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*In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Amanda Powers-Han, Senior Partner, Media at Greater Than Once.*

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

**Amanda:** Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to have the conversation with you today.

**Taren:** We're excited to speak with you. Amanda, you have been with Greater Than One since its founding in 2000, and congratulations on that tremendous milestone.

**Amanda:** Can you believe it?

**Taren:** Yeah I know, 2000 feels like it's so long ago as we go into 2020. So congratulations on your 20-year anniversary.

**Amanda:** Thank you.

**Taren:** You're welcome. What are some of the biggest shifts you have witnessed in terms of agency-client relationships in media and overall healthcare communications?

**Amanda:** Gosh, I would say first as an agency and really as a marketer, we were born in digital media, and when we started it was barely a consideration. Most of our time honestly was spent educating our clients and advocating for digital to become a much more critical piece of clients marketing efforts. And it's really amazing to think about the fact that that was really only 20 years ago and since really, really early days in the way that we started, as you well know digital has completely accelerated and now to the point where it's really at the forefront, isn't it. And digital transformation is being prioritized more now than ever, and a lot of that is really driven by the current environment and the situation that we're in today.

I would say that clients now see that our digital roots and the fact that we have really deep expertise is a key differentiator and in many ways, the way that our clients are also beginning to think and really having digital, in many cases, as a centralized component of their marketing strategy.

**Taren:** It's so true. Digital has taken over everything. All of the recent studies that are showing that we are in the midst of this – I don't know if they call it the fourth or fifth revolution in terms of digitization from commercial aspects to content and care. So it's exciting to hear what you all are doing and you're noticing this as a trend as well.

**Amanda:** Absolutely. Yeah, in so many different ways. So the consumption of digital content has completely taken off. We know now that telehealth and telemedicine have finally kind of come to their day, if you will, huge surges of content consumption when it comes to video to the point where there's content exhaustion. Now we're watching all of the reruns again because we've already watched everything else.

And also just back to the business side for a minute, the transformation and the relationship even between the sales rep and the healthcare professional and that's something that we've been helping our clients navigate since the beginning of all this.

**Taren:** Yeah. I think you're right and that ACP and the brands and how everybody is kind of finding their way through it, it's uncharted territory. I just read something today on looking for precedented times, enough with the unprecedented, let's go back to precedented times. But in fact, the train is rolling down the track and I don't know that we'll ever go back to where we were pre-COVID days. Everybody is finding a new direction. Would you agree with that?

**Amanda:** One hundred percent, and I would just say that this is the normal now. So to look forward and not to look back and even to think beyond COVID and having conversations about COVID and instead, just embracing that today is a new day and many of the trends that you and I have just talked about have established what's normal. There's so much opportunity even from today as we think to the future.

**Taren:** Absolutely. I'm waiting for the holograms, to be quite honest, to come in. But you know, we're not probably too far off from that. It's exciting times and that really plays into your company's whole ethos, which is about imagination and how you like really figure out a way to unleash your teams and their imaginations. Talk to me about this philosophy.

**Amanda:** I will. First I just have to say hearing you just even set it up gives me goosebumps. It's something that we really dug in and thought long and hard about as an agency as we wanted something aspirational for us as a company and also something that's really true to the DNA of GTO and even the way that we began.

A few different ways that I really try to advocate for imagination within the organization, I think the first one is leading by example. So as a leader within the company, I have the great ability and opportunity, I would say, to really set the bar and to push and inspire our people to think with an imagination to make sure that they believe that it's a safe environment to do so and just really bringing forward imaginative ideas and/or creating an environment where people can come forward with them as well.

**Taren:** Exactly. I was going to say it's that opportunity to create that white space for people to think unconventionally and not be judged in a way.

