

# Inspiring Women

## Episode 60: Janet Dillione

Lori McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Lori McGraw. I am your host, Lori 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](http://inspiringwomen.show), or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening and I hope you will be inspired.

Welcome to this episode of Inspiring Women. I am so pleased today, that we are speaking with Janet Dillione. She is the CEO of Connect America, which is a company that she has started a year plus ago, so during the pandemic. It focuses on health monitoring solutions for population management areas. Now, Janet is a proven CEO, she's led many different high tech companies, both startups but also large scale, global enterprises. We're talking about enterprises like Siemens, Nuance, Bernoulli. She is really a champion of innovation and that intersection of technology to solve longstanding problems in the delivery of care is where Janet has really found her niche and built some pretty compelling and strong businesses. She is an accomplished author, leader, speaker. She also serves on a number of different boards and well recognized, Modern Healthcare, Top 25 Women in Healthcare, Becker's Top 100 Women in Healthcare, a Most Powerful Women on the Channel award.

And Janet, I am really pleased to be speaking with you today.

Janet Dillione:

Well, I'm pleased to be here. Thank you so much for the very gracious invitation and I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Lori McGraw:

Great. Well, why don't we start. We always start on Inspiring Women with what are you doing now? What does the day-to-day look like, what does the CEO of Connect America mean? What's day-to-day for you?

Janet Dillione:

As you've mentioned, I joined Connect America almost a year ago to the day. And, came to a company that I thought would be a great change. I spent the bulk of my career in the provider space, so think large health systems and those types of things. And, had the opportunity to come to a company that had really been a B2C, a consumer business, but had 350,000 home-based customers, which I found fascinating. I said, "Wow, you've solved the last mile. That's incredibly hard," and thought it would be a great opportunity, and I joined.

Since then, we've done several acquisitions. My goal here is to help to bring out a platform that allows us to surround folks in their home, vulnerable populations. It can be the elderly, the chronically ill, to surround them with services and products that can help them stay in that home, safely, and independently and as graciously as possible.

It's an extraordinarily compelling vision, it's been fascinating thus far and I know it's going to continue to be so.

Lori McGraw:

Congratulations on a year. Being there for one year, making a switch in direction if you will, with all your experience, to a company in the pandemic. Why that shift during pandemic time, what compelled you?

Janet Dillione:

I was very interested in looking at healthcare through a different lens. I think, in healthcare, for those of us that stay in it, number one again, it's the mission. But, we have endless opportunities to "leave it better than we found it."

With the pandemic, just the orientation of the folks at home, of what was happening in senior living and I just thought what a great opportunity to try to contribute to something that was happening during the pandemic, but that was obviously going to be with us after the pandemic. Everyone understands the denominator here globally, about the aging population in the US, the rest of world. And, all of us are going to be in that population at some point. So I just thought, again, a fascinating opportunity to try to bring some solutions to something I hadn't done before. I do enjoy doing that.

Lori McGraw:

Well, you also have so much experience in this space. Maybe, if we can even go back a step to some of your career progression. You have amazing education. Brown, Wharton, so you're starting off with this base of education. But, it seems like you quickly moved in your career, to very senior leadership positions, pretty brand name types of companies. Siemens, Nuance, Bernoulli. How did that happen? You've been in healthcare IT and clearly recognized as a leader for some time, but I would say at least as I look at your background, there was a very quick progression to the C-suite. Can you just give some perspective on that?

Janet Dillione:

Well, as you can expect, anybody that's successful, obviously I was supported by others. As I look back, I frequently laugh that I just cannot believe the opportunities and the "jobs" people gave me. Just, it's extraordinary, at a young age.

But, I was fortunate in the company I started with, Shared Medical Systems had very mature management, very open management. People as now about being a woman. I said, "In that era of IT and healthcare, they didn't notice if you were purple or green. Could you understand it? Do you get it? Can you do this? Can you action it?" I just had phenomenal opportunities. I don't know that I would say I was fearless, but I was probably too naïve to understand that I had absolutely should never have agreed to do some of the things.

As I tell people now when I talk to women, the other thing, I purposely chose to stay on the product and the P&L side of companies. I think that was also something that helped me along. That was unusual, in that era, people usually tracked in different directions. I just stayed on that more left brained side of the business and had some phenomenal opportunities because of it. I was always at that edge where things were changing, that innovation, that kept me motivated but also gave me crazy opportunities.

Lori McGraw:

And then, how did you know? What made you gravitate to that?

One of the things that I notice is that it strikes me that younger women today, at least in my experience, they're very thoughtful about their career progression. The way you're talking about it, it sounds like the opportunities just emerged, and you grabbed them and leaned into them. Or, were you thoughtful about a career progression that moved obviously into leadership, which is where you are?

Janet Dillione:

I share this a lot with folks, including my daughters. In my view, a career is not linear, it is not a straight line. Those that do well bounce well, they adapt, they pivot. They say, "Okay, I'm not going over that wall the way I thought I was, I'm going to go over here. I'm going to go around the wall, I'm going to go under the wall." I think those are the people that do well. I think personality wise, I just had that. And, just give that advice again when I speak to others.

