Talent Management

**An Interview with Marie-Claire Barker,
Chief Talent Officer, Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide**

EDITORS' NOTE *A native of the United Kingdom, Marie-Claire Barker has worked for Ogilvy since March 2002. She started her career in sales and marketing in the U.K. with Kimberly-Clark and Britvic Soft Drinks where she had her first exposure to training and development. She moved to Human Resources in 1995 when she joined Allied Domecq Spirits and Wine, where she spent five years and held roles in International Leadership and Management Development, Organizational Development Management, and in Corporate HR based in Canada.*

Marie-Claire Barker

COMPANY BRIEF *A subsidiary of WPP, Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide (www.ogilvy.com) is one of the largest marketing communications networks in the world, with 450-plus offices in 120 countries, specializing in advertising, relationship and interactive marketing, public relations, sales promotion, and related services. The agency services Fortune Global 500 companies, including American Express, Coca-Cola, Ford, Johnson & Johnson, IBM, Kraft, Motorola, Unilever, and Bayer. The hallmark of the agency's brand-building capabilities is 360 Degree Brand Stewardship®, a holistic approach to communications, using what is necessary from each discipline to build a brand.*

How do you define the talent strategy at Ogilvy?

In terms of our talent strategy, there are four key areas of focus, which are global because Ogilvy is a global organization.

The first focus is on our ability to attract and acquire the best talent in the industry. The second is on our ability to develop our people and strengthen our culture, which is a prominent objective in everything we do. The third is on how we retain our employees and ensure that they are motivated and committed to be here, which plays into how they are managed effectively, how they are given opportunities to grow, and how they are given the opportunity to do what they do best every day while being stretched in their assignments. The final piece of our strategy relates to our ability as leaders to measure performance and give feedback. As we look at Ogilvy & Mather today, one of the core areas for which we will hold our leaders accountable is candor, ensuring that no one is unclear as to where they stand in their career and how they are performing.

How have you communicated that strategy to Ogilvy throughout the world?

Communication has been critical and we've done it in a series of different ways. We held a series of management and leadership meetings where we pulled together senior leaders from across the globe to focus on how we move forward as an organization, the behaviors that we should be demonstrating as leaders, how we hire against those behaviors, how we develop people against them, and how we set up the planning and benchmarking of our employees against this, because the people in that room are the ones who set the culture. We need to hold them accountable for the behavior we want to roll out to drive change at Ogilvy.

You have a very diverse client base. How critical is it for the culture within Ogilvy to mirror that diversity and to maintain that inclusive environment?

It's absolutely essential for us. We're the only agency with a fully committed diversity and inclusion department. At the end of the day, it's more than race and gender. We look for diversity of all sorts, and that plays to our focus on pervasive creativity. In order for us to generate creative ideas and solutions for our clients, we have to be a business of perspectives, and if we keep hiring in our own image and going to the same places to get people, we're never going to get that diversity of perspective.

With technology affording options for employees like flex hours and working from home, how much has that impacted your work structure and have you implemented some of those options?

It's a priority for us as we move into 2010. We have a lot of people talking about work/life balance, but for Ogilvy, it's not really about balance – it is about flexibility. Personally, I have parents who are nearly 80 and a toddler who is three, so I'm never going to get balance in my life. What I need is for an organization to understand that, sometimes, I may need flexibility. So we're looking at flexibility and what we can do from a technology perspective to support people in that.

Ogilvy also has a very strong emphasis in its culture on community and corporate responsibility. How important is that to young people today?

Very. We're used to volunteering and giving back. Our professional networks are responsible for driving some of these corporate responsibility issues for us. We have a corporate volunteer day, where we offer all of our employees a day to work in a soup kitchen or volunteer at a school or help with the elderly for a day. The Working Parents Network also runs a Winter Wishes program that gives holiday gifts to underprivileged children. There are a lot of initiatives within this organization that people can get involved in, and we are very open to hearing new ideas in terms of volunteerism.

Is it challenging to put metrics in place to evaluate the impact of attracting and retaining talent?

There are many measures we can use. Year after year, we're getting more applications from those interested in our associates program. In terms of whether we're getting the best people, you just have to read in the press about the key hires we've made in the past few months, especially in our planning teams.

In terms of the retention and the commitment of our people, we do employee satisfaction surveys, and as we move into 2010, the surveys are going to reflect more of the new culture we're trying to drive, and managers will be held accountable within our performance management process for developing their employees, having development plans for each individual in their teams, and managing the commitment of the people that work for them. So we have both soft and hard data to measure progress.

With the responsibility of attracting, retaining, and developing talent, is it hard to budget your time and get it all done?

Absolutely. But I have a great team working with me in New York and across the globe, so I'm in a very advantageous position where if something needs to be done the next day, I can ask someone in another part of the world and it will be done for me while I'm sleeping. But it is a challenge. A lot of organizations are trying to do more with less and while we may not have massive teams, it does create a sense of collaboration and innovation because you have to pull together and do things differently. So it's an exciting time for us. ●