



Meet... Jennifer Remling

Jennifer Remling, Global Chief People Officer, WPP in conversation with Stephanie Cornell, Head of People Communications & Engagement, WPP

Hello, and welcome to WPP TV, a channel for our people to share their creativity, insights and expertise. I'm excited to be joined today by Jennifer Remling, WPP's new Global Chief People Officer. Hi, Jen. How are you?

Good. How are you?

Good. Excited to have you here.

Thank you.

So, you've been with us for about two months now. What are your first impressions?

Well, I spent my first couple of months listening to our people and to the Ex-Co. And I actually had an opportunity to spend some time with our board. I couldn't have asked for a better onboarding. I think my first week was the Global Ex-Co. And I spent a lot of time digging into the employee data from our pulse surveys and learning what our people want across the network. So it's been an incredible experience.

It's great that you actually had a really deep insight into the business before starting, because you've obviously spent a lot of time at several WPP agencies, including AKQA, Essence, and, of course most recently, GroupM.

Yes.

How do you think that experience is going to shape and impact your new role?

Yeah, it's really interesting. I think-- I was with AKQA in 2011, 2012. And I was there when WPP acquired AKQA, so I sort of experienced that side of it. And then I joined Essence just post acquisition, in 2016, and so kind of saw a company that was smaller and high growing, and then went to GroupM, which was a network of quite a few agencies, sort of a microcosm of WPP. So I think that experience was going to help shape how I shape the people strategy.

Yeah. Well, I mean, you're a fantastic case study for Career Explorer, which we launched earlier this year, to make it easier for our people to move between agencies. Tell us a bit about the ambition of the initiative and if it's something that you're actively encouraging more people to take advantage of.

Yeah, I think it's incredibly important, when you think about our scale as a multinational company, the kinds of career experiences that you can have just within WPP. So we want to create a way and a mechanism for people to experience that and to plug into it.

I think, under Mark's leadership, WPP has changed dramatically over the last three years, really encouraging that. And I think there's more we can do to help facilitate it.

So, I'm going to ask you to take a step back and look at WPP from a bird's eye view. As we head into 2022, what do you think is the biggest opportunity for us from a people perspective?

Well, so if we go back to Career Explorer, I'd say sort of having that as a beacon and then looking at the employee data from our pulse surveys. The three areas that people really wanted us to focus on is having employees feel like they're invested in, like they have career growth and mobility opportunities, and that they're having career conversations. So that's really shaped our people strategy for '22.

I just came out of a leadership-- people team leadership offsite this week, and we really want to focus on the mechanisms to help-- if you think about Career Explorer, how do we create like a career navigator, so people can figure out how to-- like a career journey roadmap. So if I'm an associate creative director and I want to become a creative director, what are the skills, and knowledge, and learning opportunities that I need to progress as a creative director, or if I want to maybe switch to like being a strategist or if I want to go into media.

So, we want to create a way for our employees to understand how to navigate that. And then Career Explorer is the mobility mechanism for how you raise your hand and get into the process.

So, we've talked a little bit about our listening strategy and the importance of listening to our people. So, if we're to look at the most recent survey data, what are some of the other big areas that we should focus on and how will we do that?

Yeah, I would say the other big one, in addition to careers, is having a sense of belonging. And people want to feel like they are working in inclusive cultures. And so, we're rolling out programs to drive that, through an inclusive leadership program that we just recently did. And we're going to be building on that with additional programs in '22.

So, my next question, a bit of a hot topic, hybrid working. I'd love to hear your take on it and also what opportunities you think it presents not just to us as a business, but also from a personal perspective.

Yeah, I think COVID was really hard. And literally overnight we started to work from home around the world, which is-- it was just massive. And I think we were all shocked at how well it went. But I think over time it's worn on people, because the thing I've noticed is, getting back into the office a few days a week, you have to schedule every interaction, when you're working from home 100% of the time.

So, there's so many missed opportunities for conversations and that you just-- I didn't even really realise until I started to come back in, and the energy that you get from other people. But on the same side, not losing what we got in terms of flexibility from COVID, I think there were some silver linings that happened for people in terms of how

they started to rethink how they did their lives, spending more time with children, or more time exercising, or learning to cook, or--

I've talked to many people, like we were having a dinner last night and some of the women that were at dinner were talking about new things that they learned about cooking and taking care of themselves. And so, we don't want to lose that. We want to bring more up, keep more balance in our lives.

So, I think for the business it's also been incredible, because I believe you've had-- we developed really intimate conversations over video, seeing people's children in the background, their cats, their dogs. I think we started to kind of see each other as human beings, through that lens.

So, I think going to a hybrid model, I think we can kind of bring all of that together, where you can kind of get the best of both. So, I'm excited about-- it's not going to be easy. I think we're all trying to find our way. But I think it's an exciting time.

Absolutely. And you talked just then about learning new skills in lockdown. Is there any skill that you learned that you'd be happy to share with us?

Yeah, it's interesting. So, I did do a lot more cooking and started to-- I like to cook. And I don't usually have a lot of time for it. So, we learned new techniques. So, we did sous vide, where you-- it's like the bath. It's sort of like a French technique.

Yeah, I've heard of it.

So, we started to do it-- because you had more time, so we started playing with different things and trying new recipes, and so that was a lot of fun.

That's great. So now I'm just going to finish up with a couple more personal questions. Do you have a mantra, something that you, maybe, frequently repeat to yourself if you're faced with a particularly challenging moment at work, say?

Breathe.

Yeah. [CHUCKLES] That's an important one.

I think it's really important to stay centered and calm. And if I find myself getting stressed or in a moment of a tough conversation, I try to just take a minute and center again. And I do a lot of meditation work. So, when I have time, I do walking meditations, just to focus on gratitude, and being grateful, and focusing on what I want in my life. And that keeps me pretty centered.

And that's important.

So yeah.

And for my final question, is there anyone in particular who's maybe impacted your career or who you've drawn particular inspiration from?

Yeah, so it's really interesting. So, for me, I would say this is a little bit full circle. In 2012, I was working with a career coach. And this was when I was at AKQA. And he asked me, are there any women out there that aspire, you've seen, that you think would be somebody that you would like to emulate? And Angela Ahrendts is one of them.

And I don't know if you know, but-- I don't know if everybody knows, but she's on our board. And at the time she was the CEO of Burberry and then she went on to be the head of retail for Apple. And she-- the thing I liked about her was that she took-- she was very much about mindfulness and taking care of her employees. And she was also very creative in how she approached her work at Burberry.

And so, I drew inspiration from that, and then I got to meet her a few weeks ago. And she was all of that and more. So that was pretty exciting. And I would say, my career coach, really, it's very much the same point in time. We really started to shape through what I wanted to do in my career, and how was I going to get there, and who did I need to be, what did I need to learn. So that was a huge thing for me.

Well, thank you so much for your time, Jennifer. And thank you so much for sharing.

Thank you. Thanks for having me.