**Amanda:** A hundred percent. I would say that even with that comes the cultural aspect, doesn't it?

**Taren:** Mm-hmm.

**Amanda:** So the company and the culture, the heartbeat needs to be imagination. And for us to put imagination first is really important to us as a company, trying to build teams that really spark imagination. And even in something as common as the day-to-day meetings that we conduct, trying to really invite diversity in thought, and not always to have the same three or the four folks to speak up, but to really try to bring out the best ideas in all of our staff. And sometimes some of those great ideas come from the quietest folks in the room. They just need to feel that they have an environment or an opportunity where they have a voice. I've been really surprised that some of – especially through more of the modern channels if we think about social media and others, a lot of times it can be the more junior folks if they're really set up well that come up with really great ideas that we push forward.

**Taren:** That's a great insight because a lot of times they haven't been – I hate to say this – but they haven't been beaten down by bureaucracy or hierarchy or any of those other things. They're coming in fresh, and it's great and it's refreshing to see.

**Amanda:** It is. You just made me think about my own kids. I have a 5-year-old and a 2-year-old and to your great point, they haven't been beaten down either. And just the ideas that come out of them are something that I can't ever imagine would come out of my mouth again, and it's because they just they're free.

**Taren:** Yup. And that's great. I love that. Yeah. We should all, at times, be able to think like a 5-year-old because truly that is unleashed imagination right there.

**Amanda:** Just one other quick thing if I could back to your question.

**Taren:** Of course.

**Amanda:** Something that we didn't expect would come out of imagination and what would really make imagination real within the company is the lexicon. So interestingly enough, we use the word imagination in our everyday communications, and it just has happened naturally. And I would say that even if we could evaluate from some form of a social listening assignment or a research assignment and identify how many times the word imagination is really spoken within the agency everyday, it would probably be one of the first for the top terms. And that, I think, has also just been kind of a natural way for us to make imagination part of our normal and/or kind of everyday communications versus being something that we only push for and/or put forward in specific settings.

**Taren:** Interesting. Yeah, that's interesting. So let me ask you this question. Do you think you can teach people to be imaginative or is it part of their DNA?

**Amanda:** That's such a good question. I would say both. There are definitely people within our company that imagination comes naturally, and as we would potentially identify those with the most imagination, I could probably name a dozen folks. And at the same time, to the earlier part of our discussion, which is to really create that environment where some of the people that may not have the strongest or the most senior voices for them to feel that they can come forward with great ideas, that happens all the time.

So I would say that it's both. It's creating that environment where people have an opportunity to really stretch their imagination and perhaps even kind of riding on the coattails or being inspired by those that it comes more naturally for.

**Taren:** Excellent. Excellent. We talked before we got on our call earlier about so many different channels that are available. We've got social media. We've got TV. We've got print. We've got everything ever out there. What are some of the biggest challenges for healthcare communicators today to break through that noise, and then what are some of the biggest opportunities?

**Amanda:** It's interesting the fact that you just listed four or five channels as part of the question I would say is one of the key challenges which is the fragmentation across all these channels.

**Taren:** Interesting.

**Amanda:** So how do we prioritize channel selection and even individual programs within different channels as it relates to really driving client business and I would say that that's also connected to the balance of let's say effectiveness versus efficiency when it comes to channel mix. Some channels of course are very effective in driving awareness and/or delivering conversion. And then we have some of the channels that have really come forward over the last let's say six to eight years that are really known to build efficiency into different programs such as programmatic, native and so forth. And so really balancing, I would say, effectiveness and efficiency is a key channel or a key challenge.

And then I'd also say because we're a digital first agency and so much of the investment is now in digital another key challenge is connecting the digital activity to ROI and especially when budgets are limited. A lot of the work that we do is in rare disease, so you can't necessarily do one of those impact or brand studies in the same way that you could if you have a \$10, \$20, \$30 million media budget. But I would say too like just as far as some of the solutions based on the challenges that we're talking about is being data driven, so as much as we can really apply a data driven approach to channel planning is what we push for with our clients and we also really try to be strategic when it comes to measurement.

So instead of seeing measurement almost as the caboose if you will, we really see it as an engine, something that can drive strategy, insights and analytics is a key part of the work that we do and I would say that if you can be strategic in your approach to measurement that that really helps navigate some of the fragmentation, the balance in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately our ability to connect the dots when it comes to the digital activity to ROI.

