

What It Takes To Be a Top Marketer

Howard Gross, Managing Director of Boyden Global Executive Search in New York, is quoted in a Brandweek.com article, on needed qualities to being a successful Marketing executive.

By Elaine Wong, Of BRANDWEEK.COM



NEW YORK - (Brandweek.com) - The Procter & Gamble headquarters in downtown Cincinnati is known locally as the Two Towers. Built in 1985, the twin, octagon-topped buildings are sheathed in untold tons of white limestone and soar 17 stories into the Midwestern sky. From the outside, a visitor might guess that P&G could be a prosperous insurance company, but the appearance is deceptive. The company owes its 172-year history to fostering a culture of innovation and that means its legacy depends on risk-takers and innovators, albeit ones that work within a somewhat rigid corporate framework.

Years ago, Suzanne Watson thrived in a similar environment that was bound by inelastic rules, but rewarded improvisation and quick thinking: the basketball court. Watson was an "Orange Woman," a guard on the NCAA Division I women's basketball team at Syracuse University. Now she applies those qualities to one of the highest profile jobs in marketing—managing P&G's Tide brand.

Recruiter Howard Gross, managing director of Boyden Global Executive Search in New York, says people in Watson's position need to have qualities that are similar to a successful athlete, including being "comfortable being in the limelight, and being held accountable, and, most importantly, being able to tolerate pressure."

Ed Tazzia, a recruiting exec at Gundersen

Partners in Detroit, agrees. "The marketing in [the P&G] environment is the driver of business," he says. "In other companies, it's driven by operations, finance &hellip where the primary driver is the management of risks: 'How much can I charge? Who should get a credit card?' In packaged goods, no matter if it's detergent or fine fragrances or health and beauty aids, the consumer packaged goods companies are driven by marketing people."

Watson, now 34 and a mother of two, still has more than a trace of the confidence derived from being a star athlete. On a recent February morning, Watson emerged from an elevator at P&G headquarters sporting a pair of leopard-print pumps and a snug, black turtleneck. That day, she exhibited the ability to think on her feet in several instances and admitted that her dynamism, sometimes, has its downside. "I'm so energized by seeing change and moving things forward that sometimes," Watson says, "I'm eager to move a bit faster than my feet can carry me."

Watson needs all the mental bandwidth she can muster. Tide has some \$3.5 billion in annual sales, but growth is threatened by the economy—consumers are tempted to switch to cheaper laundry detergents. For the 52 weeks ending Jan. 25, Tide topped the liquid laundry detergent category with \$1.3 billion in sales, but its other variants, such as Tide Simple Pleasures, fell 43 percent, or \$36 million in sales, per IRI. Private label posted much bigger gains, up 23.4 percent in dollar

sales, or \$115 million, for the same period.

“People feel comfortable with Tide,” concedes Paul Leinwand, vp with consulting firm Booz & Co., Chicago. “But a good percentage of people [using a less expensive brand] might just as easily say, ‘That product experience was fine, my clothes are clean, I saved money.’” Like any marketer, Watson is presented with an infinite array of media choices—TV, print, social media, radio, mobile, etc.—that makes supporting a brand like Tide arguably much harder than it was 10 years ago.

This morning, Watson’s workday starts in a seventh-floor “huddle room.” A space big enough for only four people, a table and an erasable marker board, these glass-enclosed conference rooms are all over P&G’s marketing floors. Just around the corner is Watson’s workstation—bare for the most part, save for a finger painting by her daughter, Naomi, and some Tide mock-up boxes lying around. (At P&G, side-by-side cubicles are meant to encourage “open collaboration” among colleagues). In the huddle, Watson is sitting with fellow P&Ger Rodrigo Coronel, her new digital mentor. Watson has never met Coronel before, which makes this a good time to outline her recession-era vision for the brand, one that depends on linking Tide with social good. The idea is human life requires four basic elements—and you can count on Tide for one of them.

“Food, water, shelter—and clothing,” Watson chirps, moments after the meeting, ticking off survival requirements on her fingers. “Clothing is one necessity Tide can deliver on,” she explains. “When things are bad, food, water and shelter are essentials. But being able to put a fresh T-shirt over your head? That is a small miracle, a ray of hope that things are going to be OK.” Just for emphasis, Watson holds a big jug of Tide aloft.

The idea of bolstering branded goods with philanthropy isn’t new, but it’s an increasingly

popular option in a down economy. During this year’s Academy Awards, Frito-Lay ran ads for its TrueNorth nut brand, spotlighting people who have started community service projects. Kellogg’s Super Bowl ad was all about encouraging moms to nominate local playing fields for renovation. “With President Obama we are ushering in an era of service. Community service is bigger than green,” says Simon Sinek, president of Sinek Partners, a branding consultancy.

