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In this episode, Taren Grom, Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE meets with Diane Bryant, CEO, NovaSignal.

Taren: Diane, welcome to the WoW podcast program.

Diane: Well, thank you. I appreciate the invitation to be here.

Taren: We're so thrilled to speak with you. In looking over your bio all I can say truly is wow. You are one of the most powerful women in technology, as well as business. So I can't wait to dig in to your three-decade career journey for a bit. Thirty-two years at Intel, then on to Google Cloud, now chairman and CEO of NovaSignal. Can we start with your Intel days and where you spent the last five years as president of the Data Center Group?

Diane: Yeah, I'd love to. So as you noted I was at Intel for 32 years. I actually joined right out of college as an electrical engineer and then worked my way up to president of the data center business and it was the fastest growing business. We contributed more than half of Intel's profits. The exciting part for me is I grew the business from $10 billion to $19 billion, which was an 11% revenue kegger, made all the shareholders very happy. Wall Street, obviously very happy, so double digit revenue kegger on a $10 billion base was quite a fun accomplishment. It really occurred thanks to the invention of cloud computing and then the emergence of artificial intelligence. So it was a very fun time for all of us.

Taren: Well, a fun time I would say. I mean it's always fun to make that kind of money and improve the stockholders equity, and a lot of personal gratification I would think for you as well. What do these recognitions mean to you personally?

Diane: I have to admit I was thrilled to be selected as one of the 50 Most Powerful Women. I'll say that probably the greatest benefit of it was the network. I remember attending my very first Fortune's Most Powerful Women event and I was literally sitting between Martha Stewart and Billie Jean King. It was quite a thrill.

Taren: Wow, yes. Accolade well deserved on your own as well and I'm sure they were thrilled to be sitting next to you.

Diane: Well, thank you.

Taren: Diane, I'm sure you get this question all the time, but we have a lot of women who are technologists who are part of our community who are often an n of 1 in the room. How did you craft a successful career in a "man's world" and what lessons can you share?

Diane: Yeah, that's an excellent question. So it is a bit bizarre. You're a woman, you're half the population and then you join into the tech world and all of a sudden you're a minority. So it is an interesting position to be in, and I've obviously been in the tech world now for 36 years. But the first thing that is clearly required is excellence in your work. You literally have to be so good at what you do that you don't give the hiring manager any reason or any excuse to pass you up when the next position comes along.

The second thing that you have to have is grit. As you know grit is the power and the passion to pursue your goals. I pride myself on having great grit.

The third final attribute that I think is incredibly important is EQ. You need the ability to read people, yet you've got to be able to empathize with them. You have to be able to always find the win-win. What I have learned perhaps the hard way sometimes is that you just can't afford to alienate any of your peers because your peers are the majority population. They're the majority population, so they're the ones that have the power and they ultimately control your future.

Taren: I think that's so true. So the lessons are really know your stuff, be good at what you do, have passion behind it and have the ability to read that room, which really are skills that women aren't often taught. But I know that you also are a great mentor and sponsor for women in technology. Is this the advice you provide to those women, as well as other women who may be not be technologists; I think those lessons apply across the board.

Diane: Yeah, you are absolutely right. The lessons definitely apply across the board. I do take sponsorship of other women, particularly women in tech that's who tends to be in my circle.

But I have to say the first thing is I distinguish mentor from sponsor. I really believe in sponsorship. Mentoring for me is too passive. I'm always there if you need some advice; I'm happy to give you my advice. But there's a real difference here with sponsorship, which is actively and persistently advocating for a person and doing that with the person you believe in and helping them achieve the role that they deserve. I'll tell you a quick story.

At Intel, when I reached the level of vice president, it was an exciting day for me. It was 2004, and there were myself and two women and we decided that we were going to fix the population of women VPs. So at that time 3% – three percent of all vice presidents at Intel were women. And so we said we're going to change this and we created an advocacy group and each of us 13 VP women at the time, we identified two women in the organization that we knew and that we believed deserved to be VP but were being passed up. And we advocated for them until they were promoted and then we all turned around and grabbed the next two, advocated for them, pull them into the VP world, and because I was so senior at the time it goes back to that power comment – as part of the senior leadership team, we could use our position power to influence

the decision, to challenge the male manager as to why he once again was not going to promote that woman.

