

# Chutes & Ladders

Seek the next rung. Take the plunge. Most of all, these eight senior healthcare execs advise, enjoy the ride. As told to **Marc Iskowitz**





**Bhavesh Ashar, VP, project head of transplant, Sanofi**

**Time in the industry:** 14 years

**Original career plan:** Actuary

**Previous roles:** Healthcare consulting with McKinsey & Co; at Sanofi, AVP Sales & Marketing, Injectables and Associate VP, Commercial Operations, attaché to US president/CEO, marketing, commercial

operations, new products/business development, commercial head, integration lead

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

I always had an interest in both healthcare and in business. After college, I chose a career in business and trained as an Actuary. My interest in healthcare grew through my actuarial days as I read more about that business model and networked with people in that field. A career in the pharmaceutical industry was the ideal way for me to merge my business background with my interest in healthcare.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

Too numerous to mention—I have had the fortune to work with and learn from many talented colleagues over the years—co-workers, managers and mentors. Business school and text books can only teach you so much. I have benefited the most from watching skilled leaders in action, solving tough business problems in real time.

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

Adaptability. As change becomes a constant in our industry, I believe this skill has helped me navigate the ups and downs much more effectively. I developed these skills through experiencing change in both professional and personal settings.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

Given the increasing importance of global markets, I wish I had spent more time earlier in my pharma career in that setting.

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

Excel with the job at hand. Give every project your best, and demonstrate your value to the organization. Don't be shy about getting into the details, as often times the magic is in the details.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

It's becoming increasingly important as the industry goes through transformation. While it's necessary to have a very solid and broad-base level understanding of the business from many different vantage points, it is also becoming critical to develop a "spike" in a functional area and/or a therapeutic area.

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

The industry will continue to change rapidly, and the pace of change will accelerate. Demonstrating real patient value will become front-and-center of all that we do.



**Terrie Curran, SVP, global women's health, Merck**

**Time in the industry:** 21 years

**Original career plan:** My two favorite subjects in high school were economics and biology—ideal for pharma marketing

**Previous roles:** Sales rep, Upjohn Australia; women's health product mgr., Novo Aus.; group product mgr., Pharmacia &

Upjohn Aus.; sales and marketing dir., Pharmacia Aus.; country president, Pharmacia New Zealand; GM Aus. & NZ, Schering-Plough

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

I joined the industry as a sales representative selling hormone replacement therapy, an anxiolytic, and an injectable for arthritis.

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

I didn't set out with the goal of being a country managing director or the leader of a global franchise, but in each of my roles, I simply focused on making a difference.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

I have had many great mentors. One in particular taught me how to run a business. He taught me to consider the ROI of each investment decision, how to effectively engage and lead people, and to take risks on young talent. I am also fortunate to have a mother and husband who have always supported and encouraged me.

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

Building strong teams—you can have the best strategy and products, but without the right people, your results will be mediocre.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

Yes, but it's what you take away from each experience, learn from your past and apply to what's next that truly matters.

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

Excel in your current role; seek mentors/advocates; broaden your experience; lead people early on; understand the financial business drivers; don't be afraid to make a lateral move or take a pay cut to get new experiences or skills; also, gain experience in the future growth markets.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

It is important early in your career to have a specialty as a basis, but to progress into a leadership position you need to broaden your base of experience and capabilities.

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

Every aspect of our business will experience fundamental change in response to market demands and pressures. Nevertheless, I believe that pharmaceutical companies have an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate how their products and solutions can help the world "be well."

*Responses have been edited. Go to [mmm-online.com](http://mmm-online.com) for full text*



**Brigitte Fernandes-McAlear, VP of marketing, life sciences, Roche Diagnostics**

**Time in industry:** 17 years (Europe/US)

**Original career plan:** General management

**Previous role:** I spent five years with Novartis and another five with Eli Lilly. I then joined the molecular diagnostics division of Roche Diagnostics (US). After directing the marketing component of several product launches, I took the lead of the marketing team for Roche's US applied science business

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

Upon completing my MBA and receiving offers from the fashion industry and investment banking, I realized that working in an industry that can improve people's lives is far more fulfilling.

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

A little bit of both. I had to reorient my career focus from finance to marketing. As I became a better leader, I began to get pulled into higher levels of responsibility.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

One mentor had a profound influence. During a feedback session following a leadership assessment, this coach spent most of the time explaining what I did well. He helped me reflect on why I had not "turned my leadership skills on" right away.

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

Building teams. I think of myself as the orchestra leader who conducts people with various functions and skill sets. Everyone is needed, and different voices make the performance better. I learned this from growing up in a Portuguese immigrant family.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

I do not dwell on the past, but I look at it objectively. I am always working to improve something.

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

Find what you enjoy doing, then focus on getting the job done, not moving up. Also, think of your role in its broadest scope.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or a niche?

Just as in marketing a brand, having a specialty helps. But if it is too narrow, you will be confined to niche roles.

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

Most therapeutic solutions will be personalized, making medical decisions more complex. Manufacturers will become more solution-driven, well beyond medication, with the best leveraging several converging technologies: bioinformatics, Internet and novel therapeutics. The public will challenge the industry and regulatory agencies to expedite the delivery of new technologies to those in need.



