional topics.

Depending on timing, and what transpired in the open session, I might distill my observations and takeaways. Or I'll open it up (in roundtable 1:1 format) to the board. You have to be mindful that YOU own the facilitation and know some board members might not be as succinct as you'd like them to be. So stay on top of it. From there, we talk through any outstanding concerns and arrive at clear next steps.

There are a lot of administrative and operational tasks that take place in a closed session:

- Reviewing minutes of the last meeting

- Talking about compensation – Who are we going to give more stock to?

- Audit committee findings – What do we need to know?

- Discussing real estate – When are we opening up the EMEA offices?

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**3. Closed-Open-Closed Session:** This is when I've got things on my mind that I want to talk about before my open sessions. I want to make sure the board knows how I'm feeling, the good, the bad, the ugly. Things like:

There are some dynamics going on across the company that you need to be aware of for context before we go into open.

There's an e-staff person that's new, and it's their first board meeting. Just want to make you aware of that as their delivery might be a little unseasoned.

I want the board to know about a handful of people who just crushed it. I need you to help me motivate the team with some kudos – use the board members as a tool to inspire the team.

### **PRO TIP:**

The best way to harvest feedback in a closed session is to designate one board member ahead of time to distill for the entire team what they heard. You're looking for them to share their highest observations and takeaways.

Then, go around the table asking for additional (or dissenting) commentary above and beyond the top level distillation. This makes the feedback and debriefing extra-efficient since there are so many opinions from the open session.

Start with your end goal to determine how to structure your board meeting. Pick the most effective framework to get you there. Then, execute with precision.

The right framework is the one that fits your org.

### **PRO TIP:**

Test for understanding: When a board member dives deep or feels passionate about a topic, let them speak. But be ready to “repeat” what they just said to test that you indeed understand what their concern is. Then, map out in 1-2 sentences your plan to address it. This communication move, which is rooted in active listening, can build deep trust with your board, showcasing your care and thoughtful approach to their concern.

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### 3. ACTIVATE DEBATE AND DYNAMIC TENSION

For me, walking out of the board meeting with all nodding heads is a sign we didn't go deep enough. It's a sign I didn't expand the conversation. I did not do my job well, and this is arguably one of the most important parts of the job.

Here's how we strategically introduce tension in the board meeting:

**Encourage debate.** Present the counterpoint to any sound business decision you're about to make. Flip the script and answer the question, "Why shouldn't we do this?"

**Make sure everyone has a voice.** When I see a board member who's not engaged in the conversation, I activate them (e.g. Do you agree? What about this worries you?). As the CEO, it's our job to make sure everyone weighs in on key decisions, and we assess all the pros and cons.

**Bring in outside perspectives.** Loop in members of the executive team or other critical team members. Expand the conversation with differing perspectives and strong opinions from across the organization.

#### PRO TIP:

Keep the tension healthy. Steer the conversation in the right direction, and make sure it's collaborative and constructive. You can even introduce some humor and levity as needed. Life's too short to have boring board meetings.

Debate for the sake of debate doesn't result in progress.



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## 4. AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

There are countless ways to get off track. I see three common mistakes that drag down board meetings:

**Deep-dive.** Your time with the board is limited. Don't inject too much information into the conversation. It's easy for an operational update to go down the rabbit hole, wasting time. And time in the board meeting is very expensive. Sometimes you have to let the team and board dive deep. Other times, you can avoid this with effective facilitation.

**Assumption.** Silence does not equal agreement or understanding. Don't assume your board is tracking. Instead, ask them. I end all board meetings with a closed session. The question on the table is typically, "What are your key takeaways and top concerns?"

**Rigidity.** This is the exception to the deep-dive rule. There are times when, as the CEO, I have to flex the agenda. I may observe in real-time that there's a topic that's clearly taking over the conversation, heating up the room a bit – something that's important to everyone in the room. Instead of cutting off the conversation, I need to be flexible and let it play out – seeing where it takes the team and the board. This generative approach can reveal some of the most critical items holding us back.

