

Shimona Chadda

Think Bigger. Be Different. Bring Value.

Think Bigger: Be Ambitious in the Scale of Change You Think Is Possible.

Back in the dark ages, three years before the iPhone launched when the BlackBerry was the cutting edge of corporate mobile technology, I took my first job. It was a marketing position for a pharmaceutical company. Our challenge was to promote a declining prescription drug to doctors and ensure that the brand stayed top of mind. The conventional methods of communication and promotion included direct mail, email, sales reps, and sampling. But I had a different idea.

I had been following trends in the consumer packaged goods (CPG) industry. Marketing through mobile phones via SMS and mobile coupons was in its nascent stage. I thought, “Why not use SMS to market to our doctors?”

There were many reasons why not, and I heard them all.

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- “That’s not how we do things.”
- “We work in a highly regulated industry. We have to be careful about what we do.”
- “That’s business-to-consumer. We’re business-to-business.”
- “Doctors use gatekeepers. They would never give their cell phone number to a pharmaceutical sales rep!”
- “That’s an invasion of privacy. It could backfire on us.”

We took it up a level. Not only did we use mobile, we launched a mobile-only loyalty program. How did I get my team on board for such a crazy idea? I asked, “What do you always pick up as you walk out the door in the morning?” The answer came immediately. “My keys and my phone.”

I had a good team—in fact—the best! At that moment, they saw what I did: the massive growth in mobile, a compound annual growth rate of twenty-eight percent, a medium as personal as your house key, the inevitable one hundred percent market penetration of the second screen overtaking television. We saw what the traditional business-to-business marketers hadn’t yet realized: that the emerging world of mobile provided an opportunity for immediate, intimate conversations with doctors; that traditional marketing mechanisms lacked the capability to create such powerful connections.

Suddenly we were all on the same page. Thinking bigger. It was still a gamble, though, because mobile was an emerging category, and we were betting that others had underestimated its potential. The bet paid off. Doctors all

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over the country signed up. The loyalty program ran for two years, reviving a declining brand, doubling revenue, and winning awards at various forums for innovative use of emerging media. Real innovation generates impactful results by transcending traditional industry thinking and novelty. It generates results which break the barriers of expectations and obliterates the norms to create new norms.

My parents once told me, “Focus on your education. It’s your one true life-long asset that stays with you.” When I landed my first job, my father pulled me aside and changed the mission “Doing a job is just following orders. Anyone can do that, but not everyone leaves something behind when they’re gone. Don’t just take a job. Build a legacy.”

As a child, I was challenged at every turn. Maybe that’s what comes from growing up in a military family, moving every two or three years, focusing on the mission. In the military, devotion to the mission transcends rank or gender, and I brought that focus to my team.

Success comes from the team, each contributing their strengths to achieve the goal. My contribution was to bring a vision, to focus our gaze beyond what others had done, to create something new that could only be accomplished by a team unified in purpose and passion.

Our next challenge was to take a leading prescription medication to the over the counter (OTC) market. The Conventional wisdom said that the transition to OTC required abandoning the prescription market, since the revenues from the larger OTC market would dwarf prescriptions sales.

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We did all the things required to engage the OTC market—packaging changes, alternative flavors—but I advocated against foregoing the prescription sales. In my view, it's not an either/or world, it's a both/and world. After considerable discussion, we decided to sell in both markets. A decade later, the product is still a leading medication in both prescription and OTC sales. We won the chairman's award for driving innovation that delivered a significant business impact. Think Bigger than just delivering on a task, meeting deadlines and hitting your numbers.

Some years later my husband took a job in another city, so I resigned, and we moved. I know what you're thinking. What about your career? What about your legacy? But there's something you don't know: In graduate school, my husband and I started out as a team, teasing each other about who was the smartest and challenging each other to greater accomplishments. When I landed my dream job at the top pharmaceutical company in the country, he moved right along with me. Now, years later, he had a great opportunity, and I went right along with him. Think bigger than yourself. In every aspect of your life, it takes a team.

Be Different: You Can't Create a Legacy by Blending In.

In a new city, I found a marketing position with a one-stop retail bill payment startup and stepped up to the mission of building another legacy. Things went well, but in a startup, cash is king. Early on, we hit a rough patch, and I was asked to let go half of my team. That wasn't my idea of a legacy. I went to the CEO and said, "What if I earned

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my team's salary in terms of promotional budget? Would I be allowed to keep my team?"

He frowned. "How would you do that?"

I smiled. "You know our budget for sales promotions?"

He nodded.

