

**September 30, 2020**

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*In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor of PharmaVOICE, meets with Georgette Pascale, Founder and CEO, Pascale Communications.*

**Taren:** Georgette, welcome to our WoW podcast program.

**Georgette:** Thank you so much for having me. My company and I have a lot of respect for you, as well as PharmaVOICE, so this is going to be a lot of fun. So thanks for having me.

**Taren:** Well, thanks so much. And it's been awhile since we caught up, since you were named a PharmaVOICE 100 in 2009. So I'm anxious to talk to you and learn what's happening and what's new in your world.

**Georgette:** Wonderful.

**Taren:** Before we get started though, I mean we share a little bit of history, Georgette. We both started virtual businesses before virtual businesses were a thing. Tell me how you think this has proved advantageous in terms of the recent pivot that everyone is going through right now because of the pandemic.

**Georgette:** I think it's 150% or more advantageous because we really didn't skip a beat. My company has been 15½ years – I started Pascale 15½ years ago and we've really developed a lot since then, as you said, since I was in the Pharma 100 in 2009 I believe. Geez, that makes me sound a little old. 😊 No, I'm kidding. I was like wow, that was awhile ago. But no, it's been so advantageous. We've always had that work from home and we never called it work from home; we've always said virtual because, honestly, that was the whole concept where we're legitimately working from anywhere. So whether that's another continent or on a boat somewhere or what have you, that was meant to be what virtual meant as well.

And congrats to you for seeing the forest through the trees because I know I was hit 15 years ago with some not backlash, but just inquiries and people not understanding the concept. So I think cheers to you guys for doing that as well. And yes, it's been great because we've been able to help our own clients adjust to how they are working virtually, and that's been great. Our account executives, our medical writing team, whoever, we've really been able to help our own clients.

So yes, I think it's been great and I'm sure you guys have seen that as well where it's been easy to pivot because we were kind of halfway there already or more so.

**Taren:** Exactly, yes. Thank you so much for that. We also called it virtual because to your point, it wasn't a work from home situation. We were a virtual company. It allowed us to tap into professionals basically around the world. I read this quote the other day that really in the last 10 years this is the first time in history, where because of technology, your office can be anywhere. So you're not constricted by brick and mortar.

**Georgette:** Right. And that was the whole concept when I started. For me personally it was mostly about I was done with the... I was the director of a healthcare practice in New York of a big agency and I just kind of wanted to work with a senior team. I knew I could be more productive for me. I know it's not for everyone and there's some people that don't prefer working from home, but for me I was much more productive. When my creativity struck, I was able to just do something immediately. So that was the whole concept and just kind of working with like-minded people, I knew I could find that and I did. And not everyone in the early days worked out because some people thought they could "work from home" back many moons ago, but they could not and some still think that.

So it was a lot of trial and error for me. Now we have this amazing team of over 40 coast to coast in the US as well as two over across the pond in London that manage the global business for Pascale. So we've morphed from just a healthcare PR agency – I think one of the first ever virtual healthcare PR agencies, actually, and now we also have digital as well. So we do PR and then we also do a lot in the digital space and with social media management and paid media and all that good stuff.

We're really all encompassing now, which has been fun and kind of a big step away in addition from when you and I caught up many moons ago. So that's what we do now and everything from pharma to med device to health tech, we're doing a lot in the AI space and telemedicine and anything to do with healthcare medicine, that's kind of our clientele and how we've morphed over the past 15 years.

**Taren:** Fantastic and kudos to you. And we'll go down that path in just a minute, but before we do I want to touch on the fact that starting a business is not for everyone and it takes a pretty bold leap to go down that path of entrepreneurialism. What incited you to make the leap from a big PR agency in New York to starting your own agency?

**Georgette:** Well, I think it's a little bit of madness when you're an entrepreneur. It's a little bit... you kind of have that spark. It's not always super planned out or anything. Passion is still my number one for everything that I talk about in every interview I do or anything. It's really hard to teach passion, and I say that no matter what kind of PR you're doing or what kind of job, and I had that passion burning of like I know this can work. I know it can work. And if I can get one or two clients to understand, which they did, it kind of evolved from there.

I think it was just knowing that the passion I had. I'm not one of those people – I don't like failing, but I wasn't really afraid to fail because let's face it, when you're an entrepreneur especially in the early days, there's a lot you go through just in so many ways, whether that's financially, emotionally, you can go down the list.

So I think you'd need to be a strong-willed person and know you're getting to fail at things and that's okay and you're going to learn from that. Because that's something people don't talk about a lot. So that was it for me; it was really the passion in knowing that this concept could work because I had done it myself. So it was just knowing that I think intrinsically.

