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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Cinda Orr, CEO, SCORR Marketing.

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

Cinda: Taren, thank you. It's a pleasure to be included.

Taren: It's our pleasure, indeed. I'm very intrigued about your story. I know that you started a drug development marketing agency in Nebraska, so my first question is what led you to pick that part of the country to kick off your company, and then I'll follow up with did you always want to be an entrepreneur.

Cinda: Interesting question, Taren. It's been a crazy ride full of good fortune that led to me creating SCORR in the middle of Nebraska. A little history that helps the context is that 30 years ago I kind of went through a rough personal patch. I had worked at G.D. Searle in Chicago and a colleague connected me with an opportunity in Lincoln, Nebraska. It was a leap of faith. I took my 2-year-old daughter in a car and I moved to Lincoln to be the director of marketing at what was Harris Labs and is now Celerion. Now, MDS was a Canadian company bought Harris and they didn't really have anyone else with marketing experience, and this is where the luck comes in. So I became the VP of global marketing and we brought 21 disparate companies together under the MDS Pharma brand.

So at the same time along comes a Nebraska man who I ultimately married, and about at that point or a little bit later, MDS had become one of the top five CROs, but ultimately they went through some tough regulatory challenges. So I decided to retire and move deeper into Nebraska to a small city called Kearney, Nebraska where my husband lived. From a trivia standpoint it's the dead center of the United States. Retirement didn't suit me at all, and so I decided to draw on some of the relationships I had built and do some marketing consulting and that was 16 about years ago.

I wanted to build the kind of agency I had wanted to work with when I was inside an internal marketing department. So I hired two young ambitious people, Ben Rowe who's now the senior VP and chief executive officer at SCORR and Krystle Buntmeyer who is now the president at

SCORR, and they're both partners now. We also engaged a lot of other folks and they've grown up at SCORR and they're still there today.

Ultimately, we created a marketing agency across the United States. As I said, we're based in Kearney, Nebraska, but we compete with agencies in New York and Chicago and London. I have resolved myself to this location when I feel like maybe that wasn't the best choice by knowing that if Nebraska was good enough for Warren Buffet, it could be good enough for me.

Taren: But coming from a big company and then starting your own company, what were some of those early days like for you when you had to be the chief bottle washer and cook all at the same time?

Cinda: Well, the reality of it is – and this goes back to your question of did you want to be an entrepreneur; I never had aspirations to start my own company. I really liked being behind the scenes, kind of the second fiddle, if you will, working to help others achieve their goals. I kind of think that's what marketing is about, is the people behind the scenes that make things happen, and I was far more comfortable in that role. So it was a little bit disarming when I first started SCORR because no one would ever give me credit for my accounting skills for example, or my operational skills. So it was daunting in the beginning because when you start your own company you have to be a jack-of-all-trades.

Taren: And you have to wear many hats and you have to figure out what it is you don't know to figure out how to do what you need to do.

Cinda: Absolutely, which really is one of the things that I hold near and dear which is know what you don't know. It's guided me through this whole process, both from a perspective of who I hire and who I reach out to to help me gain more capabilities.

Taren: That's awesome. Obviously there are daunting challenges of running your own business but there are also tremendous rewards. So for you, what has been the most rewarding part of running your own business?

Cinda: For me, the absolute, most rewarding component is that I love to see young talent grow. Now, I'm a little bit selfish here because I like working with young talent because it keeps me young as well. A lot of young people began their careers at SCORR when we were just starting out and they're now in senior roles. They came right out of school, and they continued to grow and to me, it's just been a fascinating journey to watch. They've gotten married, they've bought homes, they've had babies and ultimately, they are seasoned professionals.

So now we're investing in industry veteran – people with decades of experience in the health sciences arena, so it's really fascinating to watch the balance of these young talented people with the more experienced veterans, and as well as the senior more knowledgeable, if you will,

health sciences group. I was really fascinated – we’re in this period of change from a marketing standpoint as well and there’s a lot of things, tactics and technology that as more senior members of the team we’re not as aware of. So there’s a good, if you will, meshing and mixing of capabilities and industry that goes on within the organization.

Taren: Over the course of your career, having started just almost two decades ago within this specific area of SCORR and then previous to that in your role at MDS, you have, no doubt, encountered some obstacles along the way, particularly being a woman. How have you overcome some of those challenges?

Cinda: I believe that one of the keys to whatever success I’ve had is that I don’t dwell on the past frankly, but I do recognize, as I said earlier, that I don’t know what I don’t know. I’m still learning and growing and it makes the work exciting all these years later. I’m probably very Pollyanna about this, but I know I need to work harder and smarter than the next guy. I have to give my all in each of my roles and to each of my clients.

It is that which, I think, differentiates myself personally and it is the attitude that core to the SCORR culture. I see this across my entire team daily. We’re going to work harder, we’re going to work smarter, and we’re going to be better than the next guy. And that, I believe, helps overcome some of that, if you will, gender issues that are clearly there still, but if you keep that mindset and keep that focus you don’t worry about what somebody else is doing, per se.

Taren: Obviously you have a vast array of clients and therefore, you really do have your finger on the pulse of different areas involved in drug development. What are some of the big trends you are tracking currently?

Cinda: When I reflect back on the changes in the industry, and I can go back to the really early days and understand that because of the regulatory side of drug development, changes happen at a glacier pace. I think about early days. I actually remember the very first barcoded label and the very first study management system and how long it took for those to become standards in the industry today, and I put that against, if you will, I compare that to where we are right now and the future is here.

