

# BILL DRUMMY

## For Putting the Heart Into Healthcare Communications

Since starting Heartbeat 20 years ago, Bill Drummy has been catalyzing change and inspiring innovation for the healthcare marketing industry.

The agency, which began in a spare bedroom in Bill's Hoboken apartment, initially as Drumbeat, is now an industry leading healthcare communications agency with more than 200 employees and part of the global parent company Publicis. Bill made the decision to change the name of his semi-eponymous brand of the organization when the agency began engaging in the healthcare sector with more rigor thereby aligning his vision closely with the important work he and his colleagues were doing in the life-sciences industry.



Bill has been instrumental in challenging the status quo of healthcare communications and tackling conventional approaches, which is no easy task when so many healthcare companies are reluctant to embrace real change and find comfort cemented in same-old, same-old programs.

Bill believes it takes courage to really challenge peoples' thinking, but without that courage it's not possible to truly make a difference that will ultimately benefit clients and patients.

Today, he is focused on ensuring Heartbeat's long-term success, developing new client relationships, counseling long-standing Heartbeat clients on business innovation, and providing provocative, culture-shifting insights into the healthcare industry.

**PV: What is your leadership style and how do you inspire others to reach professional and personal goals?**

**DRUMMY:** My goal has always been to recruit people who are topnotch at their craft and who have an instinct for leadership, which is something you can't teach or reduce to a formula. Part of this is intuition and part is analytical; I look for people who have the necessary skills and the natural inclination to become leaders and then I give them the opportunity to really impact decision making.

A number of people who have become part of my leadership team had shown an instinct for entrepreneurialism. So, in terms of vision or inspiration, I give people the opportunity to express themselves as leaders around a shared goal. I tend to be more collaborative than dictatorial.

**PV: Can you talk about the core values you instilled in the agency?**

**DRUMMY:** Around 2009, our management team spent time to determine what our core values were and how we would promulgate them throughout the company. We identified three words that we built the company around: insight, inventiveness, and courage. Insight is knowing how to use research and examinations of clients' problems, culminating in great analysis. Inventiveness is about bringing nonordinary and sometimes surprising solutions to address a problem. The third value is courage, which is arguably the most important.

While we may be able to achieve great insights and develop innovative solutions really well, if we don't have the courage of our convictions to tell a client why they should follow one path rather than another — and make a case for the approach — then we are never going to make progress.

We developed awards and recognition programs built around these core values to make them live inside the organization. They are at the heart of our culture, which is part of why we are known as the agency for "challenger brands." We strive to demonstrate ingenuity and guts in every client interaction. It's important to have a value set that isn't mere sloganeering, but is demonstrated through daily words and actions. Our commitment to culture has led to high retention rates and, when people do leave, they sometimes come back. When we see these 'boomerang' employees, I have always think of them as a great barometer of the success of our culture.

This business boils down to two things: acquiring and keeping good clients, and finding and cultivating exceptional talent. For the talent piece, you need to create an environment where people want to work and feel valued. Of course, people want to be paid competitively, but they also want to be part of something bigger, to be treated with respect, and to have fun — so all that needs to be part of a management approach.

**PV: Let's talk about some of the innovative and transformational approaches you have been adopting?**

### Bill Drummy

**TITLE:** Founder and Chairman Emeritus

**COMPANY:** Heartbeat

**EDUCATION:** BA, Rutgers College; Henry Rutgers Scholar, Glasgow University

**FAMILY:** Wife Barrie Gillies, whose humor and tolerance have helped him succeed; 13-year-old son, Will, whose lack of sentimentality keeps him honest

**HOBBIES:** Photography; binge-watching high-quality TV series; screaming inappropriately during Little League Baseball games; spelunking

**AWARDS/HONORS:** PharmaVOICE 100, 2017, 2015, 2008; Innovation Catalyst, MM&M Magazine; DTC Hall of Fame; Heartbeat has won more than 200 industry awards; Volunteer awards, The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp

**ASSOCIATIONS:** National MS Society; Google Healthcare Advisory Board; Digital Scholar, Digital Health Coalition; advisory board member, Pharmaceutical Executive; mentor, Blueprint Health

**SOCIAL MEDIA:**



**TWEET:** @drumbeat

*Be patient and persistent.*

**DRUMMY:** I've been talking about electronic health records in the marketplace for more than five years — ever since the Affordable Care Act made EHRs the centerpiece of every physician practice in the country. Because physicians have to interact with this record-keeping system, we thought why not try do something that's appropriate for the brands while getting into the workflow of the doctor's office.

