

INSIGHT PAPER

Women on the Rise Spotlight Series: J&J's Vanessa Broadhurst Has a Seat at the Table

Taking Risks, Leading by Example

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Betty Spence, PhD

Head of Women's Advancement

betty.spence@seramount.com

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Taking Risks, Leading by Example: Vanessa Broadhurst

Introduction

"True leadership isn't measured by a command of others, but by the capacity to inspire and motivate the people around you. I've watched Vanessa lead by empowering people to navigate challenges and uncover world-class solutions. She asks questions that encourage innovation and forward movement. She is the epitome of leading with grace." --**Joaquin Duato, Chairman and CEO, Johnson & Johnson**

Vanessa Broadhurst has a comprehensive equity goal: "I want to see as many women and minorities as possible understanding how to navigate a track to the top."

As Executive Vice President, Global Corporate Affairs at Johnson & Johnson (J&J), Broadhurst oversees Corporate Communications, Brand, Philanthropy, Global Public Health, and J&J Health & Wellness Solutions. She also sits on the company's

Executive Committee (EC). She balances a weighty responsibility at this moment in history, when some employees, customers, and stakeholders expect corporations to respond to social issues and take positions on impending legislation. "I have a seat at the table to help shape our future," she says.

Her younger self "never would have believed I'd be on the EC of the world's largest healthcare company. My career has been an amazing adventure." Consistently, she has navigated the twists and turns of an exhilarating career ride with vigor and grace. We will explore her story to learn how she arrived at her current role piloting corporate affairs with an atypical résumé for the function, and why having her voice at this level matters for women's progress.



Bringing Business Chops to Communications

Broadhurst arrived at her current role after serving as Company Group Chairman, Global Commercial Strategy Organization for J&J's Janssen Pharmaceuticals. She's led several multibillion-dollar businesses at the company, including Cardiovascular and Metabolism, Internal Medicine, and Infectious Disease. These roles are on the "line" side of the company, also known as the profit-and-loss (P&L) positions responsible for generating revenue. In 2022, she took the helm of Corporate Affairs on the "staff" side of the company, bringing a stellar reputation for building businesses, according to Jennifer Taubert, Executive Vice President & Worldwide Chair, Pharmaceuticals, who has watched as "Vanessa proved herself over and over again by delivering strong results."

Broadhurst now brings her business savvy to her position overseeing the reputation of the \$378 billion J&J brand. This role offers a wider perspective on the enterprise than her previous positions, affording "an acute lens on the scope and scale of our organization and the things that impact it. Almost nothing big happens that I don't have a line of sight to, whether a crisis, or good news, or something we have to manage operationally." J&J recently separated its consumer-products business from its pharmaceutical and medical device operations, and with her team, Broadhurst worked "to stand up a separate corporate affairs organization within Kenvue," the new consumer-products company.

Broadhurst's function extends beyond communications to corporate brand equity and global public health, which may involve crafting public statements in response to social issues. She describes her process: "I gather the thoughts and opinions of critical stakeholders [with an eye to] providing a healthy work environment so employees feel supported, safe, and taken care of. I draw back on the [J&J credo](#) to make sure we express support for issues in a productive way that ensures stakeholders understand who we really are at J&J." One such statement followed the Supreme Court Dobbs decision reversing Roe v. Wade, declaring that J&J believes "healthcare decisions are best determined by individuals in consultation with their healthcare provider."

"Sometimes You Have to Take the Risk"

Broadhurst's career path is rampant with calculated risks, and her current role is no exception. "My previous jobs all built on what I had known," she says, "but I am no longer a technical leader and do not have a direct background in the functions I'm leading." Moreover, history has shown that moving from a line to a staff position can impede momentum to the top—particularly for women—but Broadhurst seems confident that this enterprise role leaves options open.

Her urge to plunge into unfamiliar waters started early. While in high school in Oak Park, Illinois, studying biological sciences, she "fell in love with psychology" and envisioned medical school and a career in psychiatry. While her friends mostly stayed in-state for college, she declined a scholarship to the University of Illinois and ventured west alone to the University of Colorado at Boulder.

"I wouldn't be as successful as I am today if I didn't go there," she says. "Oak Park is relatively urban, and Colorado offered a totally different, outdoorsy world. I met people from the West who were super adventurous and very different from those I grew up with." She even had a go at the slopes, "though I got my butt kicked by friends." She enrolled in psych pre-med, but during senior year—and following a stint volunteering in the ER at Boulder Community Hospital—she decided against medicine.

With no idea what to do next, she heeded a friend's suggestion to take a business course. "I knew nothing about business. I was so worried