**Taren:** Fantastic. It does take that passion and it does take that vision to be able to step out on your own, so again kudos to you. You noted before how many areas that you are working in now in terms of public relations and you have been at the forefront of independent PR companies. What do you like best about working in the areas you've carved out for your business? Is it the clients? Is it the work? Is it charting new territory? Tell me about it.

**Georgette:** Oh, I love it. I love healthcare, to be honest. I come from a background – I went to FIT in the city; I went to fashion school, I went to state school, no MBA or anything like that. I wanted to be a stylist. I fell into PR and from there, I had done music PR. I had gone on tours with bands. I had done fashion PR, corporate PR, high tech PR in the Silicon Valley heyday. I really worked in so many different industries in PR. Healthcare is so special because you really are getting educated and you're educating others. It just really is. I mean healthcare overall and just learning so many different things everyday and working with these leading scientists and clients – so it's a little bit of everything.

I mean I think healthcare overall is what makes it special for me because, again, there's so much innovation. I mean it's insane, you know that because of what you do. So whether it's a pharma – or pharmaceutical or diagnostic or some sort of new telemedicine program that can help in a certain way, that's just so – it makes me so excited for the future for me, for my kids, you know what I mean. I'm a single mom, three kids, and I just feel like of the work that the team and I are doing and contributing to and so excited to be a part of is just so inspiring, if you know what I mean. It just really gets to us and we're so passionate about it.

So I'd have to say overall it's just the whole area of healthcare. But yes our clients, I mean we're true partners with them, so it makes it so much more fun than – you know, we're not yes people. We're not that agency. We're going to challenge, but we're also really at the forefront of what we do in knowing the latest innovation. So working with them – and also I have to say working with my team. I mean I learn from them everyday. We're such a diverse interesting group of people at Pascale and from different backgrounds, not just PR, and I've hired people who never did PR before. Again it's that passion, it's that spark, it's what we see in each other and how we play off each other, so that's wonderful as well. So I think we have a mishmash of everything. I just find it really fascinating.

**Taren:** That's awesome. Having been in the PR field now for 15½ years, but longer than running your own agency for 15½ years, I'm interested to learn what are some of the top trends you're tracking right now in PR communications? As a follow up, what are those trends you're tracking for your clients? Because sometimes they're not the same.

**Georgette:** Totally. I totally agree with that. Such a great question. One of the things I like to lead with here that I think is so interesting is the empathy, the emotional quotient – the EQ everyone is talking about. I think those are things – the connecting with other companies and collaborations and sharing data – and myself included; I have a network of other PR firms. I'm not one of these folks who 'we're the best, there's no one else.' I've got folks that I partner with if it's not a good fit for me.

So I think the nice thing about comms right now is it's a little bit more inclusive and collaborative and again, that kind of empathy ever just because of COVID as well, is really something that I feel like is a trend right now that is a good trend. I think everyone is just really working together more as much as they can. Of course, that's not going to be at every place, but you know what I mean. I mean that's something that I definitely have seen a lot more of which I really, really like. I think obviously really some high tech video and shorter clips and really on the digital side, getting things out in an Instagram story that you couldn't a few months ago and seeing how things evolve that way is huge. And that's for all comms as well as our clients.

I think on the client side folks what we're seeing and with what we do is they are getting a little bit more adventurous and not as cautious in our field with trying to do more digital projects or videos, as I said, or things that might work to help educate others, whether that be patients or other physicians about their technology which has been really nice to see. I think it's like all of this would have happened from a digital perspective, but it's happening a lot quicker because of COVID, which is really nice. So I think these trends play really nicely into that. We all used to dread Zoom calls in a way and now it's like the norm. So I think everything is kind of coming full circle a little bit. But those are a lot of trends I see.

I'm part of a global women in PR group. Every week we get on the phone with over I think it's 20 countries, 25 countries. It's absolutely fascinating. I can tell you more about that offline or give any of your readers more info about it. But it's so lovely because I think why I'm bringing that up is even just across the board, across the globe people are coming together a little bit more and really trying to figure things out and speed up the process of making new developments. And that's nice to see.

I think in terms of just like being authentic on both sides, whether that's a client or in comms, I've always been myself and Georgette and still authentic and I think that's why Pascale has succeeded though some financial downturns and other things that have happened because we do have that reputation and we are authentic to the core. I believe you guys are as well. So I think authenticity is one of the really top – I don't even want to call it a trend, but something that's coming back that I've seen across the board that makes me really happy. And what I

mean by that is just going out there and being honest and correcting your wrongs and doing what you can.

That's a longwinded answer, I apologize. But that's kind of what I'm seeing on both sides.

**Taren:** It's great. I think in terms of the authenticity, I think you're right because when we're living in this new virtual reality when we hear from other folks as well, that Zoom is a great equalizer. There's no head of the table anymore. So the CEO pops on and he's in this just like everybody else. And we're in people's homes, so there's a different kind of intimacy involved where you may not ever have had that opportunity before. So you see people in a different way, and it's a more human way in fact. Which goes back to your empathy comment earlier. So it's all tied together. I agree with you.

