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*In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE Magazine meets with Julie Foster, VP, Global Customer Experience, Medtronic’s Diabetes.*

**Taren:** Julie, welcome of the WoW podcast program.

**Julie:** Thank you, Taren. I’m so happy to be here with you today. It’s really a privilege, so thank you very much for inviting me.

**Taren:** It’s our privilege and our pleasure. Julie, you’ve had a wildly successful career. Can you describe your journey and what brought you to your new position as VP Customer Experience at Medtronic?

**Julie:** I really had an incredible journey at Medtronic. I’ve been very, very fortunate. I’ve been with the company for over 30 years, Taren, and I’ve worked in multiple businesses, functions, regions. I spent the first part of my career at Medtronic because at that time we were just like in a pacemaker business. We hadn’t really diversified. The first year is in the cardiac space, then I moved over to Europe with my family and ran the diabetes business, came back in general management role in our neuromodulation business and went back to Europe – if you can believe that, did it twice – with the family and ran the cardiac and vascular businesses for Europe, Middle East and Africa for Medtronic and then came back to Diabetes and I was really drawn and excited to come back to Diabetes.

First of all, I really appreciate the community and very much like the community and the space overall and it’s also an opportunity for me to continue my journey of learning. I’m very motivated and inspired by learning and we’re really delving into building new capabilities not just for diabetes, but for Medtronic as a whole around consumer marketing, which is a muscle that we’re trying to build I think across all medical device companies and also this explosion on digital enablement of how we’re working different channels in the organization. So these are two areas that I was excited about and how that how you weave in business model innovation there that I could advance my learning in these capabilities, but also help Medtronic overall and really this interesting intersection of technology and experience in how to make the approach for our customers more personalized, more predictive and automated. So it’s an exciting time to be in diabetes, and I’m thrilled to be in this role for Medtronic.

**Taren:** It is an exciting time and I’m wowed by your career journey at this organization. People don’t usually stay anymore at a company for that long, but having gone to Europe twice, and we’ll delve into a little bit more, and now in your new role VP at Customer Experience.

Customer experience isn't usually a C-suite position or an executive level position. Talk to me about that and why the company felt it was necessary to have you in this position.

**Julie:** Customer experience continues to advance in importance for the device companies overall in healthcare and in medtech overall, but I would submit it's even more critical in the space of diabetes because it's a very, very connected community. There's an interesting article out of Stanford that communicates and shares that there's over 180 decisions made each day by someone living with diabetes, and we needed to make sure that along with the technology that we continue to work on advancing, that we're wrapping around the experience with every touchpoint a customer has with Medtronic. So we have that end to end view.

So the role that I have and our team has is really to ensure we're looking end to end of working with our customers whether it's someone living with diabetes, a caregiver, an educator, a healthcare professional and that every interaction that they have with Medtronic, whether it's on the technology side, service, support, whatever it might be, that we're meeting them where they are on their journey and we are listening. We understand what's needed to meet the needs of their lifestyle and we're supporting them and servicing them on their time and in a way that they want to be served.

So the level of customer experience required in the diabetes community is a whole other place, if you will, versus for example with cardiac pacing or some of our other devices where if I get a pacemaker I really don't have to think about it everyday all day long. I can really live a full life versus the 180 decisions that someone living with diabetes has to make everyday in order to manage their diabetes in the most effective and efficient way we possibly can to have the best outcome.

**Taren:** We're seeing such an uptick in the device market and the technologies are getting so much smarter and it's becoming so much easier for patients to manage their diseases, especially in diabetes which is so prevalent, one of the top diseases in the country and around the world. I would imagine you have to keep a lot of plates spinning at the same time. Tell me a little bit about your day to day and what it's like having to manage so many pieces of the business.

