

Meet the Corporate Governance Institute, the membership body that educates and certifies company directors

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Anthony Quigley, founder and executive chairman of the Corporate Governance Institute, about the need for better certification of directors, implementing good corporate governance at scale, and the centrality of company culture.

What was the catalyst for launching CGI?

David, my business partner in the Corporate Governance Institute, has deep expertise in corporate governance and was looking for ways to bring his knowledge to a wider audience. Before launching the Corporate Governance Institute (CGI), I spent 30 years grounded in the EdTech sector, helping learning providers scale their offerings to a global market.

David and I saw an opportunity when we discovered the need for more certification for directors. It turns out that less than half of one percent

(<0.5%!) of company directors are qualified for their job in the boardroom.

At the same time, a wave of poor corporate governance decision-making was bringing the role of the modern director into clear focus (and the front of the newspapers).

Unfortunately, many businesses fail to ensure their directors are qualified for the role. Having the appropriate qualifications is a prerequisite for most positions, but for some reason, we've stopped short of making sure the most senior people in a company are actually qualified for the role.

Boardrooms around the globe are filled with pale, stale and often frail males, often placed there simply because they were old (and deemed knowledgeable).

I saw an opportunity to enhance how organisations understand and implement good governance. At scale, the best way of doing this is through a high-quality, robust, professional and consistent education and certification programme. We are democratising what it means to be a modern boardroom director.

Good governance and ESG practices can vastly enhance an organisation's standing in the community and amongst its shareholders – that's the message we want to hit home with our target audience.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

The Corporate Governance Institute is a certification and membership body that educates existing and aspiring directors. Ultimately, we aspire to become the global leader in education at the board and executive level.

We were founded in March 2020, right at the start of the pandemic. This forced us to do everything online, and we've continued with this digital-first approach as we have grown the business. Our primary focus is on customers who want to learn online; consequently, we have created a world-class interactive, customer-first online learning platform.

Our customers are all around the globe, hailing from over 50 countries worldwide. It's not just the geographical diversity of our clients that we pride ourselves on; we've also worked with some of the world's leading brands, including Google, Coke, Adidas, NHS, Deloitte.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

My business partner, David Duffy, and I met online in March 2020. We spent time researching the sector, understanding the competitive landscape and putting the structures required to deliver world-class education into place.

We started by exploring opportunities for collaboration with all the key partners that would underpin the value of our credentials. We spoke to universities for certification, corporate governance practitioners to validate our thinking, and the best professors and teachers in corporate governance to deliver our courses.

We started by delivering our courses on Zoom, but as I mentioned, we're a digital-first company and now deliver all our courses 100% online. Through our digital tools, our learners can choose when and where they want to learn alongside connecting with their classmates, peers, and teachers.

We are now a team of over 30 professionals dedicated to creating, delivering, and supporting world-class education programs for senior leaders.

Tell us about the working culture at CGI

Since founding the business, we have been focused on developing the best culture for the type of company we want. As Peter Drucker famously said: "culture eats strategy for breakfast". We completely buy into this idea, and our culture is what binds the team together.

Like many founders of digital-first companies, we had our concerns about building a strong and positive company culture; but we're a tight bunch who all love what we do, which makes things a lot easier.

Besides, we need to ensure we have a great culture... that's good governance, after all!

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[Why CEOs need good governance](#)

How are you funded?

We bootstrapped the business for the first year until we had a proven product and paying customers.

Having previously built a couple of multi-million-pound businesses through bootstrapping, this is not a strategy that I want to repeat in a hurry.

Since then, we have raised about £2.5M from private investors and some small institutional investments. Our senior leadership team has a wealth of experience in scaling, so this funding allows us to think about how we develop all aspects of the business – a plan we've been putting into action so far in 2023.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

When you are growing a business, every day brings new challenges. Some of these are opportunities in disguise.

When based in Dublin, you have to fight hard for talent because you're competing with some world's biggest technology and education companies. We've managed to hire an exceptionally talented bunch, so the key is ensuring you make your business an attractive place for top talent.

How does CGI answer an unmet need?

Rightfully so, boardroom directors are increasingly under intense scrutiny from stakeholders, customers and the wider community.

Every day we see company directors and boards making mistakes. While some of these are illegal acts, most errors could have been avoided if the errant board member understood their role and responsibilities.

We want to revolutionise the boardroom through education.

We help our customers to understand what questions to ask, how to engage with their peers and what role they should play in the boardroom.

What's in store for the future?

We have just started – so there's plenty more to come. Currently, we are looking for appropriate partners across the globe who understand what good governance means for their clients. These partners will come in the form of universities and larger consultancy firms that are focused on C-suite development.

All directors, no matter how experienced, should actively seek to upgrade their knowledge and understanding of the latest thinking and trends in the boardroom.

We expect our client corporate customer base to expand as the spotlight continues to shine on organisations' corporate governance, and with ESG also now a bigger topic than ever, it's important both this generation of leaders, and the next are well prepared for the road ahead.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

It is vitally important to adopt a positive life-work balance. It's cliché, but your health is your wealth.

There have been times when I have forgotten to take care of myself, and we live in a time when many people are obsessed with success at any cost. Social media accelerates this obsession and can demand so much of our time and consciousness.

Saying that, in business, you need to be focused on understanding what you want to achieve and strive towards that goal. It's all about balance; the right balance can be the difference between success and failure.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Personally, I prioritise activities that contribute to my well-being, such as exercising, spending time with my family, cycling, and swimming. I make it a

point to engage in physical exercise in the morning as it helps wake me up, get my adrenaline flowing, and prepare me for the day.

I also practice yoga weekly and have been learning a language for the past two years. I'm better at sticking to one than the other – I'll let you decide which one!

Anthony Quigley is the Founder and Executive Chairman of the Corporate Governance Institute.

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