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In this episode Taren Grom, Editor-In-Chief of PharmaVOICE Magazine meets with Lauri Bartolomeo, EVP and Creative Director, Dudnyk.

Taren: Laurie, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW Podcast Program.

Laurie: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Taren: You are a seasoned advertising executive. I love to hear a little bit about your career journey. How did you get to where you are today?

Laurie: Oh sure. It's not the most exciting story, pretty traditional upbringing in this industry. I started about 20 years ago at my first agency. It was Ferguson 2000 at that time. They were purchased by WPP. We became Adient. The agency has eventually become Oval V, but I started as a junior editor and stayed with that agency for about five years. I think by the time that I left I was a senior writer. I moved back down to this area and actually first got a job at Dudnyk in 2000 and I worked at Dudnyk for a short stint and then I got into my head that I wanted to be an English teacher, so I left the industry for a little bit.

I went back and got my Masters in Education and I taught high school English for three years, realized pretty quickly that it wasn't for me and I missed sort of working with adults and I missed kind of sitting around and hearing ideas all day, but I did give it three years and then decided to come back to the industry and then I stopped at Saatchi & Saatchi first along the way and then came full circle back to Dudnyk and I've been here for 13 years, so getting kind of other than my brief furlough into teaching, pretty traditionally just kind of worked my way through the copy rank.

Taren: That's awesome and I would be remiss if I didn't ask you, did you learn any lessons by teaching those high schoolers that you still use today because that's not an easy gig?

Laurie: You know what, I absolutely did. For awhile, I thought to myself I kind of wasted some time and I took a step back in my career by doing that, but over time I

realized that I really did some incredibly valuable lessons from teaching and I think it's mostly in my presentation and my storytelling skills. When you're up in front of teenagers all day, you really have to keep their attention, you have to keep them interested and entertained and doing that everyday for three years I think the biggest thing that it – the biggest way that it helped me in this career is standing up in front of people and persuading them and getting them excited about ideas.

Taren: If you can move a bunch of teenagers then you've got the world on a string. That's awesome.

Laurie: Yes. And they do give you – there's so much intrinsic reward to something like teaching and especially older kids that are capable of expressing themselves and telling you that they – you've done things to help change their lives. Just unfortunately for me it wasn't enough to keep me in that field for a lifetime. I did want to come back to advertising.

Taren: Well, we're glad you did. Let's talk about your leadership style. How would you describe the way in which you lead your teams?

Laurie: It's some cliché but very much by example. I feel that in order to be a true leader you really have to earn the respect and the trust of the people around you. So I think it's been very hands on. I put my everything into every creative opportunity that we have and so I encouraged everyone around me to do the same, really just trying to walk the walk and not just talk the talk and show people what is possible if you really put your mind to it.

Taren: Excellent. Your colleagues really acclaim you for your talent to be able to seamlessly blend strategy and creative. It's not easy. And so talk to me about your process and why you think the two are inextricably linked.

Laurie: I would say they are linked. I think you can't really have good creative unless it is based in meaningful, strategic insights. It's one thing to just sort of grab attention and break the bank so to say, but to really change behavior and move the needle I think you have to hit on some internal truth, something that's going to resonate with your audience in a way that's powerful and actually makes them reconsider their mindset or their behavior. So I really think they both go hand in hand.

Our process has evolved over time and is always evolving. I think one of our biggest core values here is to keep learning and we are everyday evolving our strategy process and coming up with new tools to help us really get to those meaningful insights and I

think you know it when you see it. When you see a piece of creative or a campaign that is based in something very meaningful and it's going to move people, I think you just know.

Taren: Yeah. That was going to be one of my next questions is how do you know you've hit the mark for clients? Do you see like this big uh-huh? Everybody's face lights up. What is that feel like and how do you know when you've hit that mark?

Laurie: Yeah. It feels great. That sort of what keeps us going and keeps us in the business' uh-huh moment and just feeling like we've hit on something and everyone in the room starts nodding and you know that you can sort of build on that insight that you've discovered and that you've set out, you've accomplished what you've set out to do and you know that that's – you've got the basic for an incredible story. So yeah, that's the best feeling there is and then of course in the audience, too. You see it sometimes whether it be at conventions or you see it in market research when you're sitting behind the glass and you just can kind of see your audience's face light up and you know that you've made a connection.

Taren: Excellent. I just want to circle back a little bit. You did some teaching but then you came back into healthcare advertising.

Laurie: Yeah.

Taren: And you know we kind of joked about you know you wanted to talk to adult, but what is it because you've used your talents in any industry, what is it about healthcare advertising that excites you, that really revs your engine?