I'm proud to say that by 2011 women were then 21% of the VP population meeting the market availability for technology. So it does work.

Taren: Wow, and that is a great example of how to do it and why it works and why it's so important for other women to reach down to that next generation to sponsor them and bring them forward. Those are incredible numbers. You must be incredibly proud.

Diane: I am very proud, and you know that work was really important to me because it was just fundamentally fair. No one should be left out of such a rewarding industry and rewarding success, it is simply practical. No industry can afford to ignore 50% of the population. So those women deserve that recognition and they deserve those promotions. So for me it's just fair and it certainly was very rewarding.

Taren: It's fair. It's also good business, right. So if you're leaving out 50% of your population, you're leaving out 50% of your consumers as well who are where the decisions are being made. So it all comes around.

Diane: It does, it does. Absolutely.

Taren: That's great. Being involved in the technology field for as long as you have, I'd love to hear your take on the role technology is playing and will continue to play in the life sciences industry particularly. What are some of the major trends you're tracking, and then we're going to get into all the good stuff you're doing at NovaSignal.

Diane: Thank you. The healthcare industry is interesting because it has irrefutably have been the last major industry to actually digitize. And so fortunately now, there is countless healthcare industry surveys for 2021 pulling ourselves out of COVID that AI and the use of data is going to increasingly drive improved outcomes in the world of healthcare. Finally electronics and data and AI are going to change the way that healthcare is administered and fundamentally improve patient outcomes. It's been demonstrated now countless times that the integration of technology delivers unquestioned gains for the patient. There's the disruption in healthcare that occurred through telemedicine, a dramatic increase in consumerization of healthcare with a variety of devices and apps that we all have, and then there are those early adopters of AI, so countries like China.

I was involved in 2016 with China in the adoption of AI because they had a significant shortage of healthcare professionals (specifically radiologists) and they have the highest rates of cancer per capita. And so they had a compelling need, a true need to adopt AI in order to get the scale that they needed given their shortage of radiologists. So there's lots of great examples of the impact that technology can have, and I think at last I think we're at the tipping point of adoption in healthcare.

Taren: I hope you're right. I think it did take 400+ days of the pandemic to show the need, right. The industry was moving along kind of until we got to this huge disruption in our processes that really it woke up a sleeping giant, so to speak, because technology has always kind of been there in the background, but now there's some real practical applications that are necessary for us, as you say, to improve patient outcomes. Patients are far more aware now of clinical trials and their healthcare than they ever had before. So the time is right right now.

Diane: It is true. And you know when you think about why was it that the healthcare industry has been so slow to move, in the end it's the willingness to change. It's the willingness to get out of your comfort zone. Stop doing your healthcare practices the way you've always done them and eliminate the fear that really exists when you talk about AI across the board of having your expertise and your core identity replaced by a bunch of fancy algorithms. It's that kind of thinking that has created the barriers to advancement in healthcare for all these years.

Taren: I agree with you, Diane. We often hear that it's not the technology that's holding people back, it's the change management piece of business that's holding it back.

Diane: Yeah. I talk about change a lot because living in the tech industry for all these years it's such a fast pace high innovation just a tremendous pace of any industry, I mean exceeding any other industry, and yet adoption is the hard part. You have all these amazing engineers and data scientists doing massive innovation and then you turn and it is adoption that gets in the way.

So when I think about change, leading organizations is the same thing; how do you get your organization bought in and moving. Ad it really does start with that compelling reason, and it has to be either the tremendous opportunity or devastating loss. You have to feel sometimes threatened, and it takes that compelling reason and then it takes a strong leader that has a believable plan that can actually execute the change and can show people how they're going to be successful with the change and it's not a threat. And then you just need a tipping point. You need the trailblazers that are willing to jump in, jump on board, and that's where I think we finally are in the world of healthcare.