And, don't be so frustrated when it's not linear, and it's not a straight line and something didn't happen in 18 months or 24 months. Are you learning? Are you growing? Are you seeing something new in the market? Are you interested? Take the bounce, adapt.

Lori McGraw:

So give us an example of those early, formative stages where you pivoted, bounced, adapted, took a different place. Women like you, at the stage of leadership that you are at, it wasn't a straight line, you hit a lot of roadblocks along the way. But yet, you found a way to persevere and make something out of them. I'm just interested if you could share some of the maybe stories of where you really found that way to get around something that otherwise, you might have seen block other people.

Janet Dillione:

Yeah. I was young, I was not a vice president or at that level yet. I was a senior manager of some sort. There was a re-org going on and there was absolutely a role that I wanted and I did not get it. I got an adjacent one. I really wanted the other domain. I was irritated, I can still remember who got that job. I will not say the name, but I absolutely remember who it was. I said, "Okay."

I got this other thing, which I really did not want and I did not know much about. I thought, "Okay, all right, let's figure this out." But, the good news is it was a domain that was profitable, it was revenue generating, it had scale so those are good things. It had a good team, but it needed a pivot. The pivot was going to get out of what we were doing organically and to go to a partnership. I had a phenomenal opportunity to get into the market and wound up

negotiating a company who I won't name, but their SOC split three times while we were doing the negotiation.

Lori McGraw:

Oh, wow.

Janet Dillione:

I remember leaving my daughter's fifth birthday party to go execute a term sheet while we were doing this negotiation. And, I spent time up in Silicon Valley before it became Silicon Valley, wound up being on the front edge of cloud-based kinds of solutions and the company became a multi-billion dollar company. It was acquired by Oracle at one point.

But, I learned so much about negotiating an agreement. I got to work with the top tier of the company because it was going to be one of the largest partnerships we had ever done. It was like going to law school. It was a phenomenal opportunity. I learned term sheets, I learned the fact that if you can't say no, you can't really negotiate. I learned the fact that make sure you draft and write down all of your assumptions so that you can stay constant during the negotiations.

But, it wound up being a great opportunity, a real contributor to my career. And like I said, when I got it, I probably had effigy dolls on the person that had got the job I wanted. But, a year or two later I was like, "Oh my God, that other job, that was terrible. This was a blast."

Lori McGraw:

That sounds like an amazing opportunity, being thrown into the deep end but then, swimming and taking advantage of it. How did that, then, lead to perhaps the next opportunity and the next opportunity?

Janet Dillione:

Actually, that job, by the time that was arriving at its destination about 18 months later, at that point the company was growing, there was a big re-org going on. They were getting to announce a new organization and they were going to announce the first three female vice presidents. I was fortunate to be one of them.

Lori McGraw:

That's awesome. That's awesome.

Janet Dillione:

True story.

Lori McGraw:

That must have felt ... Yeah. Fantastic. Fantastic.

So also, another thing, and again just reading the reports and as we look at women in career progressions in healthcare tech as well as many other industries, women who are rising, and at a certain point in time, you were rising in your career versus where you are now, but then

tend to get stuck. Has that ever happened to you? If so, how did you get out of it? Or, have you seen others do it and why do you think that happens?

Janet Dillione:

I'll give you a couple different answers.

In terms of why some people get stuck, my observation is, and this is true again, that goes back to your earlier question about linear, a ladder isn't just the vertical braces so to speak. The rungs of the ladder are horizontal. What I notice about a lot of people is they're so career tracked and so progression minded, they forget that they are part of a team. The people with whom they work, their teammates, the horizontal network matters just as much if not more than the vertical network. My observation is a lot of people forget that and they're not the best teammate.

And, when it comes time for people to promote and to get those really big jobs, the leadership is going to look for those who are viewed and strongly supported by that important peer network. I go out of my way to point it out, and I think sometimes especially women are so singularly focused on the forward and the vertical that they lose the horizontal. I think that we have to keep pushing that and learning that. I think a lot of that was done, in other eras, by others on golf courses and in after dinner drinks. If that's not part of the culture, it has to be done at work and you have to be a fantastic teammate.

Lori McGraw:

How do you think people need to do it today? Because another thing that I spend time talking to younger women about is how they are navigating just building their career progression process or progress, in a pandemic, where we're not quite out of it, we're not all back in the office yet. You and I are both in offices today.

What are you suggesting to people? Particularly, again, women who have taken more of the brunt of, I will just say, career progression toll during this pandemic time.

Janet Dillione:

Well again, if you're just speaking to going forward, I think again, you have to demonstrate that there are times where what you are working on is not the number one priority. You really need to find your way to contribute to what is the number one priority. Usually, you have a talent and you know what your differentiating talent is, and you need to bring it to bear on that which is the corporate priority. Run to the fire.

Just because you may not be "owning" that initiative or leading it, others will see and watch that contribution you're making. I think that that's a really important thing to do, whether you're virtual or in-person. Again, I try to point this out often to not only women, but others with whom I work, is that go to the fire. Go to the important thing. Just because you're not leading it does not mean you cannot contribute to it. This is not a time to be timid.