**Julie:** Well, we have to be constantly thinking about the voice of our customers and bringing that into the business from the different regions around the world and ensure we're helping the rest of the functions have understanding of that voice and of what's required in order to improve the experience of someone living with diabetes. And at the end of the day we're all day long thinking about ways, as I mentioned before, of how to create that experience as best as it possibly can be, but it's all about helping reduce the burden, minimizing the burden of all those decisions that need to be made. And to your point, Taren, if there's a way that we can do this – which we are and we're very excited about a lot of the things that we're working on – to optimize the intelligence of our systems and to create more machine learning to have that personalized predictive automated behavior, if you will, of the technology and have the technology do some of that for the customer and reduce that burden, those are the things we think about everyday.

So we're constantly looking at mapping all those touchpoints out, understanding voice of customer from around the world that's lining up from a pipeline perspective both on the technology side, but then wrapping the experience piece around every single portion of that technology so we understand that patient journey, if you will.

We also want to make sure that we're providing options. So most individuals that are living with diabetes don't want to have a pump, so we actually just acquired a smart pen. It's actually the only FDA-approved smart pen out in the market right now and we're really excited about it because, to your point, it's pulling forward the intelligence, if you will, that is in a pump to more people and giving them an option to have the benefits of those insights and to do the same thing of creating more personalized predictive automated features, if you will, that have the technology do more work for them and reduce the burden that they have each and everyday and hopefully reduce some of those things that they have to think about each and everyday.

So that's what we're spending our days on meeting with our teams internally around the world and then of course ensuring that we're meeting and listening constantly to our customers and understanding what their needs are and what we're doing that's working well that we have to keep doing and not make mistakes and do more of and those things that we have improve upon and have gaps and we're that voice of that customer for the organization.

**Taren:** Fascinating. And you keep talking globally, and I think that's so important and I would have to imagine that your two tours of Europe give you a really unique perspective on what the global world looks like for diabetes. Tell me about your experience in moving to Europe and it couldn't have been easy – you brought your kiddos and your husband and twice, so that's really a leadership learning exercise.

**Julie:** Yeah, it's – oh my goodness, it was extraordinary. I'm so grateful. We as a family are so grateful and two dogs by the way, which is a whole another podcast probably. Oh, I have a really interesting story of taking our 17-year-old dog who couldn't go below the plane and had to be on the plane, so definitely for another podcast Taren, but I'm quite certain you'll find it quite humorous. Maybe the listeners will as well.

But here's the – it's phenomenal personally and professionally, and we're all different and better human beings as a family because of this experience because we have a much wider lens of the world and appreciate all the different cultures and how we can all come together. And when you think about diabetes (and actually many areas of medicine), there are far more similarities of someone living with diabetes or their caregiver or an educator or healthcare provider than differences around the world.

What's different is the government, the healthcare systems, the infrastructure, maybe the training of HCPs; I mean some of that can be quite different. But when it comes to understanding the needs of those living with diabetes there's far more similarities if you're someone that has a young daughter just diagnosed and you live in France with type 1 diabetes or you are in Texas or in Thailand. It's very similar, the voice, the concerns, the needs that you have and that's where we want to ensure that we're taking a very global lens to this as well and

taking the learnings that we have from different parts of the world and leveraging them, so no matter where you are we can do our very best to help mitigate some of the burden, help improve the outcome of someone living with diabetes so they can live their best life and again meet them on their journey.

So it's an extraordinary experience to go through to live in different countries. especially in the last role I had where I had Europe, Middle East and Africa. I traveled every week all around and it's – actually, Taren, I think of the humbling – it's a very humbling experience because as one that's inspired by learning, it's like everyday I realize how much I don't know and how much we don't know and we need to learn how to do better. It's also a constant lesson of our mission that our great founder Earl Bakken created and etched over well over 60 years ago of alleviating pain, restoring health and extending lives. And it becomes even more true when you're in many of these developing countries and it just challenges all to think differently of how we can help more people around the world.

So it was an invaluable experience that's definitely changed our family and our personal lives forever. Our kids will never be the same again. It definitely has made me from a business perspective have a much richer and broader and deeper understanding of how we need to approach things around the world.