Taren: It does take bravery and it takes courage to do something that nobody has done before and to be – oftentimes we hear 'oh well, we're waiting for the pilot' or do a pilot test here. But the fact is that's not going to move the industry. Somebody needs to step forward and say we're going. So it takes leaders such as yourself to make those bold moves.

Diane: Yeah.

Taren: I am so fascinated by what NovaSignal is doing. Can you share with our audience the tremendous amount of technology and the innovation that you're driving at NovaSignal.

Diane: Thank you. I'm very proud of this company and I'm very excited about what we're doing. It's funny when I joined I said my vision for this company is to become the fifth vital sign. In my mind there is no reason why when you go into the general practitioner's office for your

annual exam that you learn about the health of your brain. You walk in and you've got stethoscopes and you've got pressure cuffs and thermometers and they tell you all kinds of things, the doctor will tell you all kinds of things about your lungs and your heart, but he forgets one major organ which is your brain.

So our job here is to provide a complete breakthrough way using artificial intelligence and using robotics to determine and support the diagnosis of brain illness. All of us have had someone that has been touched in our lives through an illness of the brain, whether it's stroke or dementia or traumatic brain injury. All of these manifest themselves in the brain and hence, can be diagnosed through the monitoring of the blood flow through the brain. And so that's what we do is using transcranial Doppler technology, which is an ultrasound technology with robotics and artificial intelligence, we can assess the health of the brain and identify illnesses such as stroke. And stroke is where we're starting.

Taren: That's fascinating. When we think about the brain it's been so underserved from a therapeutic positioning and not through anything; it's just it's hard because the brain is so complex. So this is really truly a breakthrough to kind of figure out what happens there where it's been a big mystery in the past.

Diane: Exactly. Exactly. Because it is very difficult to look, as you say, to look inside and investigate the operations of the brain. This is a perfect example of how technology really changes the game. I mean we believe this is the biggest neurological breakthrough of our lifetime, the ability to use robotics and AI to view inside of your skull and identify the major arteries in your brain and determine whether the blood is flowing at the right velocity, whether there's particles, emboli flowing through your brain that's going to lodge and cause a stroke, or whether your vessels are narrowing, vasospasm – All of these things can be identified before it's too late.

It's a staggering fact that less than 15% of all people that have a large vessel occlusion, they have a large blockage in their brain are actually treated successfully, less than 15%. It's disease that is all about time to treatment. So until NovaSignal, we didn't have a way of accurately and rapidly diagnosing the presence of a stroke.

Taren: Diane, the timing of this is so poignant for me because my mother just, she just had a stroke.

Diane: Oh no.

Taren: Three and a half weeks ago, she had two minor TIAs. It's because she has narrow blood vessels in her brain and her blood is thicker and she was on a blood thinner, but she was on the wrong blood thinner for 15 years. So the blood thinner she was taking really wasn't the right one for her. So all of this is really it's so important, and there are certain things that could be done immediately after a stroke, but to be able to prevent one is just game changing.

Diane: It is, and to take your mother's example. So if you have a stroke, there's a 30% probability you'll have a second stroke. So your mother's TIA particularly, if you have one, you're bound to have another stroke. In my vision to make this the fifth vital sign, your mom could have a personalized headset that is continuously monitoring the blood flow in her brain and identifying whether particles are flowing or whether the velocity is declining. There's just no reason for people to end up being lifelong disabled because of a stroke not being caught in time.

Taren: Again, I think it's just it's wonderful the work you're doing and it's great to hear that there are some breakthroughs being made because when we look at the incidence of stroke and it's going to become even more prevalent as we become even a greater aging society. So kudos to you and kudos to your team.

Diane: Thank you. Yes, I do have the founder and inventor to thank for. Robert Hamilton, he's a Ph.D. at UCLA and he actually invented the robotic AI device, and I'm fortunate enough to have been brought in as CEO and helping him get it out to the world.

