

THE CLIMB

As these eight pharma execs tell **Larry Dobrow**, achieving long-term success takes learning, listening, adapting and connecting with colleagues





**Janie Rodriguez, senior manager
Toviaz marketing—global innovative
pharma, Pfizer**

Time in the industry: 16 years
Original career goal: College professor
Previous jobs: Johnson & Johnson
Pharmaceuticals Group, Strategic
Marketing—health economics & pricing
manager; Daiichi Pharmaceuticals—

marketing; Boehringer-Ingelheim—marketing



**John Fish, global director, digital
customer experience, AstraZeneca**

Time in the industry: Ten years. That's
a personal record for me in any industry.
Original career goal: I was a radio, TV
and film major at Temple. I thought I
wanted to be a DJ, but it was not what I
expected; everything was formulaic.

Previous jobs: Brand manager for
Continental Airlines. Co-founder of an Internet company.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

After graduate school, I was hired by J&J based on my background on race-based discrimination and health outcomes.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

Influencing and negotiation skills. This is of particular importance as marketers interact with legal, medical and regulatory groups.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

I'm not sure it happens that way. I think it is more like a progressive build of confidence as you pick up new skills and overcome challenges.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

Just how much of a healthcare/pharma marketer's time is devoted to non-revenue-generating activities.

To whom do you owe your success?

My mother. She taught me to be kind, empathetic and assertive, qualities that have served me well as a marketer working in a highly matrixed organization. It took me some time to realize it, but I also learned from her about work ethic, discipline and resilience.

Who were your inspirations and mentors, and why?

My boss at my first marketing job at Daiichi played a critical role in my development. Dawn J. Smith taught me about process and project management while instilling the importance of being strategic. Most importantly, she emphasized the need to have fun while at work.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional strength, and how did you develop it?

I always ask for feedback about what I am doing right and what I need to stop doing. I don't like to wait for an annual review to get information about my performance.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

I would have asked more questions along the way. I was raised in a culture where asking questions could often be interpreted as being confrontational or irreverent.

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

Be vocal; get noticed. Working hard alone won't get you noticed. Join organizations and volunteer. That is the best way to network.

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

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

Until I arrived at AstraZeneca, I was exploring new industries every five years or so. When AZ's global recruiter called, I had been commuting to Columbus, Ohio, three days a week for over a year and was being asked to move there permanently. That wasn't an option for my family so I played it out with the AZ recruiter. Pharma intrigued me, particularly the sense of purpose and science of helping people.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

I hire people who are far more talented than I am and provide them with a fail-friendly environment. I don't mind taking a bullet for a team member when we did our homework and went in with good judgment and a strong hypothesis.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

At Continental, I fell in love with being an “intrapreneur,” because the resources and assets at my disposal allowed me to focus on bringing an idea to life and then to market.

What were some of the challenges along the way – and how did you get past them?

Innovation requires sponsorship. When the political landscape or business shape changes, you have to re-align your approach or you lose momentum... I see a lot of people around me paralyzed because of the fear, uncertainty and doubt that comes with change. Getting comfortable with change has been very helpful to my career.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

Initially, I was surprised at how slowly the industry adopts what is deemed best practice in other industries. Cost management, CRM, digital, multi-channel and now customer experience – these are all business processes that other verticals explored and embedded years ago. Pharma seemed more reactive than proactive.

Who were your inspirations and mentors, and why?

What I love about mentors is the clarity you get from the questions they ask; it reduces the noise that you generate in your own head. I'm inspired by Steve Jobs and Richard Branson for their vision and Elon Musk for his capacity. Does he even sleep? And corny as it sounds, my wife and family are hugely inspirational to me.

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

Be flexible and adaptable. Learn how to operate within ambiguous situations. Listen more than you speak. Communicate value in context of the audience.



Oved Amitay, vice president, head of commercial, Alnylam Pharmaceuticals

Time in the industry: 21 years

Original career goal: I was always interested in medications and as a kid wanted to learn about herbal medicine.

Previous jobs: General manager of the Gaucher disease and MPS portfolios at

Genzyme, where I was responsible for Cerezyme and Eliglustat. I joined Genzyme in 1998.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I was working on my graduate studies in pharmacology at Northeastern University and had a chance to present a paper at a local meeting. The presenters next to me were from Cambridge Neuro Science, a company that was developing therapies for stroke and brain injury. I was intrigued by what they told me and got my first industry job, as a research associate, there.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

When I was at Genzyme, I met parents standing by the side of the hospital bed of their son, who had Pompe’s disease. Genzyme was taking the first steps in clinical trials to evaluate a therapy, and I wanted to do anything I could to give that boy a chance to be in the trial. He got in, although he and his family had to relocate to England for several months. He survived and the drug was later approved.

