CAREER PATH

CMO to CEO: muscles the growth seat never builds

Why commercial leaders rarely make the hospital CEO shortlist, and the deliberate exposure that closes the gap.

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THE SHORTLIST

Who boards put on the first list

- A clinician who learned to read a balance sheet
- An operations head who ran a flagship through NABH
- A CFO with enough clinical fluency to face the medical director
- A commercial leader, only when a board member asks why not

The honest answer is not prejudice. It is exposure nobody handed over.

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THE GAP

Fluent at the top, silent below it

FLUENT	Which specialty pulls, which channel converts, where the funnel breaks
SILENT	Bed utilisation, case mix, cost per procedure
CEO VIEW	Occupancy, payer mix, doctor recruitment, capital allocation at once

That silence is what a board hears as not ready, even when nobody says it.

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THE BIGGEST TELL

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Anyone can present a growth story when the trend line is up. A board is testing whether you can explain a miss without deflecting it.

Ask for a P&L, even a small one, not a bigger marketing budget.

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CLINICAL CREDIBILITY

Earned in rooms with no marketing agenda

- Sit in mortality and morbidity reviews as a listener
- Attend case-mix and clinical governance meetings
- Ask questions that show you understand clinical trade-offs
- Do it years before you need their support

Clinicians can tell relationship-building for political cover within one conversation.

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WHERE THEY FALL SHORT

Five patterns boards notice

- Near-silence on cost structure, staffing ratios, capacity
- Defended a budget, never owned lines they do not control
- Clinical relationships built around launches, not governance
- Comfortable with a funnel dashboard, not a full financial pack
- Assumes more demand solves capacity or pricing problems

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DO THIS

A five-to-seven-year case, built in layers

1. Ask for a P&L: a vertical, a unit, your name on the whole number
2. Observe board and finance sub-committee sessions until the rhythm is familiar
3. Shadow operations reviews: capacity, staffing, procurement
4. Present the full financial picture whenever you can, even informally
5. Say out loud when your function is not the quarter's biggest problem

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THE MINDSET

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A growth leader is measured by a number that goes up. A CEO is measured by a business that holds together.

Margin, quality, doctor retention, capital discipline and growth, none allowed to dominate.

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READ THE FULL GUIDE

The commercial leader's path to CEO, in full

- Why P&L ownership beats budget defence
- Using subsidiary boards for operational exposure
- What a CFO and a board should ask first
- gauravphogat.com/the-commercial-leaders-path-to-ceo

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