**Taren:** Excellent. When we talk about digital and metrics, it's as recently as five years ago it was still a little bit squishy. How do we evaluate something that's so new, but now digital is not new and while you are a data driven digital agency, do you still find that to be a challenge to find the right ROI and the right markers in which to measure your campaigns against?

**Amanda:** Absolutely. I would say that it's a really exciting challenge to solve for and one that's never really complete. A few of the ways that we solve for that are working with our clients' marketing science teams so there's a lot that we can do collaborating with them to come up with ROI solutions and we find that that's a really great approach because then they're bought in to the methodology and when they're bought in to the methodology of course, all really support in or believe in the results that come from it.

We also do quite a bit of modeling, which is an effective way to try to forecast impact our ROI and then also based on results really strengthening that model over time and then of course there's some out of the box solutions that we can use as well working with companies such as Crossix and IQVIA to set up impact studies and sometimes those that specifically connect to paid media efforts so that the results are actionable to the point of us being able to really optimize our channel mix or even individual programs within those marketing programs based on what we're seeing.

**Taren:** Excellent. And as we venture into some of these new territory and while you said that a lot of your work is in that rare disease space, but still in all have you ever had the opportunity to have pushback from a client or needed to push a client forward at a pace maybe they weren't ready to go in and how did you manage that because it can be tricky, how did you manage that negotiation there?

**Amanda:** I would say more times than I can remember. I would like to say more successful versus not as successful, but of course we all have our war stories. What I could say is really building confidence with clients is important and advocating for what is really needed versus what they've asked for and that's not always easy. Sometimes a client will come forward with something very specific and instead of executing or just taking that as an order, where we have been more successful is to really ask the why behind the ask and to make sure that we believe that what is being asked is what is certainly required. Or perhaps something else would be a better solution and building that client confidence that creates the relationship between agency and client where that give and take and back and forth is welcomed, I would say, is really important to establish upfront and probably more than anything helps avoid those difficult situations from the onset.

Another thing that I would say is trying to be data driven. So if you can put something forward that is really well supported as part of your argument a client normally will be open to listening to that and appreciates more than not that you're being thoughtful in the argument that you're putting forward if we do feel the very passionate pushing for an idea and then also I would say that we have a real stake in the game so we're an independent agency. And so we're really fortunate to be able to put our clients first. We invest in clients and I would say for the most part they invest in us too. So that's I would say just a way of saying how important that relationship is between agency and client, so when there is a difficult situation you really have a strong connection and a platform to be able to have that hard conversation against.

**Taren:** That's excellent. Thank you so much. Those are great insights. You talked about just being thoughtful and being transparent, those are some key leadership traits that may not always be so recognized. What are some of your other key leadership best practices?

**Amanda:** I would say first and foremost, the importance of honesty and integrity. Even sometimes when the truth is hard, being honest in having your integrity will serve you as a leader very well in the long term.

Secondly, I would say believe that people will rise to the challenge. My father always did. He always believed that I could do things that I didn't even believe I could do and when you believe that people will rise to the challenge, I find that they normally do.

Another important aspect of leadership is the importance of developing relationships and developing relationships takes time. Those relationships though will serve you very well back to the idea of even managing conflict, being in a position where you're debating back and forth a critical idea and the chemistry. So the importance of developing that relationship and the chemistry that it builds across the team will serve that individual and leader very well in the future.

And lastly, I would say and it's related to the idea that I just shared, challenge and debate is healthy, so I would say as a leader embrace it, advocate for it and bring it. It makes all of the individuals around you better and it also strengthens the work.

**Taren:** Absolutely. That's what they say, fashion designers, that's the best part of collaboration is bringing out the best ideas from everyone. And when you go to look for new leaders on your teams, what is it that you look for?