Still, when consumers are in penny-pinching mode, such an argument is hardly a cure-all. Coronel knows as much. In an economic downturn, he says, consumers aren’t just choosing between “Tide and the competition,” but “Tide and a fancy dinner, or Tide and something else.” As such, Watson and Tide are both looking for new ways to talk about value—including via digital platforms, which is what Coronel is here to discuss.

Watson seems more excited than daunted by the prospect. “One of the things I have a lot of passion and energy for is, ‘How do we connect with the consumer?’” she says.

Watson’s kinetic energy is no act. Watson’s head, however, is all business. After earning her MBA at the University of Michigan, she joined P&G as an assistant brand manager for Era in 2001. She never left. She also never forgot the aptitudes of the basketball court, so you might say that Watson now plays every position for Tide’s team. As associate marketing director, she’s responsible for everything from marketing and research to focus groups and finance.



And Tide is more than an important, heritage brand (see “Six Decades of Suds,” below); it’s also a farm team for P&G leadership. A.G. Lafley, the company’s CEO since 2000, had stewardship of the brand in his early years. So, too, did Susan Arnold, P&G’s first female company president, who recently retired. Watson’s supervisor, Alessandro Tosolini, also came from Tide, and he has since assumed oversight of North American fabric care.

It’s a position that requires an ability to think ahead, while also navigating the present. As Watson puts it: “It’s a balance of the fundamentals with pushing that envelope towards innovation.”

Such innovation during her tenure has come via variants like Tide Coldwater (energy efficiency through the use of cold-water cleaning), Tide with Febreze Freshness (a union of two of P&G’s most successful brands) and, most recently, Tide Total Care, launched in partnership with sibling fabric softener Downy.

Though many of those innovations involved cross-brand synergy (i.e., adding Febreze or another P&G product to the mix), Watson’s current marketing challenge is more about simplifying the message behind the core one. “I really try to distill it to its simplest form, which is, ‘What is the consumer need?’”

Right now, she knows the need is stretching the family budget. Though her past launches came in advance of the official recession, she’s been working on that theme for quite some time. For example, Tide Total Care, launched last summer, claims to keep clothes looking new even after 30 cycles through the washing machine. “Consumers right now, more than ever, need ways and solutions to care for their clothes and have them last longer,” Watson says. These days, she adds, Total Care helps moms “make more economical decisions on the outfits she and her family wear everyday.” And with Tide in general, she says, the driving force of the marketing message must continue to center

on making a difference—palpable, financial—in people’s lives.

Watson has been pondering this idea for much of the day, even during what passes for lunch: a nibble on a chip and a few bites of a turkey sandwich, hold the mayo, no tomato. Thus far, skeptics of her vision for Tide have asked her a question that, admittedly, has no easy answer: “Tide is a detergent,” she says of what cynics tell her. “How can it help people? C’mon.”

Watson’s attempt to answer that question is the “Loads of Hope” program, a vision that’s been honed into a much-anticipated 30-second commercial spot by Saatchi & Saatchi. The screening was supposed to be at 1 p.m., until a technical glitch in the video conference room. Watson’s 1:30 appointment stayed put, a half-hour agency summit recap with Tide brand manager Mark Christenson, who promises: “Saatchi’s going to make a sizzling video.”

By 2 p.m., Watson and Christenson take seats in a chilly conference room, facing a screen where three agency execs from Saatchi are in virtual attendance. Reps from pr firm DeVries and Starcom MediaVest Group, Tide’s media buying agency, are listening on the line. As soon as Pete Carter, the advertising development director on Tide, takes his seat, Watson begins: “As we think about this video, keep in mind there are over 5 million Americans displaced from their homes each year due to natural disasters. It deprives them of basic human needs such as fresh clothing,” she says. Roll tape.

The spot opens with unsettling footage of homes flattened to the ground by a hurricane; block after block of soaked debris and torn-off roofs. Then, suddenly, into the picture backs a gleaming new tractor-trailer painted in Tide’s signature orange. The trailer, it turns out, is a rolling laundromat, equipped with 20 washer/drier units, interspersed by shelves stocked with huge jugs of Tide. “Every year, millions of Americans face disaster,” intones the narrator.



“That’s why we created the Tide Loads of Hope program. A free laundry service that provides clean clothes to families affected by disasters.”

The spot shifts over to footage of bedraggled but genuinely grateful people picking up their laundry the truck. “It feels so good to be able to know that I’ve got clean clothes,” says one woman, her face creased with emotion. “You don’t know how very basic essentials are,” offers a second, “until you have none.”

Suddenly, Watson’s claim that Tide is behind one of life’s essentials doesn’t seem so far-fetched.

