

Mars' Berta de Pablos-Barbier named Ad Age Woman to Watch for 2018

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The 24 women on this year's list have engineered company turnarounds, forged new business models and burned down existing ones. But our Women to Watch Class of 2018 is united in another regard: They are catalysts for change within the industry and within the world at large.

This year's U.S. Women to Watch are using their voices and talents to do just that. They are making an indelible mark in business while also making the world a better place.

[Berta de Pablos-Barbier, President, Mars Wrigley Confectionery U.S.](#)

When Berta de Pablos-Barbier was a food scientist early in her career at Mars, she fed her creative side by joining an acting troupe that met evenings.

“Thankfully, the internet didn’t exist back then, because there are some embarrassing photos of me as a comedienne in costume. This is where my love of storytelling began,” says de Pablos-Barbier. “Innovation and creativity have played a big role in my life, personally and professionally.”

De Pablos-Barbier, now president of Mars Wrigley Confectionery U.S., is still flexing those muscles today. Starting as an intern at Mars in 1994 and moving up the ladder for a total of 16 (nonconsecutive) years at the company, she has gone from developer to food industry leader. She was promoted to her current position in 2017 after two years as VP of marketing for Mars Chocolate North America, where, among other things, she continued Snickers’ “You’re Not You When You’re Hungry” campaign; introduced a new product, Snickers Crisper; and led the “Celebrate with M” campaign for M&M’s 75th anniversary. That 2016 effort, which included a remade M&M’s “Candyman” song, TV commercial and flavor contest, led the brand to grow sales eight times faster than the chocolate category and increased household penetration after three years of declines, according to privately held Mars.

De Pablos-Barbier left Mars in 1998 to sharpen her marketing skills in France for luxury brand Boucheron and later for Lacoste. She also started a children’s clothing line with a partner. But the food industry still appealed to her, and in 2015 she moved to the United States to return to Mars.

“Across different sectors and companies, I’ve observed that there are more similarities than differences,” says de Pablos-Barbier. “It’s about understanding human desire and emotion, whether in jewelry, candy or clothing.”

She works to understand consumer desires and emotions, then applies that knowledge in ways that “hit an emotional chord,” she says. “Are we effectively delivering on our brand promise? Are we meeting an unmet need and making an impact? I’ve learned to ask these

questions of my teams, no matter where I sit.”

She's also passionate about empowering women, which she says can be seen in Mars' Dove ad work, as well as its social causes. The company, for instance, has a goal to get all of its cocoa from certified sources by 2020, and pledged \$1 million to CARE to support women farmers in Ivory Coast. M&M's iconic spokescandies have also appeared in an ad campaign to raise awareness about climate change and wind as part of the company's sustainability push.

If you weren't doing this job, what would you be doing?

I would be a television or film producer.

What was your worst career mistake and what did you learn from it?

I don't believe there are mistakes in life, just learning opportunities. However one of the biggest risks I took in my career, breaking out with a partner to start our own children's clothing company in France, taught me the most about myself. It was successful, but I missed working for a large and diverse company, with broad teams to collaborate with across functions and segments. Ultimately, I made the decision to leave and my partner successfully grew the company and brand. I have immense respect for entrepreneurs and startups and have taken a piece of that experience with me wherever I go, looking to instill that spirit of risk and curiosity in my teams and projects.

What advice would you give your younger self?

Adaptability has been one of my strongest assets. At times, it's been scary to try something new or different, but I always emerge stronger. I always tell my daughter, “Don't fear fear.” It's how you overcome those fears or insecurities that show your strength. The mountain will always seem too big, the road too long, but with adaptability, you can tackle anything that comes your way. Always give it a go.

If you could have dinner with anyone living or dead, who would it be?

I'd love to have dinner with Michelle Obama. I was so inspired by her Partnership for a Healthier America and Let's Move! If I had dinner with Michelle, I would thank her for her work, bold choices, energy and willingness to transform and make a difference. I respect how she used her powerful position to create meaningful impact.

What's one thing the industry can do to encourage more women and people of color into its ranks?

I wish it was as easy as one thing, but there are multiple things. First and foremost, companies should be aware, commit and be accountable for their diverse hiring practices. Once we're able to attract top talent, we have to ensure we have flexible ways of working and create an environment where all associates can stay and grow.

Diverse employees should be thoughtfully recruited, retained and nurtured through employee resource groups and provided with appropriate internal supports.

As a Hispanic woman, I understand I have a responsibility to share my story and my career, and make sure we are committed to make and drive change. If you can see it, you can be it.

[Article by Jessica Wohl, originally posted in Ad Age on May 28, 2018.](#)

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