

Inspiring Women

Episode 48: Marie Lamont

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership and over the years, I've come to learn one thing, women need women and not just any women, but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at inspiringwomen.show or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening, and I hope you will be inspired.

Laurie McGraw:

Today on Inspiring Women, we're speaking with Marie Lamont. Now, Marie is the President and Chief Operating Officer of Inteliquet. Now Inteliquet is a technology and analytics company that helps identify and qualify patients for clinical trials. And Marie is the leader of this organization, having been 25 years in the global biotech space. She previously had her own consultancy agency that was an executive consultancy and advisory firm.

Laurie McGraw:

She also has led multiple units and businesses and various companies, including being a senior executive at Genzyme, a Sanofi company, for many years. There, she was global head of business strategy and commercial operations, leading a \$3 billion unit of Genzyme. And she was doing that while also leading some humanitarian efforts, ensuring that needed medications to get to certain populations. She also led a unit that grew from a hundred million dollars to \$2 billion during the time of the Sanofi acquisition. Marie comes from a degree at Saint Michael's College. She has done executive education at Kellogg and Harvard. And Marie, I am so excited to be talking to you this morning.

Marie Lamont:

Thank you so much. I'm super glad to be here.

Laurie McGraw:

Great. Well, Marie, I always start Inspiring Women, really just trying to understand, what are you doing now? What is your day to day? What is your professional job look like today?

Marie Lamont:

Oh, that's a great question. Well, as president and COO, we're an interesting intermix of what we provide for services. So if you think that as a solutions provider for cancer centers, we have folks that are supporting and engaging with cancer centers to help them match patients to clinical trials. And it sounds really easy, but it's really complicated. We use AI and machine learning to

convert unstructured data into structured data and puzzle piece patients together with clinical trial protocols.

Marie Lamont:

And so, I have a real small team. We're a virtual company, 35 people, and we service a million cancer patients across the United States. And what I think is really interesting, is our goal is always to make clinical trials as a care option for patients and their physicians. And so my day to day is, interacting with the teams that are talking to cancer centers.

Marie Lamont:

But on the other side, we look at all of the data in an aggregated de-identified way to partner with biopharma so they can make decisions about molecules to invest in, clinical trials that they need to develop to bring therapeutics to market. And what I find so compelling when I do this stuff day to day is, the only way to get novel therapeutics to the market, is through clinical trials. I'm going to quote some stats. Three to 5% of cancer patients are involved in clinical trials. It's a really small number, and-

Laurie McGraw:

That is a small number.

Marie Lamont:

... [crosstalk 00:04:04] scarier. It's-

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah.

Marie Lamont:

... crazy. 1% of community cancer patients are involved in clinical trials. But 80% of patients get their care in the community setting. So you have this really weird imbalance. So when I think about what do we do day-to-day, a lot of it is education and awareness for folks to understand why trials can be beneficial to their patients. Sometimes it's giving hope to patients who may not have hope. But it's an option, right? Like any other therapeutic option, radiation chemotherapy, immunotherapy that's been approved by FDA, or a clinical trial. They're all options, and my goal is to make sure we move and accelerate those options. It doesn't mean every patient that's matched goes into a trial, but the objective is to get the option.

Marie Lamont:

So it was funny, you talked a little bit about my background. I yank that background to the table for what I do. Genzyme was all about the patient. The CEO of Genzyme, Henri Termeer, believed, put patients first. And I've been lucky in every other role. I've joined organizations because it meant we could make a difference for patients. And same thing here, get that choice into the hands of physicians and their patients.

Marie Lamont:

So my day to day, is interesting. I'm interacting with the software engineering group at the company. They're the ones who are managing this AI and machine learning and natural language processing. Interacting with sponsors who are developing these therapeutics to bring to the market and also cancer centers, and growing the number of cancer centers that we can provide this service to. So, it's an intriguing balance.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. Marie, I don't agree with you that it's all luck, in terms of how you got there. And I want to explore that a little bit, but I will-

Marie Lamont:

Sure.

