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*In this episode, Taren meets with Jennifer Gottlieb, president of W2O.*

**Taren:** Jennifer, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program.

**Jennifer:** Thank you. It's so nice to be here, Taren.

**Taren:** I want to congratulate you on being named a PharmaVOICE 100 in 2019. So what does this honor mean to you considering it is coming from your peers within the agency?

**Jennifer:** Thank you so much, Taren. I am so excited and honored to be getting this this year. I have been, I guess, dreaming about this for most of my career having been a pharmaceutical executive in the marketing communication space for well over 25 years and seeing the amazing cover that you always put together and hoping for my face to be on it, so I am so excited. I'm so grateful to my peers and my clients and others that put in for recommendations for me and nominated me for this, and it really just is very gratifying and a testament to know that I've made an impact in the life sciences industry the way that I have.

**Taren:** You certainly have made an impact and it's such a well-deserved honor, so congratulations again. And further congratulations because you were named president of W2O about 18 months ago and since then, the agency has been going gangbusters. Talk to me about how your previous agency experience prepared you for this role and then we'll talk about what your near-term and long-term goals are for the agency.

**Jennifer:** Sure. I was very excited to be named president of W2O about a year and a half ago. My history has always been on the agency side back to when I began servicing large and small clients in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry along the way.

My agency experience I think the fact that I've spent my whole career on the agency side really helped me to know that I could take on this position through what I believe is a very exciting yet changing time for pharmaceutical marketing and communications with the convergence of all of these different disciplines coming together and the convergence of mediums where the lines are being blurred very much about what we do in terms of communications, marketing, digital,

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social and now it's really just what's the best solution right for the client. And so for me, being able to be at an agency throughout my career has made me very nimble, very adaptable.

I'm a lifelong learner both of the industry itself as well as the areas in which I am expert at, but I would say that my work back over time working at large and small companies, big public holding companies, as well as independent gave me the best background to be able to join forces with Jim Weiss who's our CEO and founder in 2006, and so over that 13-year period be able to grow this company from a \$6 million biotechnology startup based in San Francisco to the almost \$200 million integrated powerhouse healthcare firm it is today. So doing all of those different jobs and growing with the firm over that decade plus of time has really enabled me to take this position with a lot of confidence and a lot of excitement as to what we can do next.

**Taren:** I tell you it's exciting. I can only imagine there's never a dull day for you.

**Jennifer:** No. I like it that way.

**Taren:** I love how you talked about the converging of all the different mediums together. Where do you see the healthcare industry pharmaceutical advertising communications portion of it going in the next few years?

**Jennifer:** So it's a great question Taren, and I think that we will see what I consider an evolution of what is working well just into what can work better. So I don't see any kind of drastic changes in terms of certain areas of the marketing mix maybe not continuing to flourish or go forward, but I do believe that we are headed for an even more extreme technologically based situation in terms of you know we often like call it the uber-ization of healthcare. So as we see more and more people getting their information from their phone, not even just their computer, it will be a mobile first kind of dynamic. And it doesn't mean there won't be traditional TV advertising or print advertising or traditional public relations tactics that happen, but it will come down to how are people consuming information, what is the most critical information they need, how is it customized to them specifically and then how does it continue to be nimble and refresh on a regular basis to maintain interest and relevance. And I think from that we will see how that ultimately impacts the rest of the marketing mix.

So I just think it's going to be a little bit of a shift where it used to be we have lots of different content put over different mediums with one message; it will be how are people consuming information, what's the message they need and how are we getting it to them in the places where they live and are.

**Taren:** Fantastic. Well, I think it's an exciting future ahead for sure, and I can't wait to see how it turns out. Because you talk about the phones, but it may even be beyond phones; it may be on people's wrists. I mean there is just so much...

**Jennifer:** Exactly.

**Taren:** ... happening in this space that it's hard to keep even up, so it's science fiction ahead I think.

**Jennifer:** Totally.

**Taren:** Running a global top 10 healthcare agency, as we said, I'm sure is never dull day for you. But what are some of the challenges that you have to manage on a regular basis? I hear it from a lot of presidents and CEOs of healthcare advertising agencies and firms that talent management is one of the things that keeps them up at night most.

