

A Focus on Citizenship

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; New York-Presbyterian Hospital; American Museum of Natural History; Partnership for New York City; the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy; and Columbia Business School. She is also a member of Advertising Women of New York; the Council on Foreign Relations; The Business Council; and the Deloitte WIN External Advisory Council. Lazarus received an undergraduate degree from Smith College and an M.B.A. from Columbia University.



Rochelle B. Lazarus

COMPANY BRIEF Ogilvy & Mather (www.ogilvy.com), based in New York, 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, Kraft, Mattel, Motorola, Nestlé, SAP, Unilever, and Yum! Brands, Inc. Ogilvy & Mather is a subsidiary of WPP Group plc.

This company understood community engagement early on. How critical is that at a time when corporate responsibility is being heavily promoted?

It has been part of our core and culture. What is lucky for us is that what we know how to do fits so perfectly in the world of philanthropy. You almost can't create a movement or drive a mission for the world without great communications.

So we've had an obvious central role in the world of corporate citizenship from the very start. It has been less about writing checks and more about contributing our time, attention, passion, and skills to causes all over the world and covering almost every field of endeavor.

It is also so motivating to the staff; to take what you know how to do professionally and apply it to something you believe in works magic on the way you feel about your professional life.

Is there a real shift today in drawing the line between business and philanthropy?

The line is completely blurred – it's not even about philanthropy but about citizenship. There is an expectation now that companies will behave as responsible citizens of the local and global community. So GE's ecomagination was

something you could argue is of enormous value to the quality of the environment, but it also has an economic imperative because all GE customers are trying to do more with less. Therefore, GE is making products to satisfy their customers' needs, but those customer needs are all about having products that are friendlier to the environment.

It's a wonderful, virtuous circle now and what might have been considered philanthropy 25 years ago is not philanthropy at all – it's smart business.

Do shareholders understand that transition and how it has evolved?

The enlightened ones do. Most companies I know proclaim they are market driven. The market has spoken and the market cares what the ethos is of a company. Those who demonstrate that they don't care about their role in society and the contribution they make are marked down for it.

Is it important that the citizenship efforts align with the business strategy and are there examples where it has worked effectively?

Absolutely. There are so many examples, the most obvious being Ronald McDonald House. So much of McDonald's business comes from providing healthy meals for children, so giving back for them means helping children who have health issues.

Coca-Cola's focus on water is another one, as well as Avon's focus on breast cancer and domestic violence. Avon sees itself as not just making products that sell to women but being about an affirmation of women's role in society and women's independence.

Ecomagination comes out of what GE does, and the Dove Self-Esteem Fund for young women comes from Dove's focus on helping the world understand what real beauty is.

DuPont worked with a town in North Carolina to rebuild their infrastructure after a tornado, but in a sustainable way, so they

contributed DuPont sustainable products – it was like a live product demo of the future of DuPont's R&D efforts in sustainability.

The world has moved beyond writing checks to having all the giving back to the community come out of the heart of what the company does. That's so much more potent, because you're dealing with the economic power of the entire enterprise – not just the philanthropy budget.

For a company like Ogilvy with a number of resources around the world, is it tough to sometimes have to say no to certain causes?

It is, but if there is someone within this company who believes strongly in a certain enterprise and wants to devote his personal time to helping that organization figure out how to communicate and motivate people better, I don't stand in the way. So these become individual choices. But without a champion within the agency, it won't work.

We have another great advantage these days because so much of our client activities are focused on these efforts that have societal impact. So you don't have to beg for philanthropy. When you work on Dove, for instance, you're working on self-esteem for young women. It's not what you do late at night; it's your day job.

Are young people today looking for a philanthropic company culture?

Absolutely. It used to close the sale to people who were coming into the company, but now we start with it. And the younger you are, the more it matters.

No matter how large this company has grown, the values are never lost. What is it about Ogilvy that has made it work so well?

We were lucky because we had a founder who laid out a culture before he had any clients. He was a great copywriter, so it was expressed in a way that once you heard it, you could not help but remember it.

Strong cultures tend to attract people who are taken with the culture and repel people for whom the culture doesn't resonate. So it's a self-perpetuating machine, because the stronger your culture is, the stronger it continues to be, because you immediately know when you walk in the door as a potential employee if this is the right place for you and vice versa.

Is the business still exciting for you?

Every time you go to a new client with a new set of opportunities, problems, or issues, it's like having a new job. That's what keeps me fresh. ●