

Driving Transformational Change

An Interview with Melody Justice,
Executive Vice President – Business Transformation, Coca-Cola North America



Melody Justice

EDITORS' NOTE In addition to her current post at The Coca-Cola Company, Melody Justice is a key member and leader of the company's Women's Leadership Council, which formed in 2007. Prior to joining Coca-Cola, Justice was a Securities Analyst with SunTrust Banks in Atlanta and an Investment Associate with Southeast Banks in Florida. She has a B.A. in English and psychology from Emory University and an M.A. in business administration and finance from the University of Miami. She is a Chartered Financial Analyst.

COMPANY BRIEF Based in Atlanta, The Coca-Cola Company (www.thecoca-colacompany.com) is the world's largest beverage company. Along with Coca-Cola, recognized as the world's most valuable brand, the company markets four of the world's top five beverages, including Diet Coke, Fanta, and Sprite. Consumers worldwide enjoy Coca-Cola beverages at a rate of 1.5 billion servings each day.

How do you define your key areas of focus in your role with Coca-Cola today?

I'm responsible for two things in business transformation: First, I manage a variety of enabling functions that support the business, things like strategic planning, research and development, public affairs and communications, and information systems, to name a few. But I spend more time on the second part of my responsibilities, which is to focus on driving transformational

change in how we operate, so the business can be faster, smarter, and more efficient in meeting the needs of consumers and customers.

As a global brand, is there coordination among regions, or is the focus more on what works for a specific region?

It's both. There is coordination on end-to-end processes and functions, like how we wire our information systems together, and how we use the same HR or financial processes. But each business has to focus on designing and organizing itself in a way that makes the most sense for its partners and consumers. In North America, we've gone through a change of design and focus to drive consumer, customer, and commercial and franchise leadership. Those changes, in combination with working with our functional counterparts globally, are beginning to create some real benefits.

How do you evaluate and track the impact of your efforts?

Tracking that impact is very important. Taking out cost and increasing speed are key metrics. On the IT side, we're in the midst of a major multiyear systems conversion, which will give us much better in-outlet visibility, and the kind of data that we need to better serve our customers. On the sales side, we've created looks of success for channels and customers, and we've automated a way of communicating those standards so a person working in the outlet knows what success looks like. These are all examples of tangible impacts that yield cost savings, increased speed, and greater accountability.

How critical is top-level management involvement and engagement to the redesign efforts?

For Coca-Cola North America, productivity and operating effectiveness are the core priorities in any business plan, and there is an ongoing discussion with Muhtar Kent [Coca-Cola President and CEO]. There is a constant stream of communication, and associates can understand and engage with it because they see it consistently prioritized from the top. Mr. Kent has a system-wide focus on business transformation that is cascading down to each of our businesses. In turn, each business is implementing and executing in ways that are appropriate for them. Our collective success is tied to the system-wide strategic approach that Mr. Kent and his senior leadership team have designed.

With a very diverse consumer base, how critical is it to have that same type of diversity in the workforce?

Winning in the marketplace absolutely requires a diverse workforce that understands and can sell and market to all kinds of people. Our goal is to have our workforce mirror the marketplace. I'm really proud that this is becoming a mindset at Coke, a way of doing business, and a way of thinking. We're not only recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, but we're getting better at selling and marketing to a diverse and multicultural world of consumers.

With the speed of business today, how challenging is it to find a balance between work and life?

Increasingly, over time, I've found that professional life and personal life are more interwoven. At Coke, we have a program we call Living Positively, which is a commitment to making a positive difference in the world by redesigning the way that we work and live so sustainability is a part of everything we do. This holistic way of thinking helps me maintain a balance, because it's all about making a positive difference for myself, my company, and the planet throughout my day.

How critical is community involvement from a leadership point of view?

Involvement in the community enhances your worldview and gets you outside of yourself. It's really critical. For me, it's a way of seeing things through a different set of eyes, because it's different from my day-to-day responsibilities. I think it's vital to stay in touch with that and vital to see the world, walk in the world, and be outside of your day-to-day business role. It makes you a better leader.

When you look a year or two out, are there certain key priorities in the forefront of your mind that will help you continue to drive the impact and success of business transformation?

Our transformational efforts around effectiveness and productivity are so essential to continuing to grow and invest that it's a core priority for me to continue to focus on and see it working. All the things that will be visible to the outside world are enabled by the transformation that goes on behind the scenes. Success to me is achieving success in North America, and when we get there and maintain it, we'll know we have done our job. ●