



Colette LaForce

CMO at AMD

LEADERSHIP AWARD

Q+A on Leadership with AMD's Colette LaForce

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When I was growing up, a surprising number of our local professionals had names that doubled as appropriate descriptors. Dr. Gum was an oral surgeon, Dr. Smiley a delightful plastic surgeon. There were many others. Only Dr. Bonebreak messed things up as he was not an orthopedist but instead a rather feared pediatric dentist! So when I hear a name like LaForce, I can't help but wonder if the namesake is a force to be reckoned with. Read my interview below and you will know with certainty that Colette LaForce is indeed just that.

As CMO of AMD, the microprocessor company that is the David to Intel's Goliath, LaForce quickly established a Marketing Operations to quantify activities, dealt with a major corporate restructuring and then relaunched AMD on a global basis. Oh and did I mention she's piloting an innovative marketing effort exclusively for the Chinese? It's never a dull moment when you're working for a challenger brand and Colette seems to thrive under these circumstances so it's little wonder she is also a recent recipient of The CMO Club's award for Leadership.

Drew: Congratulations on winning the Leadership award. What are some of the lessons you can share with aspiring leaders especially of the marketing variety?

Colette: One critical trait I see in great leaders is an ability to simplify goals and objectives. People can't remember ten goals, or even five. Great leaders, like great sports coaches, prioritize just one or two compelling goals for the team to commit to and focus on.

Drew: I love the fact that you have "transformative CMO" in your LinkedIn bio. Can you talk a little about how you are being transformative in your current role?

Colette: For me, the word 'transformative' represents a

desire to be a steward of change. Stewardship is really all about making lasting contributions that leave your environment in better shape than it was the day before. Couple that with a leadership approach that encourages meaningful change and an outstanding team that can drive execution and consistency, and you get true transformation.

Drew: What advice do you have for your fellow marketers if they too wanted to transform their organizations, one way or another?

Colette: To drive transformation, a team must be aligned on the organization's purpose, goals and values. Why do you do what you do? What are you trying to do? And how will you do it? Once you get clarity on those points, true transformation can begin.

Drew: AMD by definition is a challenger brand given Intel's category dominance. How has this shaped your overall approach to marketing? Do you feel the need to be more innovative than you were at Dell or Rackable Systems?

Colette: Innovation and creativity should always play a role in what we as marketers do, whether you work for an existing market leader or an emerging player. Many of us are drawn to challenger brands because of the 'underdog' phenomenon. Being the underdog can be a great motivational tool that builds character, forces innovation, fosters creativity and can be very rewarding.

Drew: AMD is considered an "ingredient" brand, but you have said that the customers' relationship with your product is typically much more emotional than with other such "ingredients." How did you come to that conclusion, and how has that realization aided your efforts to spark consumers' passions for AMD?

Colette: We consider AMD beyond just ‘ingredient’ and more of an ‘enabler’ brand. Semiconductor technology powers the devices we use every day, giving people very personal, rich computational and graphical experiences that literally enable us to change the world. Our research with thousands of users echoed this sentiment, and we are actively building a more emotional connection with buyers.

Drew: What have been the biggest challenges you have had to overcome during AMD’s rebranding campaign, and how were you able to use the rebranding efforts to lead the brand back to profitability and align with the business goals?

Colette: We recognized that our multi-year business transformation needed to start with a global brand transformation. Evolving a brand while simultaneously cutting costs, completing a corporate restructuring and pushing into new markets with new competitors is quite challenging and might seem even counter-intuitive to some. But without a baseline for purpose, values and mission and an outstanding team to execute, we could not have effectively united 10,000 employees and millions of fans worldwide.

Drew: Marketing budgets are getting increasingly complex as new options and tools become available. How as CMO are you staying on top of budget allocation and optimization?

Colette: One of the first things I did when I came to AMD was create a Marketing Operations team. We now have centralized visibility to spending, metrics and ROI. We have a great team that may not always have the fanciest new tools to govern with, but we are steadfast about how we measure and optimize marketing performance.

Drew: Have you made major changes to your budget allocation in the last year and if so, can you share what lead to those changes and how these changes have impacted results?

Colette: Like many marketing organizations, while our overall marketing budgets continue to shrink, we’ve pro-

tected funds for earned and owned media. We’re also setting aside funds for what I like to call ‘innovation marketing.’ For example, we will soon kick off a unique program in China, designed exclusively to engage with our Chinese fans. Too often, US-based corporations pilot programs in North America and then try to localize further. We’re starting in China and then will see where it goes!

About the author

Drew Neisser is the CEO and founder of Renegade, the NYC-based social media and marketing agency that helps inspired CMOs cut through. He is the champion of Marketing as Service, a philosophy he espouses in his writings on FastCompany.com, PSFK, TheDrewBlog and



The Cut, a much-appreciated monthly newsletter. If you have a CMO success story to tell, let Drew know at dneisser@renegade.com.