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ADVANCING with the STARS

Sometimes it's a lateral move. Other times, advancing takes fancy footwork. The main thing, say these six biopharma execs, is to think on your feet. As told to **Marc Iskowitz**



Bill Abernethy, VP, global market development, Prosensa Therapeutics

Time in the industry: 32 years

Original career plan: Sales and sales management

Previous roles: Four years of sales experience, eight years of experience in clinical trial management as a clinical research associate (CRA), Eli Lilly;

then 20 years of pharma/biotech marketing experience (13 of that globally), rising up the ranks from assistant product manager to VP while at Boehringer Mannheim, Solvay, Boehringer Ingelheim, Genzyme and now Prosensa



Joyce Ercolino, director, eStrategy, global commercial development, CSL Behring

Time in the pharma industry: 10 years

Original career plan: I started out my career in communications, with an interest in broadcasting

Previous roles: Staff writer/producer/director, FOX and NBC affiliates; consultant for clients in various other industries including Smith-Kline (Beecham); producer/director/special projects producer (brought new technologies into the company, initiated digital marketing for consulting division), Unisys

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

My Dad gently guided me toward science-based companies with good training programs. Eli Lilly was rapidly expanding in the early 80s and diversifying more toward the pharmaceutical side. I was brought in-house and retrained as a CRA.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

The ability to take complex scientific/clinical data and simplify it to what matters most to the stakeholders.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

Cari Stevens at Solvay, who hired me as an assistant product manager. And Paul Merrigan, who hired me into Genzyme and the world of rare genetic diseases and ultra-orphan drugs.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Speak slowly and listen intently! And simplify your messages! One of my favorite Genzyme memories was when I was approached by a Genzyme Brazil marketer who said I was the only presenter he could understand, because I spoke slowly enough for him to comprehend!

Is there anything you would have done differently?

Let those around me help me meet my career goals. Early on, I wanted to reach one particular career milestone myself and didn't seek help. As a result, it ultimately took longer to achieve that milestone.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

The opportunity for continuous learning and the ability to periodically reinvent yourself.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

Make myself accessible and again, listen intently and strive to understand. Provide enough guidance/detail that they understand the issue, and then let them work it out on their own.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Start working on your network early and grow it at every chance. Be willing to take a detour or two. It will probably provide you with an edge in the future that you're not considering today.

Responses have been edited. Visit mmm-online.com for full text.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I always liked healthcare and was interested in a role in pharma. I transferred my leadership, communication and online expertise to head global digital marketing at CSL Behring as an associate director.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

I majored in radio/television/film and liked the creative side of the business. After some college radio experience, I focused on TV and worked as a writer/producer/director. I worked on live events as well as post-production, and developed all types of TV programs and videos. I learned how to be a quick study on many topics and industries, so that I could effectively write and communicate about them. Good communication skills are so valuable.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

My parents taught me to work hard, and to earn my own way.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Being a lifelong learner has helped me to grow, to seek out new opportunities, and to move into new career areas.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I would have taken more business courses in college.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

There are so many passionate and talented people that really care about the patients we serve. I feel fortunate to work with such knowledgeable peers.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

It's important to help people see what they are good at, to help them believe in themselves, and to expose them to opportunities that can tap their potential. It's better to get something done, and to learn from an experience, than to spend too much time on every project and worry about perfection.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Find what you are most passionate about and learn to embrace change. It's the only constant we have. Take on new opportunities, especially outside of your area of expertise so that you can stretch and grow.



Pete Feldman, executive director, global marketing, Amgen

Time in the industry: 18 years

Original career plan: Corporate finance

Previous roles: Financial analyst, IR asst. treasurer; exec. director, pricing/contracting; wholesaler management; corporate accounts sales management; strategic planning for US markets; US brand marketing lead

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I took an internship while getting my MBA and I was excited about being able to work in an industry that had a direct impact on people's lives.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

Adapt and be flexible. Every new role has been very different and being willing to take on responsibilities where I have had no prior experience has been invaluable.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

My first manager was the CFO. She gave me opportunities to do many things knowing I had no prior industry experience. I had the latitude to make decisions, make mistakes and figure things out on my own.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

The ability to make the complex, simple. Being objective with all the information we have and distilling it into the essence of the situation. Early on in my career I presented frequently to senior level executives and I was forced to get to the point quickly and provide strategic choices and recommendations.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

Take on an international/global role early in my career.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

The pace of change. Long product development cycles do not translate into a static business landscape. The science, competition, regulatory and global environment does not stand still, so we are challenged to adapt and innovative so we can bring our products to patients. This all adds up to a tremendously dynamic space that keeps me motivated.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

Give individuals and teams clarity on the goal and the problem they are empowered to solve. Then get out of their way! People can do the extraordinary when given the opportunity to think independently.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Have a passion for what you choose to pursue. This industry can be tremendously rewarding when we make a difference for even a single patient. Passion is what helps you persevere when the inevitable challenges make our goal seem more difficult to achieve. Don't be focused on moving up, focus on being the best at what you are doing right now. Everything else will take care of itself.