**Taren:** Again, fascinating and I loved your point about the disease and more commonalities than there are differences, and I think that that is so true and we've learned this over the past 18 months I think with COVID, that we've learned it doesn't know the boundaries of geography.

**Julie:** Exactly, good example, yeah.

**Taren:** Just fascinating. Where was your most favorite place that you traveled to when you were ex-US? Is there a place that you went that you just thought oh, my gosh, I feel so privileged to be here right now at this moment?

**Julie:** Oh, I get that question so much, Taren, and I struggle with it. I've tried so hard to nail a really concise answer down with one country. But I absolutely loved everywhere I went, whether I'm experiencing Saudi, going into Russia. Of course, maybe I would say Italy because I love the food so much and I love to eat and the great wine in France and I love – I mean I really it's... every single country is a gift of learning and really special experiences that we had everywhere. But maybe if you said you have to take one Julie, I might say Italy and maybe I can just retire there somewhere on the lakes by George Clooney or something.

**Taren:** I'm all about the pasta and vino too sister, so I can jump right board with you there. That's fantastic. Earlier you talked about business innovation and the marrying of technology and the experience for customers. Talk to me about how that customer experience is now translating to innovation with your approach to programs and devices and diagnostics and things like that.

**Julie:** Yes. Well, at the heart that customer experience and insights from our customers really needs to drive our innovation, our technology pipeline and the services and solutions that we provide to meet them where they are on that journey. I have a couple of interesting examples of how we're applying that on the technology side, as well as on the service and solutions side.

I mentioned the smart pen where most people that are living with diabetes do not want to have a pump and they use insulin pens if they require the delivery of insulin, and the smart pen is really taking the intelligence that we have learned over the years and what you can get more naturally from a pump and it has put it into the pen where there can be an automatic balancing or look, if you will, of the insulin on board and then give dosing. There's a dosing calculator to do the dosing recommendations for you.

So it's getting to be more personalized and a little bit more predictive and a little more automated as I mentioned before, and you tie that in to a continuous glucose monitor – so we married the two technologies together, put all that information on a single app for the customer so they can go to one place and have more information on their dosing and the recommendations and also that constant view of how it is impacting their glucose levels and some automated decisions for them that help a little bit in reducing some of those decisions that they have to make going forward. In the future, we are going to add more of – I mean I use the big words we all use and it means this artificial intelligence or machine learning – we acquired a couple of companies called Nutrino and Klue over the past years that are amazing companies that will also be able to provide more information on when to eat and how much to eat.

So you're getting dosing calculations. You're getting information of what you need to dose and when and then information and automated information for the customer on when to eat and how much to eat and again, it connects all of these dots on automating some of those decisions, but personalizing it because diabetes is different for every single individual and we have to figure out ways to really personalize it as well as meet them on where they are in their journey versus trying to put them on our journey. So that's one example of how we're looking at it from a technology perspective.

Another interesting one was with the ice storms that we had in Texas. We have a big customer service support center there and as I know everyone is aware that that ice storm with those frigid temperatures just kind of shut that state down, and we had a pretty meaningful issue not only with our support center, but also the area in Kentucky too where we actually ship out products of things being stalled for awhile, activities being stalled whether people couldn't get into the office or whether systems weren't up and running, just a myriad of things. And the team quickly turned around like on the same day and leveraged digital and social media. That's another interesting aspect of the diabetes community is they're very connected – a very connected community and probably because of this constant decision making that's required and the desire to learn from each other, but we wanted to make sure we didn't miss a beat to be there for them if they needed anything. And the team flipped very quickly and leveraged the social – Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, our ambassadors, our blogs. We leveraged everybody

we could to get the word out that if they were struggling connecting with us that there were different options of how to reach out to us and we included that in there.