**Keith Hopps, director of consumer marketing, Medtronic**

**Time in the industry:** 10 years in healthcare marketing, nine in CPG/agency marketing

**Original career plan:** Ad agency career in client services

**Previous roles:** Account manager, Leo Burnett; brand manager, SC Johnson; sr. brand manager, Bristol-Myers Squibb; assoc. marketing director, Colgate-Palmolive; assoc. marketing director, Abbott

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

In 2000 a number of CPG marketers were recruited by Bristol-Myers Squibb to lead DTC for the launch of Zelnorm. My ad agency and CPG brand-management experience made me well-suited for the role, which involved planning and executing a TV-based campaign.

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

Healthcare marketing kind of found me. What enticed me was the opportunity to work on a "blockbuster" drug launch.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

Angel Ilagan helped me understand the nuances between DTC and CPG marketing and the importance of deep-level consumer segmentation; Vanessa Broadhurst expanded my consumer background; and Cindy Kent schooled me on personal branding and building an internal network of support.

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

I delight in winning with a team that works well together, learning new things, and always looking to do something great. Having a varied career allows me to reflect back on successes and failures.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

I may have benefited from identifying and learning from more people who had gone down the path I was pursuing.

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

Get a strong mentor. Consider a field rotation early on. And be ready to manage change because it is now a constant.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

It depends on where you want to go. Great DTC opportunities, my specialty, need experts who are grounded in traditional marketing capabilities and growing in digital marketing competencies.

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

Winning companies will be more disciplined to align globally on strategy, and they'll structure and resource appropriately to localize strategy. Physician and consumer marketing will be far more digitally based. Consumer decisions and treatment will occur frequently at retail centers. More care will take place at home, and one of the big product or service areas will be developments in preventive care.





**Len Kanavy, VP, commercial business operations, Genentech**

**Time in the industry:** Almost 25 years  
**Original career plan:** Sales rep, district manager, sales director, etc.

**Previous roles:** For Novartis: sales rep (upstate NY), sales analytics, various roles in analysis/operations, head of US business analysis group, then head of

commercial operations. For Genentech: head of commercial business operations

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

I worked at a grocery store for 10 years until I was general manager. It was a fantastic way to learn how to run a business.

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

My father was a pharmaceutical sales representative for many years, and then my brother and two sisters also became reps. So, I joined the “family business” and took a sales territory in Albany, NY.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

My parents had a profound impact on my values, and my six brothers and sisters ensured I knew how to work in a team. People who guided me: Ian Clark, David Epstein, Kurt Graves, Alex Gorsky, Mark Iwicki, Mark Rose and Chuck Ziakas.

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

A focus on performing at a high level and doing what is best for the business and patient. Throughout my career, people would approach me about new opportunities if they thought I was doing a really good job.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

I've been fortunate, so not much.

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

If you want to get into this industry, make sure that you have a passion for science, patients and people. As you move up, make sure you are spending time developing your people.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

Early on it is important to get breadth of experience. With a broad base, you are better prepared to compete for opportunities. At some point, it is important to choose your path and become an expert so you can add the greatest value.

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

I am very excited about the future of our industry. Breakthroughs are helping us understand diseases at a whole new level, resulting in exciting medicines that hold the promise of increased efficacy with fewer side effects. There is much work to do, as there is still high unmet need in complicated diseases, such as Alzheimer's, cancer, cardiovascular and autoimmune. Patients are counting on us.



**Brian Lange, marketing director, GlaxoSmithKline**

**Time in the industry:** About two years  
**Original career plan:** General manager-style positions

**Prior management roles:** A series of positions with progressive responsibility at Johnson & Johnson's consumer business unit

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

I knew that I was interested in making a career switch that allowed me to gain more responsibility and accountability for the work that I was doing. I also knew that the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries were of particular interest to me given my previous exposure.

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

I think that most careers are a mix of intention and circumstance. To me, each step on the path has been moving me toward the longer-term goals I've always been motivated by in life.

### Who was instrumental to your growth along the way?

I've been lucky in that every manager/director I've worked for since business school has found ways to push me and challenge me. Of course, there are those that truly provide that template for the type of leader you'd like to become—in that space, I have to flag Kathy Widmer (who's now the CMO at Elizabeth Arden) and Debra Sandler (who's now the president of the chocolate business at Mars.)

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

I think the most useful career skill I've had has been the ability to never lose sight of the bigger picture.

### Is there anything you would have done differently?

I can't think of one specific thing that I'd do differently. For me, life and a career are as much about the journey as they are about the destination.

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

Be your full self at work, at home, in every moment of your life. Specific to the pharma industry, the biggest advice I'd offer is to embrace the dramatic change that this industry is going through.

### How important is it to develop a specialty or niche?

Personally, I think this is a mixed bag. Specialties are great—until they aren't needed and/or special anymore. Be careful of burying yourself into too deep of a specialty—in today's world of rapid change, what would happen if your specialty isn't needed anymore?

### How do you see the industry 10 years from now?

Reinventing itself again. There are so many external opportunities and headwinds that exist—we refer to it at GSK as “being in the whitewater.” Sometimes the rapids slow down, but even then, they are still rapids.



**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 improving health care.



**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, Lavipharma), business development (Lavipharma, 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 global focus. ■