Mary Pietrowski, senior director, digital strategy & marketing, Hologic

Time in industry: 11 years

Original career plan: Pursuing a career in social work

Previous roles: Director, patient marketing, and director, e-marketing at Hologic; marketing consultant, GTC Biotherapeutics and Stethographics

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

The week after 9/11, the high tech company I had been working for closed. It was then that I decided to focus on the medical field. I wanted what I did for a career to truly matter and specifically, to make a difference to women. So I did extensive networking, took relevant college coursework, and became a medical device and biopharmaceutical consultant.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

My high-tech work taught me project management and product marketing. I was also CEO of my own business, womanspirit.com (the first online women's bookstore), where I developed skills in leadership, entrepreneurship and digital strategy execution.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

I owe my success to several senior executives who looked beyond the fact that I didn't have specific biotech/medical device experience, but recognized I had the skill set they needed.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Being self-motivated and taking the initiative to continually learn has enabled me to find emerging digital trends and to capitalize on those trends.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

The simple answer is no—from my perspective, I believe all of the paths I have chosen culminated in the career I have now.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

Transferring my marketing and digital skills from the high tech/consumer industries was easy. The only significant difference has been the added layers of legal and regulatory requirements.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

Just as senior management did for me, I strive to help my team members see capabilities within themselves that might not be apparent and encourage them to develop their skills through ongoing education and on-the-job training.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Be persistent. Network. Become a subject-matter expert. Show initiative—take on stretch projects. The rewards—both professionally and personally—are amazing when you are willing to challenge yourself!



David Stern, SVP, head, global bus. franchise, fertility, EMD Serono

Time in the industry: 20 years

Original career plan: Medical school

Previous roles: Sales rep/reproductive health specialist/district mgr./group product mgr./marketing dir., US women's health (Organon); EVP, head of US commercial operations, endocrinology/VP marketing, metabolic endocrinology (EMD Serono)



Kristin Vitanza, brand director, marketing, Endo Pharmaceuticals

Time in the industry: 16 years

Original career plan: To be a doctor

Previous roles: account rep., account exec, MCS PR; client services dir., project mgr, ApotheCom Associates; product manager, manager scientific communications, sanofi; brand Manager, senior brand manager, Endo

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I always loved the business side of healthcare and wanted to be able to use my medical background (I worked as an EMT in college) and combine it with business. I started as a sales rep to “learn the business” and moved into management.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

Working in sales gave me an appreciation to listen to what the customer needs. As a sales manager, I learned how to build a strong team and to motivate people. My biggest lesson was to help develop each person according to their strengths, not mine. The skills I learned in running the US business team was how to lead a large cross-functional team (including medical) and manage a P&L.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

The two most important mentors were the ones that brought me to EMD Serono (Serono at the time)—the EVP of metabolic endocrinology taught me how to not just run a marketing team, but how to lead a business unit, and the president of Serono promoted me from marketing to EVP and placed his trust in me to run the business unit.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Leading people through a shared vision. Teamwork is so critical to business success, and the best way to be successful is to build a passionate team of people who enjoy winning.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I spent 18 years of my career focused on the US. I would probably have tried to move into a global position sooner.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

The number of passionate people. Our industry is made up of people committed to improving patients' lives.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

Build a level of trust and allow people to make mistakes. Understand when to step in and when to let people fail.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

It takes time. It is more important to gain experiences, not to look at titles. I have taken lateral moves (sometimes taking a cut in pay or benefits) in order to get experience to be able to move up within organizations. People hire or promote based on experience, not titles or degrees.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I joined the healthcare industry when I graduated from college. My first job was in a healthcare public relations agency and I haven't left the industry since.

What valuable skills did you pick up from your previous roles?

Two of the most critical skills in any role are communication and perseverance. Everything we do circles around effective communication and the ability to clearly articulate to others. And in our ever-changing industry perseverance is critical.

