

July 3, 2019

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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Anjum Swaroop, vice president and head intellectual property at Dr. Reddy's Laboratories.

Taren: Anjum, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program.

Anjum: Thank you for having me, Taren. It's a pleasure.

Taren: It's truly our pleasure. You have been with Dr. Reddy's for two decades. That's a pretty long time with one company, given what we see so much in the marketplace today. I have so many questions. Let's start with what's kept you at the company for so long.

Anjum: Taren, I have been in this company for, you're right, almost two decades, and it's primarily because of three main reasons. It's the company's vision, it's the opportunities presented to me and of course, it's culture.

So. Dr. Anji Reddy, who was the founder, he believed that medicine has value when it's accessible and affordable to people all across the globe. Personally, I shared his visions, and I strongly believe in the notion that the poorest of poor must have access to affordable medications. So I feel a real connection to the company, and that has played a large part in keeping me here.

Also the company, I have to tell you, has provided me with immense opportunity to grow, and it has supported me to build up skills that I needed to succeed and also to drive success in the company. For example, Dr. Reddy's sponsored and supported any and all of my academic pursuits, I have to say. In addition, I had great, great mentors that guided me through the process, gave me the requisite flexibility, encouraged me to go to school, and just supported me all through and through.

Lastly, I have to say that this company has a great culture of collaboration, trust and respect, and over the years I have developed great relationships with colleagues. I think it's a great asset to have in a company. So yeah, I really like to be in this company.

Taren: That's fantastic. One of my questions was to talk to you about how your role has changed, and you touched on that just a minute ago about the opportunities that were provided

to you. During the course of your career, what's been one of the most exciting roles that you've had? Is it your current role, or is it something that led up to where you are today?

Anjum: I have to say I love my current role. I love litigation, and I am deeply emerged in it. From an Indian scientist to a US attorney has been an adventurous ride, but I do love my current role.

Taren: Fantastic. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the past 20 years in the industry? I know that's a big question, but if you could pinpoint one or two that would be great.

Anjum: Sure, sure. I have seen this company grow, Taren, from a midsize domestic operation, manufacturing, active pharmaceutical ingredients to now having a commercial presence in 30 countries. And now we have grown our business from an API manufacturer to a global leader in finished dosage forms.

So the challenges, of course, are very true to what you expect when a company expands from a small operations to a global giant. So we went into many markets and as the company grew, we were required to find the best ways to work and navigate all the hurdles and requirements in those markets, for example, find the right products, right manufacturing, regulatory. Personally for me and my team, we had to teach ourselves the legal technical and regulatory aspects and not to forget the IP and legal aspects in those markets.

That was a huge task. It was a great learning curve, very challenging, but I have to say I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it.

The personal challenge for me during that time was adapting to the new culture. I had not been to the US. I came here for the first time, so I really had to adapt to the new environment and culture. I had to work in a new discipline. I was in the legal field and found myself in the US, and of course I had to raise my kids with a new environment. So those were a few challenges, but I would change nothing about it.

Taren: That's wonderful. You started your career as a bench scientist. What advice could you provide to other women who may be in similar roles, who might want to take that leap to the next level. Any advice you have for them?

Anjum: I would say believe in your dreams and be persistent. I was relentlessly persistent in whatever I dreamt about. I have to say that I didn't choose my career; my career chose me. When I came to the US, I did not come here to become a US patent attorney, but when I came to the US, I realized I needed a formal legal education to run the department smoothly. So I went to Rutgers Law School.

So my advice to young women is whatever their dream are, follow your dream, be persistent and don't let anything stop you.

Taren: Great advice. What are some of the practical skills you needed to develop to navigate through your career to get to the point where you are today? You sit in a very prestigious seat of influence within the company.

Anjum: You have to understand, Taren, I come from India, so I really have to learn to voice my opinions, be more assertive, be more direct and at the same time, maintain the collaboration with my cross functional teams. And as a scientist you know we all are very collaborated. We work in teams, and my attorney job – my legal career required me to be more assertive and drive that process in the company. So I really have to learn to be more confident and to talk more freely.

Taren: I think those are skills that women across all backgrounds need to learn, to be quite honest – the persistence and being persuasive enough to have your voice heard. I think those are really important skills. So thank you for sharing that.

Onto practical matters, what are some of your goals for the company this year? And then as a follow up, what is your longer term vision for your department?

Anjum: This year, we want to focus on continued growth of our core capabilities, and we want to continually expand into new products.

Taren, what we have witnessed in the past years is a huge influx of non-US based companies into the generics space. The generics space is now very crowded. So we have answered that by creating new opportunities for ourselves.

Our task at Dr. Reddy's for this year is to continue to differentiate the company from the increased competition by leveraging our research and trying to fix skills. We have built – and we have in the past also continued to make a full spectrum of generic products across various therapeutic areas, and we have expanded our dosage forms. So we are not only now in oral solid dosage; but we are entering injectables, we are into patent protected branded products, we are into topicals, oncology, drug device combination.

So I think we have now a full spectrum of generic products across the therapeutic areas and across different dosage forms. And we will have to have a right IP strategy for each product. That is our goal for this year is to develop and execute this.