The collaboration as well with everybody pulling in the same direction to figure out how to combat this global health crisis. So it's very encouraging and in some way there's a silver lining to be had. I think you've hit on a number of those, so that's fantastic. Thank you.

**Georgette:** Oh thanks.

**Taren:** And in that same light, we're looking at the industry that hadn't had such a great reputation over the last 5, 10 years and now we see resurgence in terms of the public's perception of the industry. Talk to me about that. Are you seeing the same thing?

**Georgette:** Oh, definitely. People didn't like to talk about reputation maybe that much or client service. One of our hashtags is responsive AF and that's kind of controversial a little bit for healthcare without saying the F word, but being responsive and being consistent and being authentic has what's made us successful and so many others. Reputation can be ruined in an instant.

Everything you do and your client service and how you deal with your partners is so important. It's important from listening to responsiveness – I'm going to say listening again; it's something that is another trend I see coming back a bit more where people aren't being spoken at but we're actually listening to needs of people and seeing how we can adapt because we're all in the same boat, as you said, and we're in people's houses on Zoom whether they're the highest of the CEO or what have you.

I mean it is something where yes, I mean that's something, I believe everyone likes to work at Pascale because I've been very clear about our mission of what we want to do and very inclusive. So I feel like it's just – it's 100% important, especially now where trust with so many things, whether it's political or healthcare-wise, it's just at such an all-time low in this country. This is the one thing, it's like you have to control what you can and reputation you can, and the client service you can. So I look at it as an opportunity to work harder and make people want to work with us because of who we are, and that's the way I look at it.

But yeah, I agree, the reputation and client service is everything and I'm glad there's a big spotlight on it now because it's always been important, but now people are just "seeing" that more.

**Taren:** Agreed. Let's talk through some of your career milestones if you don't mind. Can you give me a couple of highlights. What are some of those client engagements or client successes that have meant the most to you?

**Georgette:** It's funny in terms of the client successes, I think when I was starting my company I had some folks seek me out and I was kind of the lowly PR girl who lived in Brooklyn and had a not great apartment and was starting this company and got my tax ID number, I just kind of went for it because that's Georgette. You never really know what's going to happen as we talked about previously, but I had former clients even from other industries and others – and this is before – you have to remember, I mean this is before like LinkedIn and everything there was all the connectivity. I was always a connector and I always kept in touch with people.

So one of my big milestones is really having people come to me when I started Pascale and want to work with me. I mean that's the ultimate flattery and it just made me so grateful and humble at the same time. I mean that's a huge milestone to want to have people work with you. I mean my job and what I do and Pascale is so important to me. It was my first baby before I had my other babies. It's one of those things where it was just really important from the get-go that I had that energy from people that wanted to work with me, so that's a huge milestone.

I think in terms of milestones, sometimes I don't think in milestones or business plans; I'm kind of a weird CEO that way I'm sure. But I think every year that we hit another year and I see this team evolve, it's like this iterative milestone where I'm just happy everyday to do what I do, which sounds kind of cheesy to people, but I really do love my job and my kids see me love my job and now they're in hybrid school so they literally see me do my job like they did when they were little and I see them do their job. So it's kind of interesting for them to watch me and watch them and them be listening on business calls or things like that.

I feel like milestones to me, I mean it's just like every little thing can be a milestone in some way for me and those are the little – it's hard being an entrepreneur. It's long hours. It's tough. So those are the things that kind of get me through the day, like kind of the daily milestones and I take those and say 'oh my gosh, like look what we just did today' or I'm like 'wow, look at this amazing Instagram page that the digital team was able to put together and get through MLR and use creative sources' and all, but it's just that's the stuff that kind of keeps me going.

I think the funniest one that I'll say because I just thought about it is I do some fun Pascale merch, which is kind of cute, and my kids and all their friends love to wear it. That just is so cute to me – I can't even stand it. All my Pascale hoodies and hats and all that, like they're so proud that I work hard at what I do and, to me, that's like a little milestone because I think that they see how hard I work and how much I love it, which I think is so important because I didn't grow up like that and I'm sure a lot of people where parents come home from work and they're just

like I hate my job or it's a long day. So to me, those continuing milestones are them seeing me struggle, but also still love what I do, and that's kind of cool from a personal perspective.

**Taren:** Absolutely. That's great role modeling and getting the name out there, so that's wonderful. It's great. You've described yourself as a being very authentic leader, a very empathetic leader. I also hear in your voice that the passion obviously goes hand in hand with all that. What are some of the leadership traits you look for in others as you build out your team? You're currently 40 folks around the country and two in the UK. So what are those traits that you look for in others to continue to keep Pascale current and relevant?