I'll tell you a story associated with that. So another time, we were changing CEOs. I was, I don't know, some rank in the management team and the new CEO came in, it was a very challenging, toxic environment. He was bringing people in to interview, the first couple of days. I walked in and I had a list. It was literally labeled the Top Five Things I Would Do if I Were You. I had been around, I was somewhat senior, I knew the culture. And fast forward a year, I got a big promotion to a C-suite role. He said, "It was that days that you walked in with a list of

what to do, as opposed to telling me everything that was wrong. That's when I started to pay attention to who you were."

Lori McGraw:

Well, also, the contributing to the solutions, it is a big deal. I think that this is an opportunity, particularly for women, and I think a lot about the younger women who are following in your footsteps, in as much as you can participate in the solution, people do think of you differently. They think of you as a problem solver, even though you are trying to focus on a problem. But, complaining is not usually helpful, in terms of what that means for folks.

Janet, at some point, I don't know if it was your first large job responsibility, or the second, or the third, or the fourth one, but at some point you moved from just C-suite executive to also taking on board responsibilities. When did that start to happen and why was that an important thing for you to do?

Janet Dillione:

It's funny. The network begets the network and I think that's always going to be a theme when we talk about women and diversity, which we probably will here. What I've found, especially with boards, was that boards tend to look like themselves. And then, when you get inside the board you realize why and it's like, "Oh, because the boards usually get filled by people's networks," which again, goes back to the need for diversity.

I was always intrigued to be on a board. I was fortunate in that I was asked to join a board by one of the investors in one of the companies I was leading. That became my first board experience. Again, it fulfills that notion of the network is important. It's been great. It's a public company, I've learned a lot. But again, it is the network.

Lori McGraw:

Yeah. Yeah. That's also a really important thing, obviously for women. Janet, in your career, you're doing something really different, you're looking at a different angle of the healthcare equation. What do you do at this place of leadership to stay sharp, to stay current, to stay energized about the work that you're doing?

Janet Dillione:

I think that leaders who typically sustain and have continuous success are themselves endlessly curious. It sounds so trite, but people who just read relentlessly and are just lifelong learners. I think you notice this in people over the years. Are you a lifelong learner? Do you consciously go seek new information? I think that is something that has sustained me.

I just enjoy what I call phase zero, where I don't know anything and I just get to ask experts an extraordinary number of questions. I just think that's fantastic. You know, it's going to school. And, that's what energizes me. And then, in return for that favor and for that courtesy of them sharing their knowledge with me, then I say, "Okay, I see a way. I see a pivot. I see we're here today, and I see we're going to go over here. This is the direction, this is the where." So my job is to see where and then to show how.

It's not just enough to state that I see a digital platform or I see an opportunity, then you have to be able to articulate, "We're going to take these series of steps. We're going to do it in

this logical progression. Here's how we're going to go from a company of today to the company of tomorrow."

Lori McGraw:

Just bringing up to your business and your healthcare experience, healthcare of course, it has been getting bigger, accelerating and yet, some of the problems remain and loom large. What are you optimistic about in the future of healthcare and this intersection of technology? Or, what are you perhaps more skeptical about? You said that you wanted to leave it better than where you found out, so what are your thoughts about that?

Janet Dillione:

I am extraordinarily enthusiastic about the talent that I see coming into healthcare. I get to see healthcare through the lens of pharmaceutical companies that I work with, I get to see healthcare through the digital lens and I think it's great. I think that a few years ago, the talent was headed in certain directions and now, I just think you see people with phenomenal backgrounds and educations coming into healthcare because again, they see it as an opportunity to contribute. That is my number one because it's only going to be solved by those talented people. Absolutely, the talent's fantastic, it's great. It's energizing. I love being surrounded by smart people.

Lori McGraw:

That is great. As we think about that, Janet, as we close out here on Inspiring Women, I'd love to just know, a quick question, is there anything along the way, whether it was a book, or a particular thing that you looked to that was inspiring to you, that helped shaped your thinking, your leadership style, that you might want to tell us about?

Janet Dillione:

I'm going to have to say the answer is it's my mother. My mother was the mother of five. She was a nurse. I watched somebody raise five children and work her entire life. And, was an absolutely endless curious learner, got her MBA while all of us were in high school. I saw someone do it. I had the good fortune to watch someone balance life and work and raise a family. I think I had great, great behaviors to model and to see that.

Lori McGraw:

Yeah, what a great role model. It's always that family environment is so inspiring.

As we close out, Janet, any last advice for younger, aspiring women who are looking to follow in your kind of footsteps?

Janet Dillione:

I think it's as we've spoken, you have to really enjoy what you're doing. You have to be, again, that endlessly curious about it. If you have that, you can do anything. You can simply do anything. As I say, I counsel my daughters on that, I counsel others, just enjoy the ride. Enjoy the journey. Enjoy the bounce.

Lori McGraw:

That is great. This has been a great conversation. We'll close out on that. On this Inspiring Women episode, we've been talking with Janet Dillione. And, Janet, thank you so much.

Janet Dillione:

Oh, thank you for your time and thank you for what you're doing. It's fantastic. Thank you.

Lori McGraw:

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