Taren: There's a lot of pressure on generics companies to be able to address all those different formulations and modes of delivery. How did you all work through those challenges? Because it's not easy just to jump in to an injectable, or into a topical.

Anjum: Absolutely, Taren. I have to pride myself that we have about 70 labs and about 800 research scientists. So our scientific capability is very diverse, and we are able to address any complexity that involves either with the APIs or the finished dosage forms. So we have the right people to do the right jobs at Dr. Reddy's.

Taren: Fantastic. As we know that patent litigation is a hot topic always. So how are you managing – you alluded to it just a minute ago – Dr. Reddy's IP strategy?

Anjum: So indeed, patent litigation is a hot topic; you're absolutely right. My goal is to focus into the early market entry, by either preparing the case for trial, or by entering into the settlement with a fixed entry date.

As I mentioned, Taren, the generic market has become crowded. Generic competitions have doubled or tripled in the past decade or so. So our strategy is to continue to evolve in the generic landscape in order to be successful. So our strategy is to focus on a selection of very robust portfolio and have the right litigation strategy, have the right IP strategy and have the right development strategy for these products.

Taren: When you're working with your teams and you need to figure out what that strategy is, how do you approach this kind of change? And then, is that part of your leadership style? Describe how that works for me, please.

Anjum: The only kind of leadership brand I think I exercise is leading by example; I mean just do it right to yourself, set an example to the team. So I like to get involved. I like to jump in areas that need my attention. And to me, it seems very akin to raising your kids, wherein we lead the path by setting an example of what's important, what should be the vision, what is the path to achieve it. And I honestly don't believe in the philosophy of leaders who practice 'do as I say and not as I do,' because that's not going to inspire or motivate the teams. So I feel I have a responsibility towards my team, they look up to me for leadership and support.

I also think I have a collaborative style that values inputs from all my team members, not only in IP but across cross function. But certainly, I do get very involved in any project that needs my attention.

Taren: That's great. If you had to pick one word that describes you, what would that be?

Anjum: Taren, I have three words that describe me.

Taren: Overachiever – there you go!

Anjum: I'm very passionate, I'm very focused, and I'm very motivated. This drives me to accomplish as much as possible.

Taren: Fantastic. When I talk to leaders, I love to get this sense of how they define success for themselves. So when you achieve a major milestone, or you have accomplished a major task, how do you define that success and how do you celebrate those successes?

Anjum: I think my view of success is very nonconventional. Success to me is a job well done. If it is my day-to-day accomplishments, I don't define success necessarily as my achievement at workplace. Success to me also means what I accomplish for the world that's around me, have I made a difference in some way – my family, my friends, my community. It could well be a litigation won, you know, but it also means have I been a good parent, have I fulfilled my obligations towards myself and family, community. And if I feel I've done my part in whatever little way, I feel successful.

Taren: Wonderful. It's fascinating speaking with you and you've had such a wide number of roles within the organization and over 20 years. Could you possibly identify one wow moment for me, something that really changed the trajectory of your career, or something that stands out to you as really a super accomplishment.

Anjum: Taren, I think my biggest accomplishment that shaped my career was my decision to go to law school after I came to the US. And you know a decision like that sometimes, you know, we think about it, it gets delayed and sometimes the opportunity passes. But I'm just grateful that I seized on that opportunity, I took that decision and I followed my goals. I went to law school in the evenings. I had a full time job. I was raising two young children. And I have to say that I underestimated the requirement of law school. I had to fit in vast amount of studying and homework into whatever time I could. And to me, I think that was quite an accomplishment for me.

Taren: It is quite an accomplishment, and congratulations. What drove your passion for law? Is that something you had always thought about doing?

Anjum: Not really. I moved into the patent department because the company thought I would be very good in leading this department. I had a scientific background. I had a diploma in patent law back in India and Prasad, he thought that I was just right to lead it.

And as I said, when I came to the United States, I thought that I have to be formally educated to give the right service that was asked of this department. So I did not think about going to law school, but I thought I had to do justice to whatever I was going to undertake, and in the years to come I have to formally educate myself.

Taren: That's amazing. Not everybody would have done that. That's a lot of foresight and that's a lot of care about not only your career, but about the job you wanted to do.

Anjum: Thank you.

Taren: Finally, is there anything you wish you know now that you wish you had known then?

Anjum: Actually there are quite.

Taren: There always are, it's great, right?

Anjum: There are. I have to tell you as attorneys, we are very risk avert.

Taren: Really?

Anjum: We are. We are. Because we put red flag and all the dangers that the company is going to face. So I think that I could have been more liberal with my risk-reward analysis.

I also think, Taren, I could have relaxed a bit more. I think I took every task with utmost seriousness and dedication, and I worked with a singular focus. And if I had known that everything was going to be okay, I could have slowed down and enjoyed the perks a little more.

However, having said that, I enjoyed the process of learning and branching out into new areas. And as I said before, I wouldn't change anything about it.

Taren: Well, I want to thank you so much for spending some time with me this morning. I've learned so much, and I want to congratulate you on your tremendous success.

Anjum: Thank you so much, Taren.

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