So kind of two different interesting examples, one of how we're looking at technology to reach and benefit more people living with diabetes with a smart pen and pulling in those insights and machine learning up into a bigger portion of the community and some of the kind of unique things that we do from a service and support through this example was when we had a meaningful issue and a problem and the quick action of how to solve it leveraging digital and social channels to get the word out.

**Taren:** Those are two incredibly fascinating examples of how you are expanding that customer experience into new territory. Social is new, but how your team reacted in response to a crisis is quite admirable. Congratulations and kudos to all who were involved in that. There had to be a couple of very difficult days for you and your team as well as the patients and you responded so admirably. And I love the introduction of the AI and machine learning because it's really what we talked about 20 years ago in terms of personalized medicine isn't what personalized medicine is today. You're truly personalizing the medicine to the person.

**Julie:** Right. Exactly. Exactly. And in some respects, Taren, I think we can also look at and we're seeing it already even with COVID and how COVID created such a virtual care environment so fast, like all of our onboarding and our education and training had to be flipped around and not just us, I mean everybody, all companies and hospitals and physicians and nurses and educators, everybody had to flip very quickly to a virtual model and we did it. We did it, and I think we all were quite surprised about not only what everyone was able to do, but the fact that the outcomes for the patients, the customers – we actually even did a study in this like did our virtual training really result in the same outcome as when we did it in person and we looked at thousands of our customers and it did. We found incredibly positive results that it was equally as effective.

So it's going to be interesting as we go into our new normal of how we create this hybrid world of ours and hopefully, to your point, accelerate this personalized approach where I actually think the patient, if you will, or the customer is going to be more at the center of driving and owning their care and deciding how they want it done. Some may always want to have it in person and talking to others on the phone. Others may not want that anymore unless they have to. And we have to not only accommodate that environment, we have to lead in it and actually create things that the customers and patients and the physicians and nurses they're not even thinking of right now. So we have to think of ways that are going to make their lives even easier that they didn't may even know exist, but if we understand their needs and what they're looking for hopefully we can bring out that technology that will be able to solve it and be very disruptive in helping them really manage their care in a very different way, but equally as effective.

**Taren:** I love your future focus and thinking about what is this next or new normal and it is going to be a hybrid world that we're going to be moving into, and the old ways of doing things aren't going to be acceptable anymore now that everybody's kind of adopted and adapted to this new virtual world that we're all living in and will continue to live in for the next bit as we

continue to go forward. So I think it's fascinating and I think that your energy and your passion behind it is so evident and I truly look forward to seeing what's next from you all. And in that vein, if you had to identify what is the one big thing you're tracking right now in terms of a trend?

**Julie:** Oh Taren, are you going to make just do one? Are you sure I can't do more? If I'm concise, can I add two more? I think a couple we've already talked about, so I don't need to spend much time on it. But this whole consumerism in medtech and devices is really interesting and really accelerating particularly in diabetes, but it's actually beyond diabetes and it's very, very exciting, so we're watching that closely. This whole digital enablement and really looking at how do we use machine learning to make what we're trying to accomplish both from a technology and a service support perspective as personalized approach that's more predictable and automated as well.

But I would have to say the other one that I really wanted to – that I thought of right away when you asked the question, the other thing – and it would be interesting to get your perspective on this as well that I think we all learned in COVID is this whole big challenge we all share on healthcare inequity and what can we do differently to ensure better access to care for people of color and what programs can we do. We're really focusing on this a lot because here I just shared with you how excited we were that we created this whole digital onboarding so quickly, but what we didn't appreciate is how many people don't have a computer or don't have internet and it is disproportionate with people of color. And so we want to figure out our part in that and be bold in the work that we're doing, whether it's with great organizations like ADA or T1D different areas and it goes across Medtronic too, but I'm focusing on the diabetes piece, but we want to be part of really helping to find solutions here. And I would say that's another one that has become a lot more urgent for us to figure out ways to shine a bright light on it, create awareness, look at how we can change representation in a lot of the work that we're doing and figure out different ways of how we're doing things to make sure we improve access.