Laurie McGraw:

... talk a little bit more about the clinical trials, because those statistics are stunning. And I think many of us, unfortunately, we have experience with cancer either with people we love or things like that. And so, I think that when you are in a cancer journey, cancer therapy, you are... clinical trials is always something that you're looking for. Why are the numbers so low? Why is it so complicated?

Marie Lamont:

You know, I think there's a number of things. Small community cancer centers aren't always able to engage in trials. They're often forced to choose between advancing clinical research and contributing to the financial health of their organization and growth. Right? Setting up trials takes time. And if it's diverting away for a period of time, the cancer centers may not have the ability to manage that debt before revenue comes in. Because they do make revenue, small amounts of revenue, on trials, but there's a gap between the effort of getting it started and moving it ahead. So, it can often economically shut out community cancer centers from engaging in trials. It may be too expensive or uncertain to participate beyond something that superficial.

Marie Lamont:

And I say this, nobody's consciously shutting out community centers. It's really the opposite. They should be able to participate in trials, but you need to help them find a way to do it. What typically happens is, they have to hire staff, nurse navigators, or clinical research coordinators that have to crawl through patient's charts, to find the right patients for trials. It just takes time and effort. It's a manual endeavor.

Marie Lamont:

The stats, I think, show that 60% of what you need to match a patient in a trial can be found in the EMR. 60. The other 40 is coming from ancillary documents. And so, folks like us come along and automate the cycle. We digitize all of the data. We move what's unstructured into structured so that we can reduce that amount of time and manual effort from searching for a patient for a trial, to validating the list of patients you've been given. It just changes the dynamics, but it also changes that financial perspective for sites. That, I think, is part of the reason.

Marie Lamont:

I mean, there's a lot more. Folks don't have enough awareness about trials. There's certain communities that don't have trusted advisors that they actually trust to give them the advice about trials. And so, you find these really divisive populations or diverse populations that can get to an academic medical center, that can get that suggestion from a trusted advisor. And then you have a whole population that doesn't see or hear that at all.

Laurie McGraw:

I think you're speaking to a tremendous amount of complexity in this area. And I think your expertise, over a couple of decades now, really speaks to that, it is quite complex. And just based on some of the statistics that you're talking about, and the level of access to clinical trials... Because when people are in a cancer journey, they want options. So, just sounds like you're doing tremendous work there.

Marie Lamont:

Thanks!

Laurie McGraw:

But, let's turn it to you a little bit, Marie, because-

Marie Lamont:

Sure.

Laurie McGraw:

... I'm interested in how you got here. I mean, you did... your background is finance and operations. And you did a lot of that before you started to move into data and technology, and then moved into an executive role. So, maybe give us a little bit about the career journey. And-

Marie Lamont:

Sure.

Laurie McGraw:

... again, I don't think it was just luck.

Marie Lamont:

I think it was luck that I joined Genzyme, initially. I joined them because I wanted it to be in biotech and healthcare. But what drew me there, is Genzyme had just launched a humanitarian program. And this was early on and it was just in the United States. But I was so impressed by a company that made the choice to give product away for free because patients couldn't afford it. That made the choice, if patients were going to pass away from their disease, that they had an ethical obligation to give the drug for free. Right?

Marie Lamont:

There's something that was so compelling to me about joining Genzyme. And I joined and I took a step down. I joined in a junior role because I believed in what the company did. And I was fortunate, some of it by choice, some of it was being in the right place at the right time, and also knowing which roles I wanted to have that gave me the experience that I needed.

Marie Lamont:

You'd mentioned in the international space. I joined just to help with the finance space. And then as I grew and evolved, we realized we needed to determine the business models for each country. What made sense for that market? You can't just give drugs away or sell drugs, if the universe and that country doesn't know how to care for the patient population. And so we, as a company, made a lot of choices not to go in commercially, but to do disease awareness and education first, to make sure the patients were understood. That the care model was there and a market to take care of them.

