

The Passion of the People

An Interview with Rochelle B. Lazarus, Chairman, Ogilvy & Mather

EDITORS' NOTE Shelly Lazarus has held positions of increasing responsibility with Ogilvy for more than three decades, including as General Manager for Ogilvy & Mather Direct (now known as OgilvyOne Worldwide) in the United States, President of Ogilvy & Mather Advertising in New York, President of Ogilvy North America, and COO and President of Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide. She was named CEO in 1996, and became Chairman in 1997, a title that she retains after having relinquished the CEO title in 2009. Lazarus also serves on the boards of General Electric; Merck & Co., Inc.; New York-Presbyterian Hospital; American Museum of Natural History; World Wildlife Fund; Advertising Educational Foundation; Partnership for New York City; Lincoln Center; the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy; and Columbia Business School. She is also a member of Advertising Women of New York; The Committee of 200; the Council on Foreign Relations; The Business Council; Women's Forum, Inc.; and the Deloitte WIN External Advisory Council. Shelly Lazarus received an undergraduate degree from Smith College and an M.B.A. from Columbia University.



Rochelle B. Lazarus

COMPANY BRIEF New York-based Ogilvy & Mather (www.ogilvy.com) is one of the largest marketing communications networks in the world, with more than 450 offices in 120 countries, specializing in advertising, relationship and interactive marketing, public relations, sales promotion, and related services. The agency services Fortune Global 500 companies, including American Express, BP, Cisco, Coca-Cola, DuPont, Ford, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, Kimberly-Clark, Kodak, Kraft, Mattel, Motorola, Nestlé, SAP, Unilever, and Yum! Brands, Inc. Ogilvy & Mather is a subsidiary of WPP Group plc (NASDAQ: WPPGY).

How critical is community engagement to the culture of Ogilvy and how do you focus your efforts in that area?

It's more a function of the people who are within Ogilvy than an institutional directive. The people who make up this agency tend to care passionately about different social causes and institutions, and they feel blessed by the fact that what they know how to do professionally has enormous value for the social causes they

believe in. So it's easy for them to give back using their professional skills.

All Ogilvy has done from the very start is to give people within the agency the freedom to use their professional skills for the purpose of communicating about the causes, not-for-profits, and institutions they believe in.

Having worked with many of the great brands, do you find in talking to other leaders that engaging employees in social responsibility is a key focus?

I can't think of a leader of a company that doesn't recognize this is important to his or her employees. People want to work for a company with a conscience; they want to work for a company that they can feel proud to be associated with. One of the ways to demonstrate that is through the role the company plays in the larger community.

So whether or not a CEO as an individual feels that it's important, they don't have a choice anymore. The employees say we want to be involved in the communities in which we live and work.

Public perception of the corporate world has not always been favorable. Should more be done from a communications viewpoint to get those messages out or is the media not interested in covering it?

Because there is so much of it, it is challenging to get your message out. So part of the challenge of overall communications about any brand or company is making sure that the world understands the role the company plays within the community.

Some companies talk about the need to cut back on marketing and communications during tough times while others believe it's even more important during those times. What has your experience suggested in this regard?

The most enlightened leaders of companies understand that those are the times to get the message out, and it takes some experience and some belief in the power of a brand.

There is no more valuable asset that a company has than its brand. So it's always the priority because it has remarkable leverage across everything.

What the company does in terms of giving back to the community in which it lives is part of its identity as a company and as a brand, and the most enlightened understand that you have to think about all of it in an integrated way so that

it's not just about writing checks to a hundred different charities; it's about standing for something, believing in something passionately, and putting the full force of the company behind it.

In leading this company as CEO and now Chairman for many years, through changes in technology and multimedia, was it difficult internally to get the people to understand the need to evolve?

We are blessed because of our orientation which, when David Ogilvy founded the company, wasn't about advertising or direct marketing; it was all about taking whatever means you had to help clients build their brands.

So we were media agnostic from the beginning and that is why it was relatively easy to grow the company discipline after discipline.

We added Ogilvy Public Relations, OgilvyAction, and OgilvyInteractive because we saw each one of these opportunities as one more way to help our clients build a brand.

So when we saw the new media, the visceral and institutional reaction was, bring it on.

How critical is that focus today on diversity and inclusion in terms of mirroring your client base?

It's critical not because it's a mirror of clients but because it's an attitude. It's about being open to all who can and will contribute, about appreciating each person's experience and thinking, and about bringing people with different backgrounds to the table. The solution you come to will always be richer that way than when you bring together a group of people who are all the same.

That inherent acceptance of people of different backgrounds, views, and experiences is one of the things that makes us more valuable to our clients, because we can bring them a solution that is more textured, interesting, global, and unexpected.

In your transition from CEO to Chairman, how has your focus changed and is it difficult to be less involved in the day-to-day?

No, it's great. I didn't know how I would feel stepping back from the day-to-day running of the company, but now it's just working with clients and helping them figure out the right brand strategies, and how to approach an opportunity.

I've given up all the worrying every minute about how the operation is actually running, and that's a remarkable luxury. ●