"If I can find a way to fund our promotions without touching our cash, will you let me keep my team?"

Curious, he threw down the gauntlet. "You have one quarter to get the brands lined up and show promotional funds coming in."

We were in the middle of layoffs with everyone in survival mode, emailing resumes, looking for a landing spot. My deal required buy in from multiple internal teams, the union, and outside companies, including top-tier retailers and CPG suppliers. All on a brutally short schedule.

Several CPG companies were looking to expand their footprint to other retailers and provide samples to prospective customers. We had connections they wanted, so my new team created a joint promotion: anyone who used our payment service at selected locations would get a freebie CPG product placed in their retail space. Imagine the scope. We powered through that quarter, every individual focused on the goal, unified by the mission. Despite all the challenges, we hit our goal, the promotion was extended for a full year, and everyone kept their job. . A leader gets nowhere without a team. In fact, without a team, there is no such thing as a leader. A team working together to execute the vision is the legacy.

In a collaborative, nurturing setting, there is competitive value, which fosters engagement,

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productivity, innovation, and quality—not just for you, but for the business as well. Women are uniquely, but not exclusively, positioned to cultivate these differentiators.

I tell my team to forget about competing with their colleagues. You must be your own benchmark. Olympic athletes don't compete against each other; they compete with their previous performance. Even after they get the gold medal, they return to work trying to beat the record they just broke.

Discover what you want to achieve, the change you want to make, the value you want to deliver. The only real metrics are the goals you set for yourself. You must aim for goals that others dare not set.

My father-in-law once told me that a tree that bears fruit always bows down. The tree that bears no fruit might wave its branches high to signal its importance, but the tree that produces visible results has no need of such posturing. It doesn't exist for its own sake. It bends down to provide shade and shelter for others. His words constantly remind me that I am not here just to serve my own interests.

Once, after a big win for my team, one of my peers claimed credit for their work. My team was upset. I realized that, by letting someone else take credit, I wasn't just being humble, I was disappointing my team and my boss. My team was looking to me to be their advocate, and I had failed them. And the executives were looking to me to blaze the trail, to validate their decision to champion me. I had a position of responsibility, and that went both directions. I have learned that sometimes in my success I have to step beyond my own perspective and stand up for all the stakeholders.

Bring Value: Anyone Can Fill a Slot, But Those Who Bring Value Will Be Valued.

When I came back from maternity leave, I had split priorities. I had a job to do, one that I did well, but I also had a son. On one hand, I wouldn't be able to hold to the same long hours as before my son was born, coming in early and staying late. On the other hand, if I wanted to pursue my career, I still had to drive innovation, push the boundaries, and create a legacy.

The challenge before me was to make every hour count for multiple hours. My work had to show that I was worth it, that I delivered value commensurate to my expectations.

My mother has an unfaltering confidence in my ability to push beyond what I think is possible. My childhood school divided the students into four houses and staged competitions among us. One of my classmates told my mother that I was so competitive that the other teams concentrated their best candidates away from areas in which I competed to give them a better chance of winning. Any time I face a setback or an obstacle, my mother reminds me that when I do my best, I will always find a way through.

I realized that if I wasn't as present in the office as before my son was born, my work had to be omnipresent. If I couldn't physically be there as many hours as before, I had to make sure that the impact I made to the business was always there, making such a difference that my organization would be happy to accommodate a modified schedule because they knew it wouldn't affect my work. I remembered something important. It takes a team. The whole family stepped up—even my brother, busy with his

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medical studies, traveled hours when I needed help taking care of my son.

The world, consumers, and competitors are constantly changing. If you are not changing, you are losing ground. It's not about getting the next promotion; it's about developing new competencies, creating new success stories, making a tangible business impact. If you deliver value and stay relevant, advancement will come.

When I started at my current organization, HCL, as a working mother, I was hired as a team of one to market for a single industry segment. I demonstrated my value, taking nothing for granted. Four years later, I had recruited and hired fifty people and I was leading marketing for six industries.

At that time, I was given the opportunity to contribute to HCL's Red Ladder initiative, winner of the 2017 Stevie awards for Women in Business. I accepted the position to help women in technology and to pay it forward. This program now spans fifty-plus customer organizations across three continents. In my nine years at HCL, the company has grown from \$5 billion in revenue to a revenue run rate of \$10 billion in Q3 2020. I have grown with it, receiving five promotions in that time. People seek to join my team for the vision I create, to do something new, to go the extra mile and more.

***To think bigger. To be different. To bring value.
What legacy will you leave for those who follow?***