**Amanda:** One of my great mentors has a great phrase that I've always taken forward with me and that is "if you're going to fall, fall on your nose and not on your rear." So when I look for leadership traits I'm looking for people that we're going to have to pull back versus push forward. I would also say great instincts. Marketing is an art and a science and great instincts are really excellent, an excellent trait in terms of what we look for on a team. I would also say that you don't need to be the loudest voice in the room. As a leader, much of our role is to

really bring out the best in others and then I would also say passion. We spend so much time at work and it's so important to love what you do and if you have that passion the contributions that that brings forward for the business are really immeasurable. We work in the healthcare industry and the work that we do is meaningful and we find that people that really share in that passion really love the work to the same degree that we do.

**Taren:** Absolutely. That's great and I love that advice from your mentor. Speaking of mentoring, let's talk about that. How important is mentoring to you to that next generation?

**Amanda:** I would say now more than ever. I've been very fortunate to have achieved so much in my life and that's both personally and professionally and the people within our organization they are our company, aren't they?

**Taren:** Mm-hmm.

**Amanda:** And guiding them and supporting them to really achieve their greatest potential is the future for them and the future for us as a company. Funny enough, my mom was a teacher. She taught third grade for years and years. She was a great nurturer and I learned that from her and on the other side, my dad is the driver. So he was always the one that would never tolerate an A minus back in school. I mentioned before that he always pushed me and believed in me even more than I could and I think that is similar in terms of just the combination and what I really try to bring to those that I mentor, inspire and grow.

**Taren:** That's great. We all need a little bit of wind behind our backs as well as people to look us up and make us think that we can do more than we can, so that's awesome. Finally, since this is our WoW podcast program, tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that shaped your career.

**Amanda:** I will definitely do that. I would love also just to quickly tell a story that was as important because it was such a learning experience in my career. I am a very achievement oriented person and as I reflect on one of the most impactful learning experiences, I was actually fired by my father. How many people can say that?

**Taren:** That makes for an interesting Thanksgiving, but go ahead.

**Amanda:** We have a family business, and as a number of young adults do, I was more focused than I should have been on myself than on the work, and he fired me. He taught me to work hard and to take nothing for granted and it worked. It worked. And thinking back to the day it happened, I can still tell you exactly where we were, getting in my car that afternoon and how I felt and I thanked him for it since because it really did make an impact on me.

As far as accomplishments, I'm really proud of things that I'm able to help navigate clients or navigate with clients I should say for the first time and it's almost serendipitous because as we

think back to GTO and the imagination agency challenging the status quo and doing things for the first time is really what we're all about.

And as I think about that key accomplishment years ago, I was sitting in a cafeteria with a client and we were talking about a program that we could develop for a brand and it was to be the first ever branded social media program in pharma marketing. And my client was the digital marketer and of course there was a brand team and as we sat there and we had lunch together, I said to her, "Let's lead this together. We can do it. This is not a brand team initiative. Let's blaze the trail together, we can do it." And we got really excited about it and she decided to put that proposal forward. The brand team agreed and what we were able to accomplish together was really incredible.

We built a case within the enterprise legal counsel to get them confident in me, comfortable with the idea that we could actually do a branded social media program in pharma. We leveraged the influencer marketers before the industry did. We developed all of the governance around this program and ultimately we proved that the program could really drive the business and it was exciting. It was exciting to really from concept development, getting a client, excited to advocate for us together to lead this program and to navigate this for the first time and then for that program to go all the way from concept development, evaluation and approval within the company to see it launch and then to see the impact that it delivered for the business was really exciting.

**Taren:** That is exciting and congratulations for breaking new ground. That had to feel everyday like wow, we are really doing something different.

**Amanda:** It was fun. I mean in the beginning it was something that you'd almost see as an impossibility and it was really a thrill to make it possible.

**Taren:** That's fantastic and thank you so much. Thank you so much for sharing so much of yourself as well as your stories and I wanted to wish you continued great success. And thank you for being part of our WoW podcast program.

**Amanda:** Thank you so much for having me. This was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it.

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