**Jennifer:** I would say to your point talent management, recruiting and retention is probably one of the things that we are most focused on. Because I often say especially in a service and agency business, your people are the most important asset you have. The proper mix of those people working together seamlessly for the good of the client, to me, is what makes agencies great, and I've had many clients tell me it's all about the team. So I think scaling in terms of growth and talent is critical.

One of the biggest and most important areas of that though is finding the right people. As I mentioned earlier that can live in what I consider often the convergence or ambiguity of where our business is going. So people that are steeped in healthcare, very knowledgeable about different disease areas or the market in general and making sure that those people can serve as that strategic advisor or trusted partner to the client, but then the team behind them need to be able to be agile and adapt to a lot of change as the change is happening in the business.

So for example, if we hire great, creative talent we need people that are open to continuing to learn how that might be changing in terms of nimble content, not just campaign content. On the media side, we need people who understand paid, earned, shared and own media, not just one of those. We need to make sure that our account people understand all the areas of the marketing mix regardless of what area they're focused in because content these days has to be adaptable for all different areas.

So it's really the adaptability of talent and finding that great, really hungry to learn hardworking because I believe that nothing really substitutes for hard work, and people who are very keen to partner and be one with our clients.

**Taren:** You are really very much admired for being a people first leader within your organization, and I know that the talent that comes in is important to you. Describe how you create that culture within W2O.

**Jennifer:** Sure. Our culture in W2O is very much a people first culture, and it means people as our employees, but it also does mean people in terms of the clients we partner with and it does also mean the healthcare industry and patient community at large. I think that's the one thing being focused in healthcare and healthcare being our north star that Jim Weiss and I have always reiterated to our firm. It's like we're in this business because we love really solving problems and helping people live healthier lives. We want to make the world a healthier place through marketing and communication, we always say.

So for us our culture is really grounded in that desire to be great healthcare advocates, practitioners and change agents for the ultimate healthcare industry. And then backing that into our culture and our people, like I said, our people are so important to us and to our business. We actually learn a lot from all of our teams and all of our people at all levels. We do not believe in a very hierarchical organization. Jim actually came out of Genentech which a lot of people don't know, and I met him when he was my client there and if you remember way back in the day Genentech was always a very flat organization, and Jim built the firm that way because we believe that ideas come from anyone at any level. We want people to be their best. We want people to take the hill, operate with courage and conviction, and we are a very open environment in terms of allowing people to flourish.

We are an entrepreneurial environment in every sense of the word, and we have many people that have built practices and offerings here on their own based out of their passion area that ultimately allowed us to do great things for the firm.

**Taren:** That's fabulous. Having just been named one of the most inspirational leaders in the industry I need to know who do you look to for inspiration.

**Jennifer:** It's a great question. I mean I take inspiration from so many different people. I love learning from pretty much every instance in everybody. I'm a bit of a sponge in that sense and I carry a lot of that with me, whether it's people that I work for or people that have worked for me, industry leaders, clients, or even just friends and family. But I would say that my

inspiration, number one, really comes from the healthcare industry and the desire to solve problems for patients. I'm highly inspired by great patient success stories.

I love working on drugs and for companies that have really changed the game, that have been like the best breakthrough or newest breakthrough that are truly proven to be saving lives; that to me, is incredibly inspiring. I always have a high regard for people who have worked really hard and built something, very self-made people and then there's countless numbers of them. Jim Weiss, my boss and my partner here is one of those people. He's always helped me see challenges and opportunities; he started as my client and I always had an affinity to work with him and when he started this firm, I was all in.

I would say that beyond that, there's a couple of famous people – everybody has their famous people they're inspired by. I've always been very inspired by Sheryl Sandberg. I know we're talking about women's podcast here, about women in leadership. Sheryl Sandberg kind of had me at hello on the Lean In book, and I think I gave it out to many people in our organization, men and women, and I was really excited about it. I think I read it a few times.

But I actually was even more inspired by her Option B book, which I'm not sure you've read. She wrote a book with Adam Grant and that book is about resilience and grit in the face of tragedy. I think both being in healthcare and just being somebody that believes that you really learn the most in the toughest moments, that book holds a lot of meaning for me. So I found it to give another layer of inspiration for me from her.

