

Making a Difference

An Interview with Georgette Mosbacher,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Borghese, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Before assuming her current post, Georgette Mosbacher purchased the high-end cosmetics firm La Prairie in 1987, served as its CEO, and sold it in 1991 to Beiersdorf. She has also served as national Co-Chairman of John McCain's 2000 presidential campaign and is Co-Chair of the Republican National Committee's Finance Committee. She received a B.S. in Education from Indiana University in 1970 and is the author of two best-selling self-help books:



Georgette Mosbacher

Feminine Force: Release The Power Within To Create The Life You Deserve, and It Takes Money, Honey: A Get-Smart Guide to Total Financial Freedom.

COMPANY BRIEF Borghese (www.borghese.com) is built on a heritage that dates back to the 14th century and combines the tradition of classic Italian beauty and modern sensibility to create a wide range of color and treatment products including anti-aging skincare, daily skin maintenance, self-renewal spa care, and color cosmetics. Their innovative product line combines time-honored botanicals and cutting-edge technology to gently yet effectively address each person's individual beauty concerns.

With the different areas you are involved in from business to politics, how do you define yourself?

It's always been a problem defining myself because I have numerous interests but they're all interrelated because I have worked all my life. At the same time, I've always felt you have to give back. I grew up with a strong work ethic that made success easier but I was also taught that you shared. Whether it's working or giving back, I always try to make a difference.

I have a responsibility to step up and do what I can to make this a better world. I don't have a lot of respect for people who complain but aren't willing to do something about it.

I want to succeed at everything I do but I also know I can't succeed if the world around me isn't succeeding.

I'm someone who feels comfortable in my own skin, which is why people can't define me; I'm not out there trying to be someone or something. I just want to do well in what I do.

In an industry as competitive as cosmetics, what makes this brand special?

This is partly self-serving, because management is very important, but so are vision and consistency, especially with a brand. With respect to Borghese, it's the quality, which we have never compromised on even though we have diverse distribution. We have a line in Costco, but the quality is the best of the best.

It's about being consistent with quality and message, and doing what you say. Don't overpromise.

We're not trying to be everywhere. I run the company to be profitable and there is a devotion to the brand and an understanding of it to which we remain true.

I also hire the best people and pay them well. You are as good as the people around you, and as a result, they're devoted, and they work hard and do a good job because they like where they're working.

With so much need out there today, is it tough to decide where to focus your philanthropic efforts?

I believe that charity begins at home, so I don't get involved in charities overseas or in those that aren't U.S.-centric.

It is important to focus and I have been drawn to our military. We have been involved in one war or another for a long time with an all-volunteer army in which only one percent of the population serves, so it's not high profile. But we have a moral responsibility to take care of these men and women and their families. So I have focused my time on helping our veterans and their families.

Is it tough to remain optimistic today with such a flawed political system?

It's all about leadership and there is our crisis – if you don't have someone with a vision who is prepared to lead and inspire, you're not going to get far.

We need someone to lead us to accomplish the things we have to do – and that's true around the world. Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, Golda Meir, and Lee Kuan Yew are leaders that had a vision and made a difference.

It's frustrating but we will survive this, and maybe it will mean reaching the abyss for that leader to emerge.

Is there more opportunity for women in business today?

Certainly. Today, women are every bit as educated, capable, and ambitious as men.

However, I have been involved in politics for 25 years and women still do not understand that politics is about money; it's the reason we only have 7 percent women in Congress. Until they're willing to write those checks, they will never be players in politics and until they can be players in politics, they can't affect change.

In terms of the corporate world, women who do get to the top as CEOs don't bring women with them. They blame men, but if you look at the kind of articles being written that stereotype women, women are writing them.

Women are also still not as comfortable with money issues. If a deal comes across a man's desk with a guy he almost punched out the night before, he reaches out to that guy as if nothing happened; a woman will stop speaking to a man for the rest of her life on a perceived slight. This is what we aren't willing to talk about.

I still go out to raise money politically – a man will give me a \$1,000 check and maybe a woman will give me a \$20 check. Yet we still don't understand why we're not part of that dialogue.

Despite all you have achieved, you have maintained your company culture.

I'm a redneck who lives on Fifth Avenue. Whatever success I've had is a result of the values that my family instilled in me. I'm a product of a one-parent home, growing up on the edge of poverty, but no one told me I couldn't do things. They told me there was dignity in any work. So I've never been afraid to work. That's also part of my success in fund-raising – I don't take it personally when someone says no to me.

There are those who suggest the U.S. is losing its competitive edge. Are you concerned?

No. I've been doing business in China for over a decade and when I hear people say, China is going to pass us, I say, China has some real problems.

The only thing that is threatening is if we lock this country down and don't allow the talented to come here, and we make it difficult for entrepreneurs to start businesses. We should not regulate to the point where you can't start a business at your kitchen table.

So if we can get government out of our way, we will still be the greatest nation on earth. ●