What were some of the challenges along the way—and how did you get past them?

The most challenging point in my professional career was when we were facing a supply shortage with the therapy that I was responsible for. I personally knew many of the patients who were using the product, as well as their caregivers. I felt that I was letting them down.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

I am often surprised by how our industry and its contributions are taken for granted by the general public. I am frequently asked to talk about innovation and healthcare, and I ask the audience, “Who are the companies that come to mind when you think about innovation?” Most of the time, the name that comes up first is Apple; I have yet to hear the name of a company from our industry. We all need to do a better job at helping people see the incredible amount of innovation and dedication it takes to develop a new drug or medical device.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

Not really. I made some tough choices along the way, which included leaving my home country (Israel), but I was always at peace with myself.

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

I look at the new generation of people that are entering the industry today, who are so much more sophisticated and better informed than I was. It’s hard to give any advice. My simple mantra is that you should always do the best job that you can; it will pay off.



Deborah Dunsire, president and CEO, FORUM Pharmaceuticals

Time in the industry: 26 years

Original career goal: To be an astronaut

Previous jobs: Medical practitioner in Johannesburg, South Africa; 17 years at Sandoz/Novartis, which included various roles in clinical

research, new product strategy and development, marketing and general management

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

Understanding the complexities and challenges of turning scientific understanding of diseases into medicines that overcome them!

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

When I had to make the decision to leave that first role at Sandoz. I found that I was so intrigued with the cutting-edge science and the collaboration it takes to make medicine. I simply could not imagine only focusing my career on one specialty.

What were some of the challenges along the way?

Not having the training to prepare me for the jobs that I was offered and having to learn on the fly.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

Both the intellectual capital in the people who work in this industry and their passion to eradicate diseases. Brilliant people who really care—it feels like such a privilege to work among them.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional strength, and how did you develop it?

A willingness to try something new. I got it from my parents, who left school at 13 and later emigrated from Scotland to Africa.

To whom do you owe your success?

How much space do you have? Roger Trythall, who brought me into the industry. Outstanding leaders and managers like Justin Van Gennep and David Epstein. Mark Levin and the board of Millennium Pharmaceuticals, who gave me the leadership chance of a lifetime as CEO. Most of all I owe so much to the teams I have worked with, who brought their passion and excellence to bear and challenged me to be better every day.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

I always look forward. There are no do-overs of any day that we live. If there is a learning, I would say that the days are precious and it is so important to reflect and enjoy the moments.

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

Love the work and the mission of your work. Learn about it broadly so you understand the breadth of it. Seek to broaden your experience across disciplines to bring more to the table. Never stop learning from the people around you.



Robert Greif, vice president, commercial operations, Revo Biologics

Time in the industry: 19 years

Original career goal: As a kid, I wanted to play pro sports. Right out of school, I wanted to learn the ropes in sales.

Previous jobs: Sales for Pitney Bowes; sales and marketing for Sanofi; marketing, sales and managed markets for Boehringer Ingelheim; business development for United Healthcare



Brianne Weingarten, executive director alliance management and R&D project leader, Purdue Pharma

Time in the industry: 29 years

Original career goal: Since the 4th grade, when I wrote a term paper on Clara Barton, I knew I wanted to work in medicine or healthcare. I slightly altered my plan during college by completing a pre-med curriculum.

Previous jobs: Revlon Health Care Group

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I was recruited away from Pitney Bowes. My transition from Pitney Bowes to Sanofi was in pursuit of a higher level of sale and a career that had more professional-development and opportunities.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

Learning how to listen, learning how to motivate people, learning how to take complex tasks/strategies and make them simple enough for implementation and learning how to ask the right questions to get to the action point.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

When I was able to sell cough and colds products for Sanofi in the middle of the summer.

What were some of the challenges along the way – and how did you get past them?

Tough bosses, corporate politics, tight budgets, product delays, unreasonable expectations... just to name a few. You have to be realistic and make the little wins count.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

The opportunities that are available to grow professionally.

To whom do you owe your success?

My mother. She taught me about work ethic and the effects of burning bridges. It's a small world out there.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional strength, and how did you develop it?

This is a tough one... I would have to say it is inclusiveness. Success comes with great implementation/execution. If you need others to do this as part of your team, you better include them.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

I would have gone abroad for global experience and perspective. I believe it would have been rewarding professionally and personally.

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

Know what you want to be. I cannot tell you how many people I have encountered in the interview process that either have not thought about it, can't answer the question or set their sights on a role that they have no experience doing.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

In the summer of 1984, just prior to my senior year in college, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work as a research scientist in the analytical labs of Felton International, a flavor and fragrance company. From that point on, I knew that research was my passion.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

The ability to transform complex scientific information into language that is understood by the layperson.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

Successfully leading two FDA Advisory Committee meetings, resulting in the recommendation for approval of the NDA under discussion. It was the most satisfying and rewarding moment in my professional life!

