

Thought Leader Spotlight

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As part of The Azara Group's monthly newsletter, we select a business leader to share insights about leadership, being an influencer, and career development. Our objective is to help support your ability to flourish as a leader and share what makes people thrive in business.

Rebecca Granne

*Vice President, Corporate Branding and Consumer Solutions
Mylan N.V.*

Education: Yale University (B.A., Political Science)

Previously With: PepsiCo
Avon Products, Inc.
McKinsey & Company
Muse Productions
Chyron Corporation
Interocity Development Corp.
ABC News.com

Interesting Details: Started a company and sold it in her 20s, worked in journalism and film production before corporate career, mother of twin boys.



1. What attracted you to your chosen field and profession?

I have had many roles in my career – I was an entrepreneur where I started and sold a digital media services company in my 20s, worked in journalism and film production, and was in management consulting at McKinsey. Through various roles, I learned that marketing is the best fit and where I am most passionate. Marketing was the first role where I could leverage the full spectrum of what I have to offer.

I've always loved solving problems in creative ways and seeing opportunities that enable companies to be innovative. Focusing on marketing and brand-growth challenges allow me to use my right and left brain. I can simultaneously use my creative and analytical problem-solving skills to strategically transform business structures and engage with consumers. I am excited by what I do and getting to routinely tackle new challenges.

2. What person, opportunity, or game-changing moment had the biggest impact on your career?

Hard leadership lessons stand out as transformative moments. At 26, I sold my company and didn't have a lot of management experience. I thought I negotiated a better deal and secured my employees' future. I was wrong. I had to lay people off. It was very emotional. I struggled in how to handle these difficult conversations.

You learn there's nothing you can say that won't make people feel bad. Business decisions have human implications. Leaders need to know this and how to have difficult discussions and deliver bad news. This was one of my most informative and challenging career moments. I learned about leading and managing people.

3. What is the biggest challenge you faced professionally? How did you overcome it?

I worked with someone years ago who threw me under the bus. She managed a project I was on and we worked very closely together. I thought she was my supportive sponsor, and we even discussed her becoming my mentor. Our leadership styles and approaches to problem solving were different, but I had a reputation for great work. I was being considered earlier than usual for a big promotion, and I was eager to get it. She told others I wasn't ready and questioned my skills. I heard about it secondhand and lost trust in her and my colleagues. So I decided to leave.

I learned to recognize when my personal approach to tackling problems can create barriers with colleagues, but also when I'm not set up for success. I can recognize the signs more easily. I learned to be less "Holly Golightly" in trusting people blindly. Now I'm more careful and I've modified my problem-solving style to work better with others.

4. What tools or tactics do you rely on in being a more effective leader and team member?

As a manager, my role is to help remove bottle necks so others can do their best work. I don't micromanage and I operate on an assumption of trust. I believe people are capable of doing their jobs. This is how I manage, participate on teams, and interact with my peers and senior leadership. I believe one of my best skills is not telling people what to do. People appreciate autonomy, and they want to own their projects and take responsibility for their work.

When people on my team want more direction, I work with them to provide clarity. I want them to be proactive in seeking my input. I am there to help them solve problems when they need my guidance. Once they feel they have the tools, support, and direction they need from me, I get out of their way so they can excel on their own.

5. Share a story about an interesting or difficult negotiation and how you were able to gain more influence and leverage as a result.

Any new role requires building influence to better negotiate your place within an organization. I've learned that the best approach to managing my career is to actively balance learning and listening by offering to help others through my expertise. Experience has taught me the power of the open-ended question "what can I do to help?"

A great example of this is my role at Mylan – a healthcare company and one of the top generic and specialty drug companies in the world. I provide consumer marketing expertise to help shape Mylan's global brand in a rapidly-changing healthcare landscape. I changed industries, joined the company in 2014 after managing Pepsi's Aquafina brand, and moved my family to Pittsburgh. Since starting, I've often asked "how can I help?" so I can be useful in a new environment and better negotiate my future. I want to be a valued team player and a part of the discussion.

6. What do you see as your unique value proposition and how has your personal background prepared you to excel?

As a kid, I had severe scoliosis. I had to wear a back brace for five years – 23 hours a day for three years and at night for two. I learned social skills to navigate through this, and my parents gave me great freedom and independence to proactively drive my own decisions. By high school, I wanted to reinvent myself and not be that girl with the back brace anymore. I asked my parents to send me to boarding school, which they did at significant financial sacrifice.

This childhood experience was extremely formative – both having to wear the brace and then changing my own destiny. It made me realize that you can frame anything as an opportunity, even hardships. It made me more confident. I don't believe in "luck" since that's disempowering. Life and success are about making choices and seeing the opportunity before you even if things seem bleak. It's really about what you do with what's before you.

7. What is your proudest achievement?

My twin boys. I give all I want at work and am emotionally present with my kids. I have a very supportive husband and strong family infrastructure. My house might be messier than others and I won't be baking cookies for school, but I read to them every night even if it's through FaceTime from another city. I'm very proud to be their mom.