Laurie: You know what, I was going to – when you asked me what excites me I was thinking of that word exciting. I think it is really exciting. When I first left teaching, I actually thought maybe going into the medical education world would be a nice blend of my advertising background and my teaching degree, but again I just felt that it just didn't have enough excitement to it. I love the excitement of coming up with ideas, making them come to life, presenting them.

It's a lot of pressure, but with a lot of pressure comes a lot of enjoyment as well. There's nothing more intense than knowing that you have a huge presentation on a Friday and it's a Tuesday and nobody has anything and the ideas keeps the heart flowing and you just got to dig deep and reach down and find something and when you do it's just exhilarating and it's fun and exciting and as I mentioned before I just kind of I like spending time

sitting around talking about ideas and so I get to do that a lot which is I feel very grateful that I can make a living doing that.

Taren: Ideating is a really special kind of talent and it's a different approach to problem solving and not everybody is really good at it. So I think that's wonderful, so it's a great blend for you and it's a perfect outlet for your creativity.

Laurie: Yeah, it's fun.

Taren: I want to switch tacks a little bit here. I know that you have a child with a rare disease which has greatly influenced your outlook in so many ways. Would you mind sharing with our audience a little bit about your rare disease journey and have some of the key lessons you've learned along the way?

Laurie: Sure. You know I was just thinking the other day. We acquired our first orphan product here at Dudnyk about 10 years ago and I did not have my son yet at that time and it was all sort of new to me and again very interesting and exciting this sort of world of rare disease and then when my son was born I started to live this journey that I had only watched other people go through through my professional career. It has followed very much some of the insights and what we know is so challenging and difficult about rare disease.

My son was diagnosed with infantile spasms at 11 months. Infantile spasms is not really technically a disease. It's more of a cluster of symptoms indicative of something else and getting his actual diagnosis, his underlying diagnosis of Angelman Syndrome took us seven years which is frustrating and also what we see so often in rare disease communities. So I just sometimes find it so interesting, even working in this business, even living in an area where we are surrounded by some of the top doctors in the world it still took seven years, so it just it gave me a unique perspective into so many families that are going through the same thing.

Taren: And what is your son's name and how old is he now?

Laurie: His name is Sammy and he is 9.

Taren: Wonderful. How is his health right now today? Have you figured out some treatments that have improved his quality of life?

Laurie: We have. We have. He's fantastic. I mean he just brings so much love and joy to everyone that meets him. You kind of have to meet together. I can tell you he's non-

verbal so he doesn't talk. He's G-tube fed so he doesn't eat and he's in a wheelchair and he doesn't walk. But when I say all of those things I feel like it paints a picture of him that is not him. He is an amazing little boy and he connects so deeply with his family and with other people around him. We couldn't be more grateful and blessed to have him in our family.

Taren: That's wonderful. Given all that you've gone through in finding a diagnosis for Sammy, do you have any advice for other parents who maybe going through a similar journey?

Laurie: Yeah. I mean you really – you truly have to be an advocate and you have to push not only for your children's best interest but for yourself as well. We're lucky to live in an area where we have access to so many great services, but you still – you have to push for yourself. It was interesting how we came about Sam's actual diagnosis. Chris Tobias who's the president of Dudnyk was actually at a client meeting and he was listening to a parent of a child with rare disease speak and she was talking about whole genome sequencing and that she actually went back to school to learn how to become a geneticist herself in order to diagnose her own child.

And so Chris came back from this meeting just so inspired and excited and he handed me a stack of about 10 different published papers on whole genome sequencing and said, "I think you really need to read about this and you really need to think about it for Sam." And I did and I pushed for it and my husband and I thought our insurance company is for over a year trying to get Sammy approved for this genetic testing and eventually quite luckily CHOP – Sammy has been followed by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia since he was a baby, and they decided to pay for the testing themselves.

They had followed him for so long and they were just as curious as we were to really find out what was going on. So they funded the testing and it came back that he had Angelman Syndrome, which was one of the disorders, the syndromes that I had suspected when he was a baby just from doing so much research myself. So it was very satisfying to finally have an answer for some of Sam's symptoms and also to know that we were sort of part of the community that we've now become connected with that's very strong and very proactive and out there this Angelman community.

Taren: So many times in rare disease it is the small groups, the small advocacy groups that not only provides support, but also push for treatments. Are you finding that as well?

Laurie: Yes, absolutely. Angelman is a little bit lucky in the fact too that we've had a lot of publicity. Colin Farrell who is a popular actor, he has a son with Angelman

Syndrome and when he came out about I guess about seven years ago he really just brought a lot of awareness and education to what Angelman Syndrome is and the foundation is also incredibly involved with advocacy, fund raising, research and there is a group at CHOP that's very much focused on looking for a cure for Angelman Syndrome. So it is nice to be connected with like-minded families that are going through the same thing that we are and then on the other hand it's also really nice to feel like you're a part of something bigger and something that's helping to advance medicine for these kids.

