

Jindal School Conference Focuses on “Elevating” Corporate Governance

by Glenda Vosburgh - October 4th, 2023



Gregg Ballew, executive director of the Jindal School’s Institute for Excellence in Corporate Governance, introduce the panelists from the “Corporate Governance in a Family Office Setting” discussion. From left: Jim Adams, John Dziminski, Clint Haggard, Kerri Scott

The 21st Annual Corporate Governance Conference, hosted by the [Naveen Jindal School of Management’s Institute for Excellence in Corporate Governance](#), was recently held at the Davidson-Gundry Alumni Center at [The University of Texas at Dallas](#). The theme of the Sept. 20 event was “elevation.”

Morning panel sessions were divided into three tracks with discussion topics on cyber risk governance, private equity and employee stock ownership plans (ESOP).

The panel titled “Private Equity Meets Corporate Governance” was led by Albert McLelland, audit committee chairman of Breeze Holdings Acquisition Corp.

Panelists were Eric Burgess, partner of Transaction Services, Private Equity Leader, Texas, Grant Thornton LLP; Charles Miller, partner of Blue Wolf Capital Partners; and Pradeep Saha, board director of Saha Consulting.

The discussion included audience participation and started with a discussion about the difference between independent directors and directors on a public company’s board.

“Primarily, as an independent director, you don’t have to deal with Sarbanes-Oxley,” Miller said.

Other topics included the importance of governance in a private equity firm in preparing for future challenges, such as another pandemic or supply chain issues or making acquisitions.

Panel members agreed they consider acquisitions through the lens of governance. In some cases, governance can cause a company to pass on an acquisition.



Hasan Pirkul

The afternoon session began with a welcome from [Dr. Hasan Pirkul](#), Caruth Chair and Jindal School dean.

“This is a wonderful event and this institute is very important to us,” he said. “Corporate governance is an ongoing process that changes from business to business and with time.”

[Gregg Ballew](#), executive director of IECG and a professor of practice in the [Accounting Area](#) at the Jindal School, opened the session with a reference to the pandemic.

“We have emerged from a challenging time yet still have some issues we are dealing with, such as lingering supply chain issues, people not coming back to the office or wanting big salary increases,” he said. He encouraged attendees to leave the conference having learned at least one new idea that could move the needle in a meaningful way.

The first featured speaker was Admiral Bobby Inman, managing director, of Limestone Capital [Advisors](#). He was interviewed by Dennis Cagan, principal of Caganco Inc., about some of his experiences in the military, intelligence services, and business that pertain to governance.

Inman is a former director of [Naval Intelligence](#), vice director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, director of the National Security Agency and deputy director of Central Intelligence.

He is a member of the board of directors of several privately held companies and has served on the board of directors of the Council of Foreign Relations, Dell Computer, SBC Corp., and Massey Energy. In 2011, he became head of the board of directors of [Xe Services](#), formerly [Erik Prince's Blackwater](#) and now known as Academi. As of 2013, he sits on the board of directors of [Academi](#).

Inman touched on his reasons for taking on the role of board member at a variety of companies.

“I used to write a lot of checks for investments,” he said. “At one point, I realized I wasn’t taking an active role in learning where the money went.”

He stressed the need for leaders to set a good example and to stand by their decisions even when everyone disagrees with them.

Inman’s session was followed by two panel discussions.

The “Landing a Board Seat” panel provided advice for those interested in serving on a board. The discussion was led by Theresa Boyce, chair and CEO, of CEO Trust. Panel members were Jonathan Peri, Ph.D., J.D. and president of Manor College in Pennsylvania; and Pamela Turay, board director, public/private CHRO, Interim CHRO of Luminator Technology.

The “Corporate Governance in a Family Office Setting” discussion was led by Jim Adams, board member and [advisor](#) to families and family officers. Panelists were

John Dziminski, president and CEO of The Rosewood Corporation; Clint Haggard, member of Burgher Haggard, LLC; and Kerri Scott, CEO of Mt. Vernon Investments. Their discussion centered on the use of governance and its importance in overseeing family businesses and trusts.



James Williams

Major General James Williams, who is a senior managing partner for Disruptive Healthcare Solutions, LLC, was The Max Hopper Leadership Series speaker. His message focused on the importance of being a heroic leader who will do the right thing and give others a vision they can pursue.

“You must know your job, your strengths and weaknesses, and your people and promote their success,” he said.



Dave Scullins, a director and audit-committee chair with Austin Industries and an IECG member, was among the attendees who engaged with the speakers.

The final featured speaker of the conference was Yoram Solomon. He is the author of five books, including “The Complete Book of Trust,” and host of the “Trust Show” podcast.

He addressed the need for people to trust others and to be trustworthy, particularly in a business environment. He gave an example from an online business that represents the kinds of things that make so many people distrustful – a deep-dive into the meaning behind the term “best-selling author” on Amazon. The term gives the impression that an author’s book has sold a lot of copies, but that is not necessarily the case, he explained.

Conference attendee Kevin Quinn, an independent professional trustee and co-founder and president of Independent Trustee Alliance, described the information provided by the day’s speakers as excellent.

“I became (an IECG) member six or seven years ago and went through their nonprofit board training. I found it to be very helpful when we were forming the alliance,” he said. “The information at these events is always (useful).”

Based on the positive responses he received from conference guests, Ballew said, the event accomplished its objectives.

“It was an awesome day,” he said. “We started by encouraging everyone to leave with at least one good idea. At the end of the day, people have come up to me and told me they have done that and more.”

Corporate sponsors were Holland & Knight, Texas Capital Bank and Whitley Penn. Conference sponsors were ExxonMobil, Grant Thornton, IDA (Investors for Director Accountability), and Texas Instruments.