Marie Lamont:

Then you can start talking about the therapeutics. And again, it comes back to that, you look at patients first. But I had the luxury of being involved in global pricing, being involved with some of the market access in markets with the supply chain. Kind of sitting and developing the business models on how to, meant you got to touch everything.

Marie Lamont:

And I found that with using strength finders, connectedness is one of my key strengths. I get to see all of these interconnections, and you make decisions for those interconnections. But what it means is, you get to bring cures and therapies to patients. Right? That is so, super important.

Marie Lamont:

And even with the transaction with Sanofi, after Sanofi bought Genzyme, I took an integration role that took me away from that patient touch. I took the role because they needed somebody who could manage change, not because I was an expert in that particular area, which I was not. But it did set me up to step into a role, within the rare disease group, to do global operations and business strategy and the humanitarian programs, which sort of got me back to that patient focus. That was important to me.

Marie Lamont:

And you don't find a lot of folks with a finance background that have that opportunity to really play in a place where you can impact patients. And it makes me very emotional when you have the opportunity to do that. And it gives you a purpose that goes beyond just a job, just knowing you're working in healthcare, but a way to impact differently.

Laurie McGraw:

Just as I'm hearing your story, Marie, what's so interesting to me, is that certainly your emotional connectedness to what you're doing is so important, but also the journey. I mean, starting in finance and operations, I do agree with you, many people who are in finance, staying in finance, but it sounds like you had an idea of where you wanted to go, and then sought other opportunities to build those, I'll just say, next boxes, that you wanted to check-

Marie Lamont:

Yes.

Laurie McGraw:

... off in your career to move to leadership. And I think starting in finance or understanding business mechanics, is such a critical skill to get to leadership positions. So, I like to encourage that a lot. I'm just curious what you think about that and how you advise other people.

Marie Lamont:

I used to think you're spot on. I do, I work a lot and we can chat in a little bit, but I work a lot doing networking support, especially for women scientists. And I think having a finance background is important. I also think having any subject matter expertise is important, just don't limit yourself to staying in that swim lane. I think horizontal, lateral, lattice moves are all key, as you want to grow and evolve and develop.

Marie Lamont:

What I would say to you is, you're right. I was very selective about the roles. But I'll tell you something, a lesson I learned. I used to say, "Yes." to everything. I wanted to help because I want people to see me as a problem solver. By helping with things, I got to broaden my horizons, touch things I might not otherwise do. But I started being a problem solver for everyone, which meant I folks didn't see me in any other way, is to come in, do a shotgun approach, and fix stuff. And I was not selective, at the time, about choosing those things that were in the best interest of Marie.

Marie Lamont:

And working with someone actually from our HR group, she actually said to me, "Marie, you're doing all of this and it's great, but which ones benefit you?" And when I stepped back and looked, 10 to 20% were benefiting in my career. Probably 10 or 20% benefited, kind of the circle around me, and the rest could have been done by someone else. And it really forced me to learn and think about what I take on and don't take on. And it's a hard lesson to learn. And that's what I say to folks. "Think about how you want to grow, be selective about what you take on and don't take on."

Laurie McGraw:

And what a great aha moment, and how fortunate that you had someone who could give you that direct feedback to sort of look in the mirror and see what you're doing. Is that something you sought out, in terms of that type of feedback? Or was it-

Marie Lamont:

Yes.

Laurie McGraw:

... just an opportunity that happened? How did that come about?

Marie Lamont:

I'm a big fan of emotional intelligence, even though sometimes I question whether my emotional intelligence is fully there. I like to improve and evolve, and so I have engaged with career coaches, executive coaches. But I'm a big fan of getting feedback, even if I don't like it. It's important for me to hear. I recognize I can be myopic in my view sometimes. And I need others to share with me what they're observing. This interesting connectedness and strategic mind I have might have me two or five miles ahead of my team. If they don't tell me I'm too far ahead and they're lagging, I'm not going to recognize I need to turn around and pull them along with me. So if you recognize those shortfalls, you're willing to solicit feedback. And I think soliciting feedback is key.