There has been a lot of movements recently in the recent years, but today Covid-19 is the catalyst for change. We’re never going to approach drug development again, either from the diversification of IT to how we conduct trials. It is the impetus for change. Most virtual and decentralized trials will become more popular and essential to efficient research.

Unfortunately, what hasn’t changed significantly is the number of physicians and patients who participate in clinical trials. This has to change. Covid-19 gives our industry a great entry point into the mainstream. People are listening and searching for information. How are vaccines developed? What are antivirals? How are diagnostics made? How can I get involved?

Taren: Agree. I think the future has met us right here in the present and as you say, how companies and organizations respond will determine their future fate. Cinda, you are also president of the Bridging Clinical Research & Clinical Healthcare Collaborative. Talk to me about this initiative. What are its goals and who are its members?

Cinda: Certainly. As I stated earlier, I'm passionate about patients and I can't believe that so few physicians offer clinical trials to their patients. Ninety-seven percent of physicians and their patients don't participate or get involved and that's astounding to me. So I strongly believe that pharma and healthcare need to come together to deliver better access to clinical research as a care option for their patients.

So what started this initiative was I kept saying if I had the capital I would go to Oprah and I would rally the cause to get women who we know are the ultimate healthcare decision makers in their family around this important fact of clinical research and clinical care as an alternative care option.

Now, I couldn't get to Oprah, so in lieu of that in 2018, I collaborated with John Potthoff who's the president of Elligo to develop this bridging collaborative which called the Bridging Clinical Research & Clinical Healthcare Collaborative to bring together all the communities involved – regulatory, technology, healthcare and research – to bring them together to improve participation in clinical research, eliminate this huge divide between research and care. After two years, we're now collaborating with The Conference Forum on their 2020 Clinical Research as a Care Option (CRAACO) to merge these two events together and bring the initiative to a point where it will broaden the spectrum of discussion, entertain more diverse viewpoints and rally companies to act.

Now, Covid-19 has forced us to move the event. We have a tentative date in July, but it will be some time this year if permissible.

Taren: Excellent. We look forward to that event and to hearing more that comes out of this new collaborative that bridges between your organization and that of The Conference Forum. So it's going to be exciting to see what those outcomes are. It's certainly an area of the industry that needs attention put toward it, and we do need to have more physicians and more patients participating in clinical trials and I agree with you wholeheartedly.

Cinda, if you had to go back and think about a piece of advice that you would give to your younger self, what would that be?

Cinda: Well there's a lot of advice I'd probably give to myself in retrospect. I assume you mean about my business. So first and foremost, I would tell myself not to wait until I was 50 years old to start my business, that I was ready a lot sooner. And now that I'm facing retirement age or

past a retirement age, I think of all the learning and fun that I missed not starting my business earlier. Some tactical things I would have told myself is to make sure I had at least a year's worth of capital under my mattress and to be ready to do every job in the organization and know that I won't love every aspect about it.

I think two important things that I would give, not only to myself but other entrepreneurs, is to learn how to sense when a storm is coming. It's like being a captain of a ship; you need to be able to smell that storm before it's on the horizon. So you have to refine your instincts so you can see the trends that are coming before they emerge and you need to be able to act on them before others are even aware of them and more importantly, you have to understand the nuances of your organization.

My last and biggest piece of advice is that life is a competition, and you need to be ready to work harder than you ever have before.

Taren: Anyone who's listening to this who wants to take that leap forward to be an entrepreneur can take some valuable lessons from that. Be prepared to do everything. Be prepared to be omniscient in some ways because you do need to predict what's coming down and to have the capital and be well funded and make sure that you are prepared for all contingencies that you can see and those that you can't. That's great advice.

Cinda: Absolutely. Thank you.

Taren: And finally, since this is our WoW podcast, can you identify a wow moment that either shaped your career or that has had a lasting impression on you?

Cinda: Definitely. This is all about mentorship, but it goes way back to early days at Harris Laboratories. I absolutely hated giving a presentation and I wasn't comfortable in leadership meetings being the only female. And the guys would pontificate and they would agree with each other, and I always felt that I was at a disadvantage. I think back to the first Quintiles brochure, sitting around the table and all the guys were saying 'we don't need to worry about them, they're just a data management company.' And me, I didn't feel like I had the voice to say 'what are you guys, nuts? That's what we sell.' And it was a real disadvantage that I wasn't able to speak more clearly and demonstrate leadership through voice.

Bob Harris at the time who was president of Harris Labs sat me down one day and he said, "you're extremely analytical. You're probably the most analytical person on the team," but he couldn't promote me because of this and until I could overcome my reticence to speak out and be comfortable with what I was saying, I was at a standstill in terms of my career. But what he offered was that he and his wife Marilyn, who was at the time the head of training, would work with me to grow beyond the situation I was in. I will never forget the level of mentorship they

gave me. Some would say that they created a monster because I'm certainly not afraid to speak out at this point. But it was the greatest gift ever given and now I try to pay it forward.

Taren: Thank you for sharing that. It's a great story and Cinda, we appreciate you exposing your early vulnerability to our audience and who knew what that little company Quintiles, right. Whoever heard of them?

Cinda: Yeah, crazy but their deliverable was ultimately the most important aspect of what clients were looking for, sponsors were looking for. Interesting.

Taren: Exactly. So you had some clairvoyance there as well. So kudos to you. I can't thank you enough for being part of our WoW podcast program and for sharing your really important insights with our audience.

Cinda: Taren, I appreciate it. This was really a great opportunity for reflection and as well as the continuation of mentorship. I really feel that each career has its challenges, but if you keep focused and poke at opportunities that it propels you forward. So I appreciate the opportunity to share with you.

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