

## A Creative Business

An Interview with Rochelle B. Lazarus, Chairman Emeritus, Ogilvy

**EDITORS' NOTE** Shelly Lazarus is chairman emeritus of Ogilvy and served as chairman of the company from 1997 to 2012. She rose through the ranks of Ogilvy assuming positions of increasing responsibility in the management of the company, including president of O&M Direct North America, Ogilvy & Mather New York, and Ogilvy & Mather North America. She became worldwide CEO in 1996 and chairman in 1997. Lazarus has been a frequent industry honoree, including being selected Woman of the Year in 1994 by Advertising Women of New York, being honored by Women in Communications with their Matrix Award in 1995, being named Business Woman of the Year by the New York City Partnership in 1996, and selected as Woman of the Year in 2002 by the Direct Marketing Association. She has appeared in Fortune magazine's annual ranking of America's 50 Most Powerful Women in Business. She was the first woman to receive Columbia Business School's Distinguished Leader in Business Award, as well as the Advertising Educational Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award. She was inducted into the American Advertising Federation Hall of Fame in 2013 and is also a Hall of Fame member of the DMA, the American Marketing Association, and Crain's New York Business. Lazarus serves on many boards including those of Merck, The Blackstone Group, Rockefeller Capital Management, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, Partnership for New York City, CECF, World Wildlife Fund, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. She is a member of the Board of Overseers of Columbia Business School, where she received her MBA, and served for five years as chairman of the Board of Trustees of Smith College, her alma mater. She is a member of Advertising Women of New York, The Committee of 200, Council on Foreign Relations, and Women's Forum, Inc. She has also served as chairman of the American Association of Advertising Agencies.



Rochelle B. Lazarus

**COMPANY BRIEF** Ogilvy (ogilvy.com) has been producing iconic, culture-changing marketing campaigns since the day its founder David Ogilvy opened up shop in 1948. Today, Ogilvy is an award-winning integrated creative network that makes brands matter for Fortune

Global 500 companies as well as local businesses across 131 offices in 83 countries. The company creates experiences, design and communications that shape every aspect of a brand's needs through six core capabilities: Brand Strategy, Advertising, Customer Engagement and Commerce, PR and Influence, Digital Transformation, and Partnerships. Ogilvy is a WPP company.

**The world is fighting a public health crisis that is impacting all countries and their citizens. The pandemic is being fought on the front lines by health-care workers, first responders, those providing supplies and meals, transportation workers and all other essential workers. What do you say to these true leaders and heroes that are risking their lives to protect others?**

I think that they are remarkable. I am on the board of NewYork-Presbyterian and their people are the true heroes. They are doing things that I don't think people ever believed was possible. They worked long hours, took great risks and worked around their concerns

for their families' health. In so many instances, they brought such humanity when they were the only people that sick patients were interacting with, many times until a person's death. The fact that they were all willing to play that role and to provide the emotional support needed was a remarkable thing to see take place. I also give the leadership of the hospital great credit because they communicated with all of their employees every day and told them how important the work they were doing was and how much appreciated they were. In addition, I believe that the way the community supported them at 7:00 PM every night by clapping and banging on pots and pans to acknowledge their efforts gave them the energy to keep going and showed how New York was at its best during this crisis.

**When you look at the challenges facing New York with the pandemic, issues of social injustice, racism and economic uncertainty, how concerned are you about New York's future and what needs to be done to make sure New York recovers and rebuilds from these crises?**

I am very concerned. However, when you think back to April when New York was the epicenter of this crisis and I was getting e-mails

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from people in Europe asking if I was okay as there was a sense that people were dying in the streets, and you look at where we are now with the lowest infection rate and we are advising other cities on how to handle this virus, I think it is very representative of New York. We lived through it, we were undaunted, and I think that if determination and resilience alone can get us back to something that feels close to normal, I think it will.

The key to so much of this is making people feel safe which requires a vaccine or having medicines to help treat the virus. I think it is going to be a tough road back and I do not think that individual philanthropy is the answer. The size and scale of the problem requires a government-sized response and, at the end of the day, the means required are going to have to be provided, at least in part, by the government.