Laurie McGraw:

It is key. Marie, though, I'm curious. I mean, you're at the top of your company and you've been an executive leader for many years now. And sometimes the types of feedback that you hear is more the, always positive, ideas are always brilliant, things of that nature. How do you ensure that you're getting constructive feedback in the way that keeps you sharp, makes you sharper, and is truly, whether you want to hear it or not, the type of feedback that helps you grow or strategically build whatever you're working on, your company, et cetera?

Marie Lamont:

Great question. I would look at it three ways. I do not hire yes people. I hire people for their honesty, because that's the way you grow businesses, is with honest feedback. Feedback doesn't need to be critical, it's constructive. Always think about feedback as constructive. Some of it you can't take action on, but it's there to be constructive. Having a good board that keeps you on your toes, that asks the difficult questions, having a good leader in your org that asks difficult questions. I have always had leaders that pushed me, that charged me, that I felt that I could learn something from. And does that mean periodically, I may have had leaders I held in too high of an esteem? Maybe, but at least I had folks that were honest with me and that's what I asked for from them.

Marie Lamont:

Can I take action on all of it right away? No. And I always need to sit down and say, "Are they giving me feedback due to an event? And are they emotionally engaged, or is this full, actionable feedback?" I do do that. I think you need to, but I'm not going to excuse any of my behavior, if in fact, they're right. I know that sounds really weird. But I think soliciting feedback from my direct team, from peers, from a board or leadership, you got to get that sort of 360 view of your world. Because otherwise, you're working in a tunnel.

Laurie McGraw:

And you're also talking about leading with emotional intelligence. That's an important part of how you show up as a leader and you have awareness of that. I think that's also something, generally speaking, but does play out to be true, is available to women in a different way. Understanding how to interact with team members, reading cues in a way that can be very helpful to foster, build, strengthen relationships, as well as direction.

Laurie McGraw:

I'm curious, in your company, you've led this company through a pandemic. We're not through this pandemic, but it changed pretty much everything about business, about work in healthcare, et cetera. What happened for your company? How did you lead through, and what are you learning from being in this pandemic? Curious about that.

Marie Lamont:

Sure. So I think first, I should say, we're a virtual company and have been, so my staff did not need to learn or relearn how to work virtually. Their challenges were circling around them. Internet speeds changed considerably with everyone working from home. They may very well have had children or their parents or pets that were in the house, where they weren't previously. Learning to flex your environment, became an important.

Marie Lamont:

We did offer folks the ability, as long as their work got done, it was somewhat irrelevant, if they did it in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening. And so, we offered up that flexibility. Work with it in the way you need to, to help manage your home life, as well as your work life in the home. So, I think being flexible with the team.

Marie Lamont:

So I mentioned before, I was taught and I'd learned, take care of patients first. Well, the second is, take care of your employees. Your employees are your best assets. And so if you do well by them, they'll also do well by you, and your customers and your patients. And so, I think that flexibility is vital. It's things as simple as doing a compressed work week in the summer, letting people get longer weekends.

Marie Lamont:

Same thing during the pandemic, how do we provide flexibility for them? As a business, it meant we weren't traveling to go see cancer centers. Right? Even when things opened up, we were ultra cautious. You're dealing with some of the most immune compromised patients. You can't put them at risk at all. And so, if you think about that from that perspective, your actions will follow. We did spend quite a bit of time updating our system, updating our platform, moving our technology along.

Marie Lamont:

But in addition, my staff that deal directly with the cancer centers, many of them were offering up help. Cancer centers had to furlough staff, and so they weren't able to do some of the work that they normally would. We offered them the opportunity for my team to help step in and fill the gap for a week or a month or a couple months, because it was the right thing to do. Some centers took us up on it, some did not. But we did take this opportunity to kind of rethink, "How do we provide services and what does it look like?" So the pandemic is still happening, the variant issues are considerable. We still look at, how important is it to travel out and about and see folks. And what's the benefit to them versus us, of doing so?