Taren: So he was smart twice. He invented that and he brought you in. Good job. Again, you're sitting in a position as one of the few women chairs and one of the few CEOs at a healthcare med-tech company and you know you are a role model to many. What does that responsibility mean to you?

Diane: Yes, it is a responsibility that I take seriously and it's sad that still today only 8% of Fortune 500 companies have women at the helm. It's a burden and it's a gift to be in a top position and to be CEO and have the power to change the outcome. When I'm asked about gee, the tech industry, there's still no minorities, there's still no women, how are we going to grow the pipeline. I say honestly we do not have a pipeline problem; we have a serious leadership problem.

Diversity is a fact. Inclusion is a choice and the stagnated state of diversity in tech is due to the leaders in tech failing to choose to create an inclusive environment. A leader's job by definition is to lead, and what the leader does, others will follow.

Taren: I love that – diversity is a fact, inclusion is a choice. What a clear signal for change. Who do you look to for guidance? I mean you don't have a lot of women peers, so you have to be looking at some of your male peers.

Diane: It is true, most of my friends are men just because that's who I was working with and surrounded with. It is a funny environment.

When I look back on my career there has always been someone advocating for me. I don't think at the time I realized it, but of course it was always a man because there were no women above me in the hierarchy. But there was always someone that saw me in action, believed in my abilities and was actively looking for the next role where I could bring greater impact and benefit to the company.

So today my advocate and my source of advice is the former chairman of Intel, Andy Bryant, and he is the one that actually told me to get out of the large corp world and to move to a startup. He said, "You gotta go do an IPO, Diane. You don't have that done yet." So off I went to NovaSignal.

Taren: I love that. 'We're kicking you out of the nest and now go fly.' That's great advice, though. So tell me about the IPO process. Again, like that's not easy to sit there with all those investment bankers who are mostly men and you've got to tell the story of this startup biotech company. What was that experience like for you?

Diane: It is interesting to contrast startup world to the Fortune 100 world. Clearly there's many, many differences. But a commonality is that if you're inside of a Fortune 100 company and you aren't continually innovating, continually developing new product lines and taking risks, the company is going to eventually fail, and there's many examples of that over the decade. So I say I was an intrapreneur before I was an entrepreneur. And the fundraising element of being in a startup is much like those quarterly earning calls where you have to explain everything you're doing and why you're going to continue to succeed to Wall Street. You get all of the big industry investors on the call and you have to make a pitch and that pitch has to be believable and the stock price will follow. So it's a very similar process, but instead you're pitching to investors and you're communicating to them why the future is great, why the technology is unique and proprietary and why the market is huge.

It's absolutely true I have done many, many investor calls and I can count the number of women that I've pitched to on one hand, less than 1% I will say. It gets old. It would be nice to have some women on the other side of the line, but it is our reality. The venture world is very, very male, very small percent of women.

Taren: Absolutely. But you've managed through it all and you've been very successful at it, so again kudos to you. In the process of building such successful businesses and business units and taking that Intel, those numbers are just fascinating to me and wow again. But you can't do it all alone. You have to have some pretty good teams behind you. What are some of those qualities you look for in team members that really build a successful organization?

Diane: When I interview folks to join the team, curiosity is probably the biggest attribute. With curiosity, you're questioning I wonder why, how, what could be different. With that then comes that attribute of risk taking, the willingness to question and to challenge the status quo and to break out and break out of the box and that's when you really have these big advancements. That's when the big wins come along. Curiosity, I think, is a critical attribute for a member of the team.

And then the second one, back to what I was talking before, I think empathy is incredibly important. And to your point before, empathy isn't taught; it's something you learn. My mother taught us empathy. She would always say no matter how little we have there's someone that has less and you need to help. Put yourself in their shoes and see the pain that

they're enduring. So empathy is huge for me. You've got to be able to put yourself in the shoes of your colleagues to see the problem and the solutions from their perspective. And to something we mentioned before, diversity of thought is critical. So you've got to be able to step into someone else's shoes, someone who's seeing the problem different from you because they may be different gender or different race or have gone to a different academic environment or so many reasons that gives them that unique value perspective, and diversity of thought is critical to business success.