And then the other person that I always look to for inspiration is I like Brene Brown. I don't know if you've read her book, *Daring Greatly* and again, people who kind of can see beyond the obvious and provide inspirational tips that resonate with me and I can carry through my days, I find to be really special in terms of inspiration.

**Taren:** That's wonderful. To those who haven't read those books, they are really good reading, especially we're in the summertime take a few minutes out – a couple of hours out of your beach time and do so. You touched on something right there that I want to go back to. It's about finding that resiliency and grit. How do you find that for yourself? Where do you go to when days are tough and you have to dig in the well and find that bit of oomph to keep you going, where do you go to?

**Jennifer:** It's a great question. Where I find my resiliency and grit, I think a lot of it is kind of how you were raised and how you grow as a person. It's hard to put my finger on it, but I think a couple of things. I think number one, I actually had a client many years ago – and I'm dating myself back probably almost 20 years – who came to me once and said if you go to work

everyday expecting four fires and you only have one, you're having a good day. So I think what I did a lot in my career is I set a level – a pretty high bar and a level of expectation that allowed me to not get knocked off my chair when something would happen. And I think also being in PR and communications for a good portion of my career, especially in healthcare, I did a lot of crisis communications and learning how to be calm in the face of crisis and challenge; I think actually not only am I a counselor in that sense, but it's also helped me evolve and teach myself how to take any situation and figure out how to work through it versus it being very stressful. I think that's a skill that you learn. So partly it's coming from my work and my skills and the other part is just kind of [complementing 15:01] the core through I am.

I also believe that seeing challenges as an opportunity and also seeing challenges as kind of just the way things – the fiber of how we operate both in work and life and that it makes us – the cliché is it makes us stronger, but I also think it is just – it is what it is. It's life and we shouldn't – I always say we should embrace life for all its bumps and bruises, not just for its positive moments. And I think if you see your life holistically that way, it makes those moments both easier to deal with, but also it provides, I think, just a different head set in mind set of how you approach them.

**Taren:** That's great. So talk to me how you define success for yourself.

**Jennifer:** So in terms of defining success for myself, it's interesting, I am kind of one with my career. So myself when we talk about me, I'm also big into work-life integration which we may talk about down the line in this interview, but success for myself means success for me as a professional in my own development and my own ability to add value to my company, as well as my clients' companies. But it also is – my success is also based on whether or not the people that work with me, next to me, above me, around me are successful in getting what they need from a professional development in some way and as from a coaching standpoint to be successful again with our clients and the industry.

And then lastly, I am a working mom. I have two teenage daughters and a dog, who sometimes feels like the third child and I have a mom who lives alone, who I'm the primary caregiver for, so my success is also based on like are all of them doing well, am I providing for them what they need to be successful. So my successes really are the people around me that I touch in my work or my personal life living the best life they can live with my support and impact.

**Taren:** That's amazing. We talk a lot about life-work balance and you sit in the C-suite and there aren't a lot of women who sit in those roles. You really are a role model. How do you project that out to others who are coming up the ladder?

**Jennifer:** It's very interesting. I think that being in the C-suite and being a leader I'm so proud to be able to be that role model for women and for people in general. I think that I am a very honest and real leader, so when I project my leadership and how I do it, it's very much with all of the joy but all of the challenges all there for people to learn from. I don't pretend that it's easy all the time to do this work-life integration juggle. I've found myself having to adapt the way I work and make sure that I have enough mind-sharing time.

Now that I'm in the C-suite I'm making bigger decisions and more important decisions often in record time. So how do I make sure that I am taking the time to be able to educate myself, get the information I need, allow people to give input, to be the best me that I can be in that role.

There's a book that's like what got you here is not going to get you there, and that's a really true statement as it relates to growing up in the business and continuing to take on bigger more leadership-like roles where you have a broader responsibility and you can't kind of just ninja in and fix everything and do things that got you successful when you were younger. Now it's about like bringing people into the dialogue, helping to coach them, allowing them to have input and take their own path forward with your guidance, and I like to think that all of my experience getting up to the C-suite has provided a nice basis for me to provide that coaching.

**Taren:** That's awesome. And one of those key examples is your Internal Women's Network, correct? You were part of that team that allowed was it six or seven of your younger talents bring forward this initiative?

