NACD CHAPTER
PROGRAM SUMMARY

NACD NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER

EVENT TITLE: 2025 New England Visionaries Speak
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PROGRAM SUMMARY

In a rapidly transforming technological environment, boards are being called upon to not only oversee risk but to help shape responsible innovation. The NACD New England Chapter's *"Visionaries Speak"* program brought together four of New England's most forward-looking CEOs for a powerful discussion on the forces shaping the future of business and governance. These industry leaders—representing sectors from advanced materials to global manufacturing—shared insights on innovation, sustainability, risk, and opportunity in an increasingly complex world. From navigating global markets and AI disruption to redefining leadership in a purpose-driven economy, this was a rare opportunity to hear directly from those driving real change.

Strategy, Governance, and Innovation in a Disrupted World
Boards today are navigating a landscape that demands agility, curiosity, and enterprise-wide visibility. In the face of mounting complexity—from geopolitical risk to technological acceleration—directors must go beyond passive oversight and embrace a more engaged, future-oriented mindset.
Panelists emphasized that board effectiveness no longer rests solely on regulatory compliance or risk management. Instead, today's boards must be strategic partners in innovation, actively engaging with management on questions like: *What emerging technologies are being explored? How are these aligned with strategy? What internal capabilities and controls exist to support responsible scaling?*

The discussion reinforced that asking the right questions—rooted in strategic context, not technical jargon—is a board's most powerful tool.

Artificial Intelligence as a Board Imperative

Generative AI and machine learning are rapidly reshaping business models, customer experiences, and workforce structures. Panelists agreed that AI is not just a technological development, but a governance challenge with deep implications for oversight.

Boards were encouraged to evaluate whether their companies have a clear AI strategy, one that identifies use cases, sets boundaries for ethical deployment, and builds accountability into decision-making processes. Oversight structures must be cross-functional and deliberate—touching legal, compliance, data governance, and HR.

Directors should understand the potential reputational and legal risks of AI bias, transparency, and security vulnerabilities. Equally important is ensuring the company's narrative around AI reflects purpose, innovation, and trust, especially as stakeholder expectations intensify.

Cybersecurity Preparedness and Resilience

Cyber risk continues to rise, and boards must move beyond passive receipt of threat dashboards. Panelists urged directors to test management's preparedness through targeted questions:

- Does the company have a defined incident response plan?
- Have escalation protocols been tested?
- Are roles and responsibilities clearly understood by senior leadership?

Boards were reminded that preparedness outweighs perfection. A company cannot eliminate cyber risk, but it can cultivate a culture of resilience. In addition to regular reporting, directors should encourage simulations, cross-functional reviews, and third-party audits to verify the strength of controls.

Cybersecurity cannot be siloed in the IT function—it should be integrated into strategy, risk, and even compensation discussions where appropriate.

Regulatory Uncertainty and Global Market Dynamics

The discussion addressed the board's role in managing regulatory complexity across multiple jurisdictions. With diverging standards emerging in the U.S., EU,

and Asia—especially around AI, ESG, and data privacy—companies must build compliance frameworks that are flexible and adaptive.
Boards should ensure that management is monitoring regulatory developments, preparing early for anticipated disclosures, and actively shaping the company's voice in policy conversations. Several panelists stressed the importance of proactive legal strategy—not just legal compliance—as a source of competitive advantage.

In addition, directors must consider the strategic implications of geopolitical instability, supply chain reconfiguration, and rising protectionism. Governance must extend beyond the balance sheet to anticipate shocks and position the organization to adapt.

Redefining Leadership and Board Composition
A recurring message was that governance must keep pace with cultural and generational shifts in leadership. Panelists discussed how leadership in the modern era requires empathy, communication, and purpose-driven engagement—especially with internal stakeholders.

Boards were urged to examine whether their composition reflects the changing nature of the business, the customer, and the workforce. Skills in cybersecurity, AI, sustainability, and global operations are now core board competencies, not niche add-ons.

Moreover, board culture matters. Trust, psychological safety, and openness to dissent are essential to effective oversight—particularly when directors are navigating ambiguous risks or emerging technologies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **AI Oversight is Now a Strategic Priority**
  Boards should ensure a cross-functional framework exists for the ethical, legal, and operational deployment of AI and machine learning technologies.
- **Cyber Preparedness is About Resilience, Not Elimination**
  Directors must understand incident response protocols, escalation

processes, and third-party oversight mechanisms to assess true readiness.

- **Regulatory Agility is a Board-Level Concern**
  Boards must track and interpret evolving rules across jurisdictions, and evaluate whether management's legal strategies support long-term adaptability.
- **Leadership and Culture Require Board Attention**
  Directors should actively shape leadership succession, cultural alignment, and board refreshment strategies to meet the demands of a purpose-driven business climate.
- **Innovation Requires Strategic Curiosity**
  Boards that ask the right strategic questions—and foster a culture of informed challenge—will be better positioned to support transformation.

MODERATOR:

Cathy Minehan, Former President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

SPEAKER(S):

Gary Cohen, CEO, iRobot

Tamara Lundgren, Executive Chairman, Radius Recycling, Inc.

Greg Smith, President and CEO, Teradyne

Sean Keohane, President and CEO, Cabot Corporation