Taren: Absolutely. And I find it interesting you note empathy is one of those leadership skills because truly right before the pandemic, that was not considered a hard skill to have – and I don't mean a hard skill to have. I mean like a hard like – instead of a softer skill, one of those happened to pass skills and yet, it is now popping up as one of the most important skills leaders need in this new environment that we're in. So you were ahead of the curve.

Diane: Well, thank you. I will say COVID really tested all leaders. It's been a challenge because as you say, so many of your employees have now additional responsibility. They need to be home. They need to care for parents that are older and ill or they need to take care of their kids because they're not in school. You got to be able to put yourself into their shoes and say what would I do, what can I do, what is possible.

Taren: Absolutely. Now that we're 400+ days into this pandemic that has ravaged the world, have you come away with any one key takeaway from this or a couple of key takeaways that have either helped lead your teams through this or that a lesson that you learned from this that maybe you didn't know before.

Diane: Well, it certainly shows resilience. When you're suddenly faced with the challenge like COVID where seemingly overnight you're evacuating the building and sending everyone home, it was chaotic. Managing through chaos is a core leadership skill. Teams, organizations cannot live with ambiguity. As a leader, you have to create sanity and structure in the state of chaos, and I think that moment challenged all of us leaders. It tests your ability to lead. It tests your ability to stand strong and communicate over and over and over again that we'll find a path through this.

Taren: Absolutely. Wise words. Diane, because this is our WoW podcast program, I'm going to ask you to identify an accomplishment or a career trajectory move that either changed your course of your career or created some kind of wow moment that has left a lasting impression on yourself, what would that be?

Diane: I have to go back to deciding to be an engineer, which was a crazy process, but had I not decided to be an electrical engineer I wouldn't be here today. I just feel so fortunate to have landed in the tech industry at a time when it was simply exploding. And I'll tell you how I got here. This is my wow moment.

I was at a community college because I didn't have any money straight out of high school. I was on my own. So I went to the community college because it was free, and I was sitting in calculus

II because I had taken calculus I in high school, so what do you do; you take calculus II. So I was sitting in calculus II and the guy sitting next to me said, "Hey, so what's your major?" And I hadn't declared a major. I hadn't even thought about it, and he said, "well, you should be an engineer because it's the highest starting salary you can make with just a Bachelor's degree."

And I had no money and I was tired of working three waitressing jobs and going to this community college and I just was like wow, I am going to be an engineer. I left calculus, went down to the counselor's office and I said, "I'm here to declare my major" and she says, "Great. What is it?" And I said, "I'm going to be an engineer." And she said, "Well, what kind of engineer?" And I was just like crap, I had no idea there was more than one. And so she said, "Hardware or software?" And I said well, I don't know, hardware, software, hardware – and I thought why would you do hard if you don't have to, so I said, "I'm a software engineer." And off I went to UC Davis and became actually a hardware engineer and electrical engineer out of UC Davis. And it just happened in such a crazy way and yet I'm so grateful. Here I am in the tech world.

Taren: That is a great story. Talk about serendipity. That's hilarious. Oh my gosh.

Diane: Such is life. You never know what's going to happen.

Taren: Right. And I love the fact that you know what, nope, I'm going where the money is and yet you found a personal satisfaction out of it, too. That's a great story. Thank you for sharing.

Diane: Thank you. Thank you. Yeah. It's a crazy – it's been a crazy world. It's been a crazy 35 years that's so much fun and so rewarding.

Taren: Thank you so much for what you're doing in the technology world. Thank you so much for what you're doing in med-tech. I look forward to seeing what's next for NovaSignal. I think there's so many areas that obviously where this kind of technology can have such a dramatic impact on patients and healthcare providers and family members as well. And thank you so much for sharing part of your story with us. It's been wonderful to speak with you. Really delightful. Thank you so much, Diane.

Diane: Oh, my goodness, I have really enjoyed it and I appreciate you taking the time. Thank you.

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