Taren: Fantastic. Talk to me because you have such a vast knowledge of the inner workings of the healthcare system, how can the industry help move things forward for parent and children with rare disease?

Laurie: I think first and foremost communities, families with rare diseases, they really need meaningful support. They need access to therapies, access to medical equipment, anything that we can do to sort of help support those families in a way and encourage our clients to do the same I think goes a long way. Because of our experience and what we went through with the whole genome sequencing, I feel really strongly and I hope that access to greater genetic testing will become available in the very near future. I know that technology is sort of always ahead of policy, but what we went through with not being able to afford the testing so many other people go through as well.

We were so lucky to have CHOP fund that testing and I do know that every year the cost of genetic testing is coming down. I also know that many biotechs, even some of our clients are paying 100% of the cost of genetic testing for the diseases that they treat even when sometimes 5% or less of people that are tested are actually identified with the rare disease. So I think just helping families find that diagnosis and then getting them to the right treatments is something that we should as leaders in this industry really be pushing forward and advocating for.

Taren: And so many times those treatments are off label for that disease because of the small patient populations, right so that makes it even harder for things like reimbursement.

Laurie: Yes. Yeah. I don't think Sammy is on anything that's actually – oh, maybe one thing that's indicated for, but yes it's a lot of off label use especially when you're talking about rare diseases in children because many of the therapies have just been tested in adults. So yes, it's access, I think it's advocacy, it's awareness, getting people the answers that they need and then hopefully the solutions so that they can live better with the diseases that they're facing everyday.

Taren: Awesome. Do you think there's an opportunity too for the pharma industry to create a better bridge with the payer systems because maybe there's – you know, I often hear these stories that it's the payers in the reimbursement that is really the sticking point, so how do we start to move that needle?

Laurie: That's a great question. I think by continuing to raise awareness of these rare diseases and advocate I mean truly it's been said there are somewhere around 7,000, probably more rare diseases out there, so while each individual condition is so rare when you look at it collectively there's more rare than there has ever been and I think regardless of how something is each family, each life can be impacted so much by changes. So I think just focusing on it, elevating the importance of it and treating some of these rare disease communities with the attention and the advocacy that they need.

Taren: Amazing. Thank you so much. I know this is a personal journey, so I thank you very much for sharing your story.

Laurie: Oh yeah, yeah.

Taren: You had been responsible for a number of product launches and great campaigns and your work in the rare disease field, can you pick out maybe one wow moment you've had in your career? Is it possible to single out one?

Laurie: Oh geez. Yeah. I mean I guess we talked about all of the little wow moments along the way, the uh-huh moments and the things that kind of keep you going. I guess when people ask me that there's always one moment that sort of sticks out in my head and it was gosh maybe seven – six years ago, a campaign that John Kemble who is my partner on the creative and the art side for a long time. We've put together a campaign for Cinryze, which was for hereditary angioedema, another rare disease and this disease causes these random attacks of swelling, a very debilitating, difficult disease for people to live with and one of the first ones that we were exposed to, so we became profoundly involved and met patients and did patient videos and met families and it was such an amazing experience.

And then the creative campaign, we call it the Swell Campaign we felt like really captured the insight of the emotional burden that the patient walks around with on a daily basis and that campaign just received so much accolade and not just from the patient community and the client, but then it won many, and we got to go up on stage and accept the award and so I think while there has been many moments I think that one was just sort of the culmination of doing great creative work, doing something important to raise

awareness of how difficult this disease was and then also ending with kind of this public recognition. I sort of always go back to that campaign as being a favorite.

Taren: Fantastic. And then finally, is there a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self something you wish you knew then that you know now?

Laurie: Gosh. There's so much. I think there's so much that I know now than I did not know then. Probably I would tell my younger self to speak up more. When I first started in this industry I was young and not very confident, but I always have these ideas in my head and I was too afraid to throw them out there and as I've grown older I should probably speak up less, so I'm telling the complete opposite and kind of throw anything out there. But I think yeah, I tell myself or any other younger person if you have ideas and things that you want to say just say it and not be afraid.

Taren: Right. Find your voice. Awesome.

Laurie: Yeah, yes.

Taren: That's wonderful. Well, I want to thank you so much for being part of our PharmaVOICE WoW Podcast Program. It was great to learn about your journey and thank you again for sharing so many of your personal insights with us.

Laurie: Oh, thank you for the opportunity Taren. I really appreciate it. This was great.

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