Tide’s Loads of Hope program originally started as a charity effort to serve victims of Hurricane Katrina. (That truck, incidentally, has done more than 30,000 loads of laundry to date.) This month, however, Loads of Hope has spurred new packaging for the Tide bottle—the screw-cap is a bright yellow—and a portion of sales now benefit victims of natural disasters.

Even cynics might have a tough time arguing against the benefits of clean clothes when your house has been blown down the street. As a piece of marketing, it’s clearly affected people in this conference room.

“You guys feel good about that?” Watson asks when the video stops. “Yes, I like that a lot,” says the DeVries rep over the phone. “It nearly made me cry. It’s good,” says Mandy Earnshaw, the Tide relationship brand manager. “Triple that emotion,” adds Christenson. “I like it a lot,” Carter says. After some discussion of the bottle color, Carter brings the debate to its crux. “The question is,” he says, “Are people going to be touched and moved to want to buy Tide?” Watson, after a pause to confirm with those gathered around her, says she thinks it will.

Judging by her reputation, that’s not wishful thinking, either. Colleagues who work with

Watson say she’s unafraid to point out inconvenient truths. Christenson witnessed it from his first day. The two were on their way to a progress meeting with a marketing partner, and “Suzanne was about two seconds walking in there when she spoke very candidly about what our partner could be doing better,” he says. “She got straight to the point. She was pushing him: ‘This is Tide and we have expectations,’ but at the same time, she did that in a very positive and clear way, and came back and did the same thing on our end. It was a very two-way, straightforward conversation. I can’t believe how quickly we got to the heart of the matter.”

“As a rule,” says Kash Shaikh, Tide’s external relations manager who’s worked with Watson for nearly four years, “what Suzanne does is take in advice and coaching from people at senior and junior levels, and multidigest their recommendations, and [then] is able to internalize and balance that with her gut, instincts and perception.”

Another key to Watson’s efficacy on the job is optimism—marketing isn’t a field for crêpe hangers. Rather than sensing doom in widespread layoffs and a drop in consumer spending, Watson sees the current times as an opportunity. The detergent category, she insists, “is in a healthy state of growth.” How’s that? Cultural trends like eco-friendliness and the development of new cleaning technologies are giving what used to be just laundry a chance to be trendy in the consumer’s mind. Watson cites Tide’s Swash—a line of sprays and atomizers that refresh and uncrease clothing without a formal washing—as an example.

Whether Loads of Hope will, in the end, succeed is anyone’s guess. But for now, the day is fading outside the seventh floor windows, and Watson (who’s managed only a few bites of a now-soggy turkey sandwich in between her incessant phone calls, meetings and general running around) is clearly pleased with what she’s seen today. Though perhaps her colleagues don’t notice it, Watson has a curious habit of picking up Tide bottles left

around the office and looking at them lovingly, almost as though they're babies.

Which, of course, for a marketer, they are. "Whenever I'm in a decision mode and there are different pros and cons, and things we're weighing," she says, "it always comes down to this: 'If you do right by the consumer, you will always do right.' It has served me well in my career."

Six Decades of Suds

Sometime in the early summer of 1945, Procter & Gamble executives gathered for a top-secret demonstration of a product that had been in the lab for years. Known internally as Project X, it was one part alkyl sulfate and three parts sodium tripolyphosphate. Project X was the answer to one of the most nagging household problems of modern times: The fact that ordinary soap did not wash clothes well in hard water, which is what most American homes of the period had. The fluffy, granular product demonstrated in the room that day was the world's first successful synthetic detergent. And once the marketing folks got a hold of it, Project X had a new name: Tide.



Though Tide is still heralded as an historic chemical breakthrough—and indeed, it was—marketing is what put Tide on the map. Realizing that competitors Lever Brothers and Colgate were seeking a similar game-changing product, P&G execs sped up the R&D while shrewdly timing Tide's 1946 release with the exploding postwar popularity of the home washing machine. P&G marketers quietly inked deals with several manufacturers to include a box of Tide inside every new washer shipped. (Such deals, today, are forbidden by the Federal Trade Commission.)

Though nobody's sure where the name "Tide" came from, the vivid orange box and bull's-eye logo were adopted early, and have stayed, with a few minor tweaks, ever since. Early marketing billed Tide as "a Washday Miracle" that would get clothes "cleaner than soap" could. The slogan "Oceans of Suds"—required to explain the Tide name in the early

days—eventually gave way to more modern ones, including "Cleans down to the fiber" and "Tide's in … Dirt's out."

By the time the 1950s rolled around, Tide had cornered a 30 percent share of the laundry market. It's been the No. 1 selling detergent since.

—Robert Klara