Nurturing the Intangible

Born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, **CHRIS BURGGRAEVE, NACD.DC**, fostered his international business mind-set while studying in Europe before moving to the United States. After a 23-year career at Procter & Gamble Co., The Coca-Cola Co., and Anheuser-Busch InBev, he now helps clients reinvent brands with sustainable pricing power via Vicomte, his New York City-based marketing strategy advisory. He is a board member of public and private companies in the United States and in Europe, a tech entrepreneur and investor, and a limited partner in venture capital funds. Burggraeve is an adjunct faculty member at the NYU Stern School of Business, where he pioneered the master of business administration experiential learning session on the cannabis industry. He has written two books about marketing as well. He has written two books: *Marketing Is Finance Is Business: How CMO, CFO and CEO Cocreate Iconic Brands With Sustainable Pricing Power in the New Galactic Age* and *Marketing Is Not a Black Hole.*

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"THE COMPANIES I AM PART OF HAVE A THING IN COMMON: they all focus on building and nurturing intangible assets, which is a natural domain for a former CMO [chief marketing officer] with a finance background. This is how I approach my role as a director especially because of my background: I help boards secure value creation over the long term through building and nurturing intangible assets. . . . These include brands [intellectual property], customer relationships, franchises, copyrights, patents, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and goodwill. . . . Today, boards, CEOs, and chief financial officers ignore discussion of the relative strength of these less visible, intangible assets at their peril.

"AS A BOARD MEMBER, in addition to helping boards recognize value creation through the intangibles, my experiences have taught me three things: One, stay focused on shareholder and stakeholder brand fundamentals, with respect for a company's idiosyncrasies. Two, companies are alive 365/24/7, and it is therefore really worth it to make the effort to code and monitor what works into SOPs and balanced scorecards, to allow a company to 'rinse and repeat' effectively and efficiently on what matters. And last but not least, remain curious, agile, and as unbiased as possible, 'un-learning' as needed, to avoid stasis. Putting it simply, I apply the same principles above to any new branded business I get involved in, whether it is as an investor or more.

"BECAUSE OF THE GROWING FOCUS ON INTANGIBLES, the case to have more finance-savvy CMOs on boards is growing as well. Intangible complexity is their wheelhouse. However, they need to earn their seat at the board table. NACD Directorship Certification® is certainly a way to help them prepare for that. The few CMOs who make it onto boards tend to influence them with impact, especially on key themes like corporate and employee value propositions, customer-centricity, digital transformation, innovation and strategic growth agendas, climate change, stakeholder management, and fundraising. They bring that much-needed outside-in perspective and empathy that help keep boards more honest and agile. They are the 'intangible whisperers.'"

—Interview conducted by Elisa Kahn, director of certification at NACD