One of the things I have learned over the years is you can see something coming and have a sense that it's going to have a big impact on the future, but figuring out when that impact will happen is the more difficult part. This was the case with EHR; in the last year or so we've been making a concerted effort to develop solutions for clients built around EHRs and we have a whole practice that's now devoted to making sure that we're getting the

RELENTLESS. IMPATIENT.



## TRANSFORMATION IS: MOVING BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

As founder and chairman emeritus of Heartbeat, Bill Drummy is challenging conventional wisdom and encouraging people to think differently about brand promotion and communications.

biggest bang for our buck as we operationalize something innovative.

As an impatient person, my big lesson in this industry has been to learn patience. There are a lot of forces tied to the existing world order that are resistant to change. Change will eventually happen, but it's probably going to take longer than you thought. At the same time, we have to keep putting our shoulder to the wheel and pushing or we will never get to the promised land.

**PV: Where do you see the industry headed in the next few years?**

**DRUMMY:** There is a drive to centralize the way healthcare is delivered and make it more outcomes-based. As I just discussed, one manifestation of this has been in the EHR space. Another manifestation can be seen in the consumer space, where patients now are behaving like buyers with a financial interest in their healthcare. So, not only do we have to communicate to patients about the clinical benefits of the product, we also have to talk about out-of-pocket costs and affordability. This is a big change in the industry, and we're starting to see this trend become more evident. In this environment, the standard 60-second commercial on the evening news is no longer adequate.

**PV: That's an interesting conundrum. How do you start to think about crafting those messages?**

**DRUMMY:** We have to think differently. We should be thinking about ways to communicate beyond a

standard 60-second commercial to get a message across. As an example, a compliance app that could help patients manage their condition and the way they take their medicine. This could be delivered through the doctor's office. I don't think advertising is going away, but we need to broaden our understanding of what the appropriate ways are of communicating with our key audiences.

**PV: How do you start to guide the next generation of leaders to think differently?**

**DRUMMY:** On the client side it's difficult because of the way the industry is structured. Marketing or brand managers are on a product for 18 months. They want to get in, make an impact, and move on to their next promotion. I don't think they're cynical, but they are incented to make impact now, not for the long-term. Our job is to convince them that they can still make impact and move on and at the same time advance the long-term interest of the brand. This means we have to get to know our clients really well, know their business top to bottom, so we will earn their trust. We have to make sure that we continually bring them innovative approaches and they trust that we are giving them the best ideas, those that will have the biggest impact. Period.

In terms of bringing that spirit to the staff, it's about giving our folks permission to think in an innovative way, to encourage clients, and not to be discouraged by client pushback. One way of doing this is to make sure we are sharing our success stories with all our people.

We also need to show everyone that, as a management team, we are making the right types of

investments — ahead of the demand — which is hard to do, particularly in larger organizations. We have to demonstrate that we are willing to invest in the future, and not in a trivial way, but with real headcount and resources, even when the revenue might not come in immediately.

**PV: What is your mentoring philosophy?**

**DRUMMY:** I mentor at a number of different levels. Over the years, I've been part of a number of different start-up groups and sometimes people are looking for help because they're not experienced in the industry. I help them develop their ideas and bring them forward to be successful in the marketplace. I am also a mentor to people within the agency, and even some of our clients. I provide advice on their careers. This is a big part of providing value back to the industry. I believe you become a mentor when you are asked; you don't want to volunteer yourself unless someone is really looking to you for the help.

**PV: What advice would you give to future leaders, or what do you wish you had known when you started out?**

**DRUMMY:** I'm glad I didn't know then what I know now, because I may not have done it if I did. For someone who's starting in their career or deciding what to do, my advice is do something that you're passionate about. Because whatever it is, you're going to spend an awful lot of time doing it. If it's not what you want, don't be afraid to stop and start something else. When I started Drumbeat, people would ask what's my exit strategy. I always thought that was a silly question because if you're thinking about the exit strategy, you're not thinking properly about the business itself. So I would say, 'I don't know.' My exit strategy was to run a good business and make good things happen and then we will see, which is not a satisfying answer to a venture capitalist, but it's the right answer. Don't get caught up in short-term thinking, instead focus on delivering something of quality for the long term and good things will come out of it.

**PV: What legacy would you like to leave in the industry?**

**DRUMMY:** That I tried to bring a different type of thinking to the conversation, that I was willing to challenge the conventional way of doing things, and that I didn't accept the status quo as being the only or the right solution. I would like to be thought of as valuing people, about caring about our clients and the individuals who work at Heartbeat, and that I have truly lived by my word and my commitment to look out for their best interests **PV**