### PRO TIP:

There's a time and a place for deviating from the agenda. Do it sparingly and only when (you feel) it will lead to a better outcome.

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# FOLLOW UP: KEEP EVERYONE INFORMED AND MOVING FORWARD

Board meetings happen once a quarter, but your business still operates across the other 89 days. Keep your board informed and plugged in with post-meeting routines and organized follow-up.

This means:

1. An impactful summary
2. Clear action items and owners
3. Follow-up board calls

Don't let your board sit idle on the sidelines. Don't waste the tremendous amount of knowledge and expertise they bring to the table.

Put them in the game.

In the next section, we'll talk through your follow-up. Remember, the board is a critical asset. Are you using them fully?

## Key action items:

- Recap and debrief thoroughly.
- Follow up with action-based summarized notes.
- Engage your board members in follow-up conversations, continuing to activate their brain power over the quarter.

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## 1. RECAP WITH YOUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

After the meeting, it's time to debrief.

I pull together my executive team for a one to two -hour session right after the board meeting. While the meeting is still fresh in our minds, the exec team gets to be in-the-know immediately about what happened in the closed session, as well as next steps for them and their teams.

During this time, we review:

- Detailed board feedback

- What each e-staff member took away from the open session. Here, I am testing for their ability to distill and articulate the game plan and next steps

- Key lessons learned

We assign owners any outstanding work products and timelines to deliver back to the board. This is a significant investment that pays off throughout the entire quarter.

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## 2. FOLLOW UP EFFECTIVELY

Next, keep the momentum going.

Immediately following the debrief, I work to codify key decisions.

First, I ask my Chief of Staff to review the meeting minutes and prepare a one-page overview. Then, I add my thoughts.

Here's what we summarize:

**Action items.** What will the team do to capitalize on decisions made by the board?

**Ownership.** Who's responsible for executing each action item?

**Feedback loop.** When should the board anticipate follow-up information?

A strong summary pulls board members and my executive team onto the same page, enabling faster movement and clearer alignment.

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### 3. ENGAGE YOUR BOARD AT CRITICAL MOMENTS

Your board meetings and board calls are typically calendared routines.

But your engagement with the board doesn't always have to be this way. You should feel confident to engage with them on key topics/needs where you need feedback right away (e.g. closing a candidate over the weekend, helping with a key account that you need to close at the end of quarter, etc.).

The Clari board is a trusted team of advisors. That's why I engage them at critical moments throughout our business cycle.

A 15-minute conversation can unlock a massive business-moving next step.

Throughout the quarter, I encourage you to think through:

**Upcoming decisions.** When are big impact moments from decisions?

**Board superpowers.** Who can you turn to for advice and input on key (or tough) topics?

**Relationship dynamics.** Which board members do you need to form a deeper bond with? How will you connect with them?

Taken together, these engagements will help you stay connected and get the most out of the big brains that make up your board.

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## **How I use Clari for board management.**

This guide highlighted Clari's approach to board meetings: best practices, pro tips, dos and don'ts for **leading** your board. Now, I want to share [how we use Clari to support our board meetings.](#)

To no surprise, we use [Clari](#) every day. It is the only tool used in boardrooms and trusted by execs to run revenue – the most important topic of every board meeting.

Clari pulls together data from every deal, rep, and region, then uses AI to predict if we're going to meet, beat, or miss our targets – with over 95%+ accuracy.

This signal drives important discussions on the right topics, at the right time. We can quickly spot where our revenue engine might start leaking and focus our energy there.

But we don't just use Clari in the boardroom. It's also a big part of our prep work. Using Clari in our exec team meetings before the board gets together helps us catch issues early, avoid surprises, and feel confident across every dimension of revenue. It's about getting the full picture and making sure we're always a step ahead.

To see how Clari will help you with your board management skills, email me at [a.b@clari.com](mailto:a.b@clari.com) or [set up a call with my team here.](#)