**How critical is it that partisanship and politics do not get in the way of action and solutions and doing what is best for the country?**

This is a major concern. I was very heartened by the first Federal government response when you got the feeling for the first time in years that they were going to come together and solve this problem. As I look at the way the next response is being addressed, it is concerning to see the partisanship taking place. I think it is clear what the public is expecting from the government and I am hopeful that something will be done and they will do the right thing. I am an optimist, but if I look at it realistically, I am not sure how long this is going to take.

**Throughout your career, you have been focused on diversity and inclusion. How critical is it for companies today to build diverse and inclusive workforces in order to bring different thoughts and experiences to the table when making business decisions?**

I think the private sector has a huge role to play in addressing issues of diversity, but it has to go beyond flowery statements. The question today is not if business is committed, but rather what they are going to do about it. When I was CEO, my message was that if we really wanted diversity, I didn't want to hear about it – I wanted to see it. The talent pool is there, it is just a matter of whether you are going to go after it and insist that it happen. We are at a point where you have to just do it and make it

happen. At the end of the day, it is about talent and you need great talent to be successful, but the talent pool is broad and diverse enough that we should get there.

**Do you feel it is a responsibility for companies today to be purpose-driven and focused on more than just the bottom line?**

I think for any company it is part of the contract to be a part of the community where you do business and I think this has to pass beyond just writing a check to an organization. I think it has to go to the very heart of your business and be conscious and deliberate. I am very supportive of the statement that came from the Business Roundtable about this responsibility which I believe the market expects and demands today. At the end of the day, it is simply good business to feel a responsibility that goes beyond profit-making.

**Ogilvy, a company that you led for many years, has an entrepreneurial culture and is nimble and able to change. How critical is this during these unprecedented times and how proud are you to see the way Ogilvy's workforce has adapted the way they work to meet the needs of this time?**

I think it is amazing to see how the Ogilvy team started to work remotely and continued to serve clients. I think it is difficult to work remotely in a creative business since there is something magical that happens when you actually come together around a table with different ideas and perspectives. We have shown that it can work remotely, but it is something we are still getting used to. The thing that I am most proud of is that Ogilvy has always been client-led. It is organized by clients, people who are promoted are those that do the best work for clients, and we judge ourselves by how we help our clients move their businesses forward. Ogilvy has continued to do that remotely as clients themselves continue to adapt to this new way of working.

**How important is it for companies to continue to support their marketing initiatives during challenging times?**

It always used to hurt me when marketing budgets were easily cut, but sales and revenue lines were untouched. I always used to tell business leaders that if you are going to cut your marketing spend, you have to believe that sales are going to be reduced or you shouldn't be investing in it in the first place. At a time like this when we are all remote, brands are more

important than ever because during times of uncertainty, there are certain brands you just trust. At a time like this, it is critically important to reinforce the trustworthiness of a brand you believe in.

**Ogilvy has always been focused on attracting creative talent. With the focus on technology, digital and data analytics, has the type of person and skill sets Ogilvy is hiring changed?**

That is a fascinating question. I think that creative and creativity are often defined in too narrow of a way. In my experience, creative people have ideas that people who think in a linear way will never have. They are just wired differently and if you give them any business problem, it is amazing what they will come up with. Ogilvy has been hiring engineers for more than a decade. When we pair them with creative people, and we do, they come up with amazing solutions that are wildly “creative.”

**You have a long history of being engaged in the Partnership for New York City. What has made the Partnership so effective and how critical is its work for the future success of New York City?**

The Partnership is a wondrous organization because it brings all of the business community of New York City together. There is no other convening organization that can do this. My experience over all these years is that leaders participate because they truly care about the city where they live and work and want what is best for New York City. The Partnership is fortunate to have a leader like Kathy Wylde who is a force of nature and brings us together to address key issues that will impact not just our businesses, but the future lives of our children and grandchildren.

**You mentioned that you are an optimistic person. What advice would you give to young people starting their careers during this challenging and uncertain time?**

It is clearly a tough time to be coming out of school. I tell them that we have been through very difficult times before and have come out of them and we will come out of this time as well. I advise them to get whatever experience they can right now and to not focus on what the natural career progressions have been in the past. If you are offered an internship or any opportunity to gain experience, it will serve you well as we all hope and try to get back to some kind of new normal in the future. ●