**Taren:** It's such admirable work, and I hope that it's sustainable because for your company, as well as other companies, who come to this realization of this health inequity and that it's not something that it goes away...

**Julie:** No.

**Taren:** ...and like eases. So I wish you good luck on that as well and continued focus and I think it's such a great thing to be addressing right now. And in terms of the medtech surge, I think that at the time I don't think – it's really the time for medtech right now. I think the world is open now for medtech and as we look to a technology-enabled healthcare your company is positioned perfectly and the time has come. Here we are and you're rising to the challenge. So kudos to you all there as well.

**Julie:** And it goes all the way up to our CEO, Geoff Martha who is incredibly focused on all of these trends that I just mentioned and the globalization of them and just making sure it's not just one group or a couple of inspired individuals. It's really top down, down top we're really

trying to connect those dots more intentionally because of the clarity that he is providing on the critical importance of these areas too.

**Taren:** Fantastic. Just to switch tracks a little bit, I want to delve into a little bit about your personal style and your leadership style. How would you describe yourself as a leader?

**Julie:** I'd say I'm a very inclusive leader that very much likes to engage with my team and very communicative, very much pulling the team together. I'm also very direct, so it's important to me to ensure clarity of direction as well as roles, if you will, so there's accountability in the organization.

And then I really like to surround myself with incredibly bright people, which is not hard to do at Medtronic; there's so many incredibly smart people and diverse individuals whether it's ethnicity, experience, thought and really ensure it's clearing and empower them to really own and drive the work that's needed. I really think that's important that that ownership the closer we can drive that and empower people who are closest to the customer is the way to lead. I want to get out of their way and I want to get barriers out of their way and support them in the best way. So I would say that's the approach and – the style and the approach that I have as a leader.

**Taren:** Fantastic. And as a leader you obviously recognize you can't do it all. You need a fantastic team behind you.

**Julie:** Right, yes.

**Taren:** So what are those traits you look for in others when you're building out that team?

**Julie:** Well there's some kind of foundational things that I look for in the culture that I am trying to create and that we have within diabetes, with our leader and with Medtronic overall that really want to have someone that is very respectful, that genuinely cares not just about the business, really passionate about like we're talking about here like diabetes or the space that we're in, but also cares about the people. So some of those things are really quite important to me, and very transparent and open.

Then I really like to look for some of the capabilities that people are very creative and passionate to win. And when I say win, it's not just about always competing and winning with a competitor, if you will, externally, but it's making sure that we're driving ourselves to be the very best that we can be and never really settling. So this hunger for always to be better and to have enough trust and comfort in our organization where people feel comfortable to debate, to raise their hand if they don't like something (that's where that transparent honesty comes in) and that's always pushing to bring their best selves there and drives to execute and really hopefully exceed the expectations that the organization has.

So there's a cultural aspect of it and also some capabilities and not really focusing as much on analytical or strategic or consumer sales. I mean we work to make sure people have those, but



it's these really foundational capabilities that I think differentiate a team and how they come together and how they work together to really balance.

That's the other thing too; I try to get a team where we're quite different from each other. As I mentioned before, this diverse thought, experience, capabilities so we can learn from one another, we become a learning organization and then we can push each other to be better.

**Taren:** That's wonderful. You obviously are a role model within the organization, how does that mantle feel to you? Role model to other women, a role model to other employees, how does that sit with you?

**Julie:** It's really an interesting question. I've never had that question before, Taren. It's a really good one. I take the experiences that I've had over the years at Medtronic and where I am right now very seriously and with a lot of gratitude and humility and given the fact that I'm always learning and it's very important to me to always give back. I always think if I can have others learn faster than I did, learn from mistakes that I've made or things that I would have done maybe differently based on what I learned through a process, that that is a responsibility and a gift actually that I have to share with amazing talent across the organization at all stages of their career.