To whom do you feel you owe your success?

My grandmother; she taught me the value of hard work and dedication from a very young age. Her work ethic was so impressive, and I strive for that each and every day.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Cross-functional leadership has been critical. Successfully leading a team of colleagues toward a common goal is a skill and an art. I developed this through observing role models and learning what works and what doesn't work. At the end of the day, it comes down to respecting everyone's contributions and leveraging everyone's strengths for the greater good of patients, customers and stakeholders.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I have had the opportunity to work with dynamic people at innovative organizations and have had some truly rewarding professional experiences, so I don't think there is anything I would like to change.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

This industry is so heavily regulated. If you can successfully market a brand and bring value to customers then I think you could market any brand beyond healthcare.

How do you help others unleash their potential?

You have to find out what motivates each team member and find out their strengths. Then give them the opportunity to shine with a mix of what they do well along with new opportunities.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Be present in your current role. Yes, you have to think about the next step but be present where you are today or you may miss great learning opportunities. Learn as much as you can and prove yourself. That is the best way to get recognized and advance in your career.



Lance Longwell, director of communications, Siemens Healthcare

Time in the industry: 13 years

Original career plan: Become a physician

Previous roles: Senior manager, corporate communications, IMS Health (from 2004-2008); previous agency roles at Cooney/Waters Group, Euro

RSCG and Noonan/Russo Communications; consultant at Pfizer

How did you get into healthcare/pharma? What did you do before?

I was always drawn to the life sciences and making a difference in people's lives but happened into communications early in my career. While doing research, I discovered that I enjoyed writing about the results.

Did your career find you, or did you find it?

I found the career, but each role within my career found me.

Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

I had two strong mentors in my career. The first was my mentor at the University of Colorado who encouraged me to follow my passion for communications. The second, my manager at Pfizer, taught me that the unconventional move in your career can be your best choice.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

My most useful skill has been the ability to synthesize data from different sources and tie it into a cohesive story. The best ideas often come from unusual and unexpected sources, and I seek those out.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I don't think I would have done anything differently in my career.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

Many people look at their career as a checklist, seeking out the next rung on the ladder. Instead, I would encourage people to look beyond a "job," and instead look at their careers as a series of challenges.

How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

Early on, I think it can be very important to brand yourself as a specialist—for example, a "market research analyst" or "oncology marketer." However, those labels can often prevent future opportunities. Niches and silos are great for taxonomy, but limiting in the real world because challenges are often bigger than the niche.

How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

The life science industry will look dramatically different in 10 years. We're changing the way we look at and treat patients—moving from treating the illness to managing health. Looking back, 10 years ago, we talked of pharma or biotech as separate industries. This convergence will continue—partnerships and innovation will bring about a new generation of products that fuses multiple disciplines into



Allan Weber, CEO, Essential Pharmaceuticals

Time in the industry: 23 years

Original career plan: Corporate financial analysis

Previous roles: Financial analyst (Ethicon), sales rep (Carter Wallace), product management (Carter Wallace, Gynetics, Lavipharm), business devel-

opment (Lavipharm, Odyssey, Essential), general manager/president (Odyssey)

How did you get into healthcare/pharma? What did you do before?

After graduate school, I researched numerous companies. The healthcare industry was of special interest due to its rapid growth, and high-tech nature. I have stayed in healthcare since day one.

Did your career find you, or did you find it?

While initially my career found me, in the long run I found it. Pharma always provided opportunity and diversity of work, keeping me involved and motivated.

Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

My first controller at Ethicon taught me the value of seeing the company's business as a whole, but through the details of the daily job. Upon entering sales, a great manager showed me the difference between a rep and a leader. At Odyssey and Pliva (now owned by Teva), I learned from senior leaders the value and skills of managing and developing people.

What's been your most useful career skill, and how did you develop it?

Business development—learning how to manage the overall needs of the company's future, and collaborating with others on achieving this. It is a skill developed only over time through interactions with all departments in the company.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I may have stayed at big pharma a little longer before making the jump to smaller companies.

What advice would you give others looking to get into the industry or move up the ranks?

First, you must truly enjoy what you are doing. Second, focus on your current job/assignment and how it contributes to the company. By proving you are excellent at your job, while simultaneously understanding the bigger picture, you will be noticed.

How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

It's not important. Having the ability to understand a broad scope of business needs and accomplish multiple endeavors is important.

How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

We will see a more collaborative style between companies, research, academia and government, but the outcomes will still be personal healthcare innovations with a less regional and more