Laurie McGraw:

What I'm hearing, Marie, is that, just how you lead the company, pre pandemic, was helpful to how you just structured, reacted, and moved the company forward, as well as supporting your clients during this time. So it's always interesting to hear, because I think there's just so much variability. And again, we're all recovering, hopefully as we get through this.

Laurie McGraw:

I wanted to just go to one more topic, and maybe close out on this, and that's mentoring and building your network. I mean, this is... you are, as a female executive, leader for many years. It's always been, I know, important to you to mentor other women, build the network of women in particular, not exclusively, but in particular. Why is that? How do you do it? Maybe give some comments there.

Marie Lamont:

Sure. When I think about that career journey, is planning and being open to opportunities. Some people say it's serendipity. But I think we also need to teach women how to network, and networking is important. For folks that are introverts, it's even harder. They don't understand networking, and many of them think that working is fake because it's such hard work for them.

Marie Lamont:

And so in some instances, I fell into places where I was interacting with folks talking about networking, and was asked to run some sessions. So I frequently will work with very scientific and technical folks. And planning for networking, helping teach them because the soft skill is hard for that community. If I think about research directors at healthcare orgs, women researchers, [inaudible 00:23:40] scientists, biotech engineers, ridiculously super smart people who find themselves in the opportunity for them to grow. It's an unexpected place. Introverts, but driven, want a network, don't know how.

Marie Lamont:

And so, the way we look at that workflow for them, what is stopping them from moving ahead? How do we help them understand the risks with seeing things only from your lens? And so, I work with them to understand what can networking do for them, and how do they structure it in a way that it's not such hard work. Right? How do you structure networking so it's not kryptonite for you? Some of it's simple. Planning out what you're going to do at an event. Set yourself targets so when you achieve that goal, it feels like a win. Maybe it's just introducing yourself to two people. Get to know them. Maybe it's picking one person that you want to meet and share business cards and ask them some questions later. But it's teaching them that being an extrovert and networking isn't fake.

Marie Lamont:

I network because I believe in the opportunity to give and get, pay it forward and give it back. Right? Resources to call on, both professional and personal. A lot of people at my level, face similar challenges, issues, and opportunities. If we're willing to share experiences and serve as a sounding board, what a phenomenal opportunity. It's like a squad, having your own squad there to support-

Laurie McGraw:

Right.

Marie Lamont:

... you. And I do think that's important. So whether it was engaging in Women's Business Leaders in U.S. Healthcare, or the HBA or executive connections in St. Louis, this pay it forward and give it back is super important. And that's just... it's part of what I feel like I have an obligation. I've had folks who have helped me and I've had instances where someone didn't. And I wanted to make sure I'm out there helping others.

Laurie McGraw:

Marie, I think there's so many nuggets in those comments. And in particular, I liked the sort of, that you can teach how to do networking. It is not just a big fake exercise and there're approaches that you can take, depending on your comfort, personality, and how to go about it. And I also like how you talked about setting it up as, make it a win for yourself with small... the things that you can achieve.

Laurie McGraw:

This has been such a fantastic conversation, Marie. I so appreciate you sharing your journey with us on Inspiring Women. As we close out today, any last advice you might like to leave with listeners?

Marie Lamont:

That's a good question. I would say, pay attention to what people say about your passions and drivers. Sometimes they think you might not be well-rounded. But understand your passion, embrace it, and then base your connections with others on exploring their passions and yours.

Laurie McGraw:

Marie, thank so much for this conversation. I've been speaking with Marie Lamont on Inspiring Women. And Marie, thank you very much.

Marie Lamont:

No, thank you. It was a pleasure.

Laurie McGraw:

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