I really take it to heart and I never lose sight of the importance I have everyday of feeling like – I think of an analogy like dropping a rock in the water and the ripple effect, that everything I say or do has a ripple and I need to be intentional and conscientious about it and transparent when I make mistakes or say things that I really wish I would have caught when it was in my mouth and it's already outside and make it a learning moment for all of us to make sure that that ripple is big and I can do my best to pay it forward.

**Taren:** Julie, that's lovely. Thank you for sharing that. And finally, as I ask all of our WoW podcasters, tell me about an accomplishment or that wow moment that either shaped your career or has left a lasting impression on you.

**Julie:** I have a really good one. I use it quite often all the time because it's probably one of the most defining moments I had in my life really both professionally and personally. It was years ago – I probably was at Medtronic last 10 years – really maybe between 5 and 10 years and I was in a – my first like leadership role as like a director, and I was probably struggling with the leadership that I had and the stakeholders that I worked with in making sure that I was being listened to. So it's kind of that typical comment that we've I think probably have all made at some point or time in our lives of you know I'm saying I had this idea, I brought it forward and someone else has it, and it's not even said in an articulate manner and everybody thinks it's a great idea. I said it before and I was really frustrated. So I went to my great HR partner at the time who has long since retired and she – and I never did that. I mean I always have found ways to like just kind of solve things on my own and navigate my way through the organization, but this was really very frustrating for me.

So I went and told her all about it and she listened very intently and then I finished and she said, “Are you done?” And I’m like “Yeah.” Like victim here, right. This is really frustrating. But I was like yeah, and she said, “Let me tell you something Julie. No one has the responsibility to listen to you. You own the responsibility to be heard. So you better figure out what you’re doing in those situations, whether you’re with one person or a thousand people, whether it’s they’re at the same level, different level it doesn’t matter. What do you need to do differently? Do you understand them well enough that you know how to present yourself in a way to be heard because it’s not their responsibility, it’s yours.”

And you could have scraped me up off the floor just like oh my God. What?! That’s not fair. But you know what, it changed everything for me at work and at home, by the way, although I’m still working on the family front with the boys. But it really always makes me think about the words I’m using, the tone that I have, the speed at which I’m talking, my body language, my eye contact, whether I’m with one or if I’m talking to a thousand people and am I really being intentional to put my very best foot forward to ensure that I’m being heard.

And this is not even a wow moment, Taren. I think it’s like a wow journey for me because I keep learning. It’s nothing I’m ever going to master, but it’s something I’m constantly thinking about and really doing my best to make sure that I’m constantly getting better at it and learning from it. But it really changed me in every way and it’s helped at home to make sure that I just don’t talk to talk, but I’m really talking to be heard.

**Taren:** That is a wow moment. My jaw dropped when you said that, and I don’t know that I’ve ever heard somebody come back with that response – that it is your responsibility. And I guess we all sort of feel that, but wow what a way to put it forward. Congratulations to you for accepting that responsibility and understanding that and taking that on to change how you approach your world. That’s amazing.

**Julie:** Yeah. Yeah. It’s great advice and you know I think yeah, it’s really been helpful for me. I think probably the most important thing, Taren, is I’m thinking about it all the time and that’s probably the greatest help, because it’s that acute self awareness that we all strive for everyday to be the best we can possibly be.

**Taren:** Julie, thank you so much for all the information you put forward about what you’re doing in terms of customer experience and in terms of diabetes and helping this community that really needs so much attention, but as well as sharing so many terrific insights and being so open and transparent and vulnerable with us in terms of your career journey and your learnings along the way. It’s been tremendously wonderful speaking with you. Thank you, thank you, and I look forward to staying in touch.

**Julie:** Thank you, Taren, and I’m grateful to have had this time with you. It’s really been a privilege. So I thank you for the opportunity and for this great program that you have that’s helping so many of us in our own journeys of learning.



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