**Georgette:** That's a great question because listen, this isn't about me. I say it to my team all the time, they're the dream weavers. I just work here. That's kind of like my quote to them in a lot of the ways. So I really want them to always feel empowered and that is a *huge* word to me because I wasn't with a lot of my former "bosses" or colleagues, whatever. I'm not into hierarchy and all that stuff and everyone who works with me, not for me – I hate saying that – knows that. So I mean I like to – my leadership style is everything you said.

What I look for is also positivity and also assertiveness and not being afraid to kind of get in there and be challenging respectfully when it needs to be and not just the yes people. That's a big pet peeve of mine because that never evolves anything.

Creativity, I think individuality. I think one of those hot topics and things coming out of COVID that we can all agree on is that managing people, leading people, whatever you want to call it is a very individualistic thing. Now I know if you have an n of 500,000 employees that can be tough, but you can put them in teams, what have you. For me, it's really being individualized with how people need to be led. And if you can get one nuance of how someone needs to be led and give them a little extra attention on that, whether it's a team or a person, I think that's really, really important.

One of the huge things for me is being inclusive. I think that's another *huge* one that people don't talk about a lot. People want to talk about diversity, well let's talk about the inclusion and how people are contributing to what we're doing. And the inclusivity – not exclusivity – is so important for leadership because honestly, I mean that's what it's all about.

Everyone needs to have a voice and not just have a voice, but understand that their good idea can be put into action. It's not just being swept under the rug. So that's a big one for me too and that's what I look for in people.

Also we like to have a lot of fun. We really do. So you can't take things too seriously sometimes. I mean what we do can be serious, so we're hard workers, but I like to make sure that we're somehow always remembering the fun stuff.

**Taren:** Excellent. You talked just a minute ago about former bosses, former colleagues. Is there anything you know now that you wish you had known as you were moving up the ranks as your career was unfolding?

**Georgette:** Oh my gosh, so much! But also, I have no regrets at the same time, I'll say that. But two things are super important to me, Taren. I think for me not taking things personally, business is business a lot of times and that's super hard. I didn't have necessarily people that treated me fairly or well, and that's hard when you're just young and have no idea what's going on. And so you kind of think that's the norm. So I think not taking things personally and growing from that, which is not easy, but you have to do it. As well as it's okay to ask for help.

Listen, when I started I was like oh yeah, I could look over a legal document or – you think you can do everything because you're an entrepreneur and then you're like no, I really need this sort of accounting team and it has to specialize in this and all of that.

So I would say two things. Keep being humble. Don't take things personally. Ask for help. Everyone is an expert in something and that's why we all collectively work well together. I think it's good to know that because sometimes people don't like to ask for help, and I'm someone, I have no problem with that. And I think that's why the company has been successful. I know that's a factor.

**Taren:** Excellent. And those are great pieces of advice and great tips for everybody to keep in mind as they're looking to chart their path forward. Georgette finally, we talked about milestones earlier, but tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that really shaped your career.

**Georgette:** I think this is it, getting interviewed by you.

**Taren:** You're very kind, but let's get serious now.

**Georgette:** I'm serious. C'mon, of course it is! It is! This is an honor. I'm not even being facetious. Because you know what, every time that I get invited to speak somewhere or on a panel or I'm able to go to a university or go somewhere and people actually want to listen to little old me like who, again, went to state school and doesn't have an MBA – not that those are bad things at all, but I think people assume sometimes when you're "CEO" you have certain accolades. So I think the fact that the wow moment for me is again is very continuum – not to be vague. It's every time I get to converse with people that are mentors to me, that actually want to listen to me as well, I think that's just the coolest thing ever. Because obviously as you can hear, I can talk all day.

The reason I started in PR and comms was because that's what I like to do. Like even with friends; I love to connect people. It's the whole reason I got into this line of work. So I think for me, that's the exciting part and like the wow moment where I just – it's not the awards or whatever, which are very nice and all of that and so appreciated, but it's really those – just

getting to shake hands – oh well, not shake hands, I can't say that, right... bump elbows... with people that I might not have met had it not been for these speaking opportunities or events or people introducing me. You have to be a life learner, so that only furthers my drive and stuff.

So that's what I would say that is honestly, is just those things and it's been a lot of fun. I can't wait to see where it goes.

**Taren:** Awesome. And I'm so glad to be connected with you. I so admire your energy, your vision, your thoughtfulness in terms of thinking about your employees. I just want to wish you continued great success as you go forward, and I look forward to talking with you again. Thanks so much for being part of our wow podcast program.

**Georgette:** Thank you so much. This was amazing and likewise, like I said, we're fans of yours and the publication and I appreciate everything you guys do. So thanks again for having me.

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