What were some of the challenges along the way—and how did you get past them?

Learning how to not take colleagues' remarks and comments personally. One of my mentors taught me many years ago that the best mechanism to avoid over-reacting to criticism is to “rub a little virtual sandpaper all over your body and walk through the door. After that, you can take anything.”

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

The lack of women in leadership positions in pharma. Recent studies have demonstrated that workplace culture is just not that comfortable with women in leadership roles.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional strength, and how did you develop it?

I use the gift of conversation to bring different types of people together to work towards a goal.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

No, I feel lucky to have worked with those whose paths I have crossed. I know that the work that I have contributed to has made an impact.

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

Post-graduate education is critical. It's the foundation for landing the best positions, which can then be a springboard to more senior-level posts. Exhibiting excellent interpersonal skills as well as being flexible to adapting to all types of work priorities and opportunities are the keys to success.



Amy Chafin, director, US brand/marketing, Lilly Oncology

Time in the industry: 13 years

Original career goal: As a kid I was interested in being an Olympic gymnast or a lawyer. But after taking a marketing class and joining DECA in high school, I knew that I had found the career I was meant to be in.

Previous jobs: Among others, I started off in sales for Hormel (selling SPAM, Not-So-Sloppy-Joes and Beef Jerky).

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

I was married and living in Atlanta, but my husband was homesick and wanted to move back to Indiana. I arrived at Lilly after applying for a marketing job online. Although I applied for one specific role, I made a strong connection with a different marketing manager who was helping with interviews. He hired me that same day.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

Empathy has helped me better understand customers and patients, so that the strategies and solutions we develop truly fit their needs.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

I had an uncle with stage IV cancer who positively benefited from a product that Lilly created. It was a great reminder of the important work that we all do every day.

What were some of the challenges along the way—and how did you get past them?

Everyone has times when they don't get chosen for a specific project or role, or when someone you respect doesn't see your full potential. When I run into these challenges, I do two things. First I align on a plan with management for how to move forward. I also try to balance my time by helping others, whether someone less fortunate or someone more junior in role. This helps me keep my problems in perspective and focuses my energy on something productive.

What has surprised you most about working in the industry?

Coming from outside the pharmaceutical industry, I was surprised that almost everyone that I have met at Lilly sincerely wants to do what is right for the patient and works hard to keep the patient at the center of everything that's done.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

After working in Global for several years, I learned how much I enjoyed traveling overseas and working with my European colleagues. I wish I would have done an international assignment and learned to speak another language fluently.

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

Focus on getting a breadth of marketing experience early in your career. Remember that the business, projects and timelines are very important, but the people and relationships should be the top priority.



Sean Clark, head, US marketing, Alcon Surgical Division

Time in the industry: Six years in medical devices, all in eye care

Original career goal: I wanted to be in business but wasn't sure of the industry. It took a while to find marketing and life sciences/healthcare.

Previous jobs: Three years in operations management with General Electric, two years in business consulting, 10 years with P&G in marketing.

How did you get into healthcare/pharma?

For the first six years at P&G, I worked in the Baby Care division, which was a great training ground on not only how to market a brand but also how to think about the key levers that drive a business. In my seventh year, I transferred to the Pet Care division. I came to appreciate the benefits that a high-quality pet food could have on a pet's vitality. It opened my eyes to the fact that there were many industries and products that impacted a person's quality of life in a very direct fashion.

What valuable skills have you picked up along the way?

Creating frameworks for understanding where situations are ambiguous or complex. I think this probably comes from my undergraduate training as an engineer.

What was your “eureka!” moment as a professional?

I'm not sure I've had one. It's been more of a subtle and consistent reinforcement every time I interact with one of our patients or customers, and hear how the products we create and bring to market have such an impact. Many people fear losing their eyesight more than death, so when we can give them back their vision or prevent an issue, it's incredibly rewarding.

Who were your inspirations or mentors? And why?

My father was the first person to attend college in his family. He worked his way through school and went on to be a corporate officer of a Fortune 500 company. My wife inspires me every day with the way she helps raise our kids. She's incredibly stubborn, in a good way: Once she sets her mind to something, she'll see it through with excellence.

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

These are all things that I remind myself of occasionally (and wish I practiced 100% of the time):

1. Own your business and deliver results. Be someone that the organization can count on.
2. Build up technical proficiency on the products you work with by spending time with internal and external thought leaders.
3. Develop your team. Try to be someone that people are excited to work for because they know you will grow them.
4. Have a plan for your career. Think about what you need to do to set you up for your ultimate goal. This is something I wish I had grasped to a greater extent earlier in my career.
5. Keep learning and growing. Take time to invest in yourself. ■