**Jennifer:** Yes. We have an initiative called Women of W2O, WoW, ironically similar to your podcast. We didn't steal it from you, I promise. We have this internal initiative, it's our women leadership initiative. It was actually spearheaded by myself, as well as my colleague Angela Gillespie who is on the board of the Healthcare Businesses Women's Association which you know her as well. We put out an ask to the organization of who wanted to take a leadership role, and many of our young women raised their hands and we brought them in and we created this employee resource group that provides a space within W2O to discuss gender equality across the industry.

The mission of the group is to provide women and our clients resources and tools they need to be empowered to be the best they can be. We had our first meeting – we have about 750 people at our company and our first meeting had 150 employees participate, including many of the men from our organization. Even though we have a very strong women leadership at W2O, I think 67% of our workforce is female and 71% are in senior level roles, we still believe you can't stop there, you have to keep nurturing that and helping women continue to fulfill their dream.

**Taren:** Your numbers are outstanding. And it's not just about the women; it's about also providing data points for men to understand why it's important to have a gender balance workforce. Correct?

**Jennifer:** Exactly. I mean we were so impressed with how many men came to the meeting and are participating in the group and we spoke to some of them, and I think a lot of them came just to show their support, but other ones came to understand better what are some of the challenges that are unique to women as they grow into leadership roles and how can they as their peers and colleagues support that. Many of them also may have partners or girlfriends or wives or sisters or mothers that are also in women in leadership positions, so they've either lived with it or are experiencing it in another area of their life and greatly support our mission.

**Taren:** What has the client uptick been?

**Jennifer:** We've had two really great activities that our clients have really embraced that we've done. So one is we led a study – we do a lot of analytics as a firm, that's kind of our area of differentiation. We have 100 analysts and data scientists at the firm, and we turned some of our tools over on ourselves and we did some analysis of women in the workplace. We have a report about that. We actually did some communications and public relations about the report and we've had a number of large clients come to us asking for our team that did the data – the research and the data to come present at their organizations.

Several large pharmaceutical companies and some of the biotechnology companies, so they're seeing us not only as leaders in healthcare marketing and communications, but leaders in women in leadership.

And then the other thing is we have an event also where we invited clients – it was in partnership with the HBA again about this topic and we had tremendous, tremendous engagement. So clearly, there is a hunger to continuing to engage cross-company, not just within each company.

**Taren:** Thank you so much for taking a leadership role in this area because it's so important, and it's companies like yours and people like you who are really making an impact and moving the needle, so thank you. Finally Jennifer, you've had a really amazing career, can you identify one wow moment from your career not related to your women's internal network?

**Jennifer:** Absolutely. It's so hard to pick one wow moment, sometimes it's the little moments – I always call them the little victories that sometimes make the biggest impact. Any moment for me that's been a wow moment has been a moment where something has happened that was

unexpected, like a leader may have left an organization that I was in and I had to step into their shoes unknowingly, maybe not fully ready or prepared for what was to come and been able to prove to myself through necessity that I could flourish. That has happened to me many times over my career; it's kind of been my theme.

But the game changing moment for me, my biggest wow moment, was making the decision in 2006 to come to W2O. At the time, we were called WeissComm Partners. Like I said, we were a very small startup biotech communications agency based out of San Francisco. I was at a large holding company. I had a very nice career, and I just had this moment of like I had this little entrepreneur bug in me and I said I'm going to go do this. I never even realized like my potential until I got into the role and realized wow, I have to build a company. I found skills within myself, whether it was operational management, recruiting great talent, going out and getting business and meeting a need maybe that was not met in the industry through a new offering and really just getting into partnership with clients who helped us kind of grow and get here. And looking back I often say wow – no pun intended – I can't believe where we've gotten to. Jim Weiss and I together, having done this together for so many years, we often chuckle and we look at each other and we realize that we both put our heads down and went to work and we love the work and we love the business and we always kind of kept an eye on the future, but we let the client needs and the industry needs direct us. We're so proud and excited to have created something so unique and so impactful in the healthcare industry.

**Taren:** Well congratulations to you and to Jim. It's amazing what you all have done. I have so enjoyed speaking with you, and thank you for being a part of our WoW podcast program.

**Jennifer:** Thank you so much for having me, Taren. Thank you again for the honor that I'm receiving from PharmaVOICE.

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