

Talent Talks with WXN & BOYDEN

An interview with Mélanie Dunn - Global CEO, Cossette



COSSETTE GLOBAL CEO, Mélanie Dunn, believes there is nothing stronger than corporate culture. An established industry leader behind the communications powerhouse, Mélanie cites real-time adaptation, team bench strength and aligned corporate values as critical factors for individual and organization success. Boyden's Sébastien Zuchowski and Chantal Hevey sat down with Mélanie to talk leadership, talent, and why true diversity can't take shape without a pivotal culture change.

BOYDEN: What would you say are the cornerstones of your success?

MÉLANIE: I would not be where I am today if my organization's culture and values were not aligned with mine.

At Cossette, I worked in several departments and occupied different positions which allowed me to grow in new ways. I also believe in the importance of surrounding yourself with good people.

A key here is to understand your own strengths and weaknesses and how to work with colleagues that magnify those strengths and offset any weaknesses. I have always stayed true to these beliefs.

BOYDEN: Engaging talent is critical to achieving success. How do you ensure to engage all generations of talents?

MÉLANIE: We place more emphasis on a person's personality and leadership qualities than on their belonging to a certain generation. We hire from all generations. What we have realized is that your generation does not really define your profile.

You can be a Gen Xer with Millennial characteristics and vice versa. Individuality and diversity are therefore all the more important. This concept is also key when bringing brands to the market as we stopped targeting large homogeneous groups and instead focus on individual behaviours.

“What motivates me is how much we have yet to accomplish.”

BOYDEN: As you look at the sector and the leadership landscape, is enough being done to drive real change and move towards greater diversity?

MÉLANIE: What motivates me is how much we have yet to accomplish. We had a long time to think about how we encourage women to be more ambitious, help in their career development and in motivational programming. But this phase has run its course as it's now up to organizations to change and adapt.

Quotas have helped us gain a lot of ground but there is a reason why women are not selected above the quota limit, and that is due to board and organizational culture.

Boards need to pivot towards being authentic when it comes to attracting diverse talent and make changes within the organization instead of pushing quotas.

BOYDEN: How does gender diversity fit within Cossette mission and within your leadership team?

MÉLANIE: I feel a responsibility on our part to ensure that our brands express themselves by realistically representing today's population - the people we see and the subjects in our advertising, social media, and websites.

In order to express brands and still manage to offer a quality and creative product that remains realistic, you need diversity. And the only way to obtain this balance is to have a diverse team that produces the work.

“You have to accept that there is no status quo or certainty; it's a world of adaptations.”

Thus, if our people don't accurately represent the population, they will not be able to help a brand become relevant to today's target markets.

BOYDEN: You are leading in the era of disruption. How do you ensure Cossette continues to evolve in light of constant change and competition?

MÉLANIE: We are in the business of communications, marketing, and media where innovation is constantly present. What we are doing for our clients today is totally different from what we were doing just a year ago, wherein lies the importance of adapting to change in real time.

The ability to always question is key. The time of five-year plans has come and gone. Changes in technology, new possibilities, personal transformations and political shifts have assured this.

At Cossette, we are making important changes in the way that we operate our organization by turning towards a more agile methodology. It really emphasizes the real-time adaptation of processes against up-and-coming challenges.

BOYDEN: Does it feel as if you're going through a constant state of renewal?

MÉLANIE: Yes, but at the same time the reality is that there is no longer an ending nor a beginning. The hamster wheel is always spinning, that is why you must appreciate the present moment.

BOYDEN: How does that translate in your leadership style?

MÉLANIE: You have to accept that there is no status quo or certainty; it's a world of adaptations. Surround yourself with people that are comfortable with change. My expectations towards my employees must also change. I myself have to adapt to new realities and trust my team.

BOYDEN: Is there more proximity in those moments?

MÉLANIE: Yes, I think that's a good point, genuine and honest relationships favour a climate of change, of asking questions and of transformation.

Leadership that's aligned with this culture helps so that there is acceptance that mistakes will happen because everything is changing so quickly but also of generosity towards the new reality.

BOYDEN: What advice would you give someone striving to lead?

MÉLANIE: It is important to make informed choices before taking your next step. Seek an organization where harmony exists between company culture and what you want to accomplish in your career.

There is nothing more difficult than going against a culture, especially for a leader, but nothing easier than being yourself at work and feeling like you can grow in a natural and authentic way.

About the series:

Talent Talks with WXN & Boyden is a feature series highlighting leadership, talent, and diversity discussions with top leaders of today. The series focuses on topics and themes with a purpose to inspire women and our diverse community to lead. Talent Talks also appears on WXN website.

Women's Executive Network (WXN) is a leading organization dedicated to advancement and recognition of women in management, executive, professional, and board roles.

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A Principal and founding member of Boyden's Montreal office, Chantal Hevey is an industry expert recruiting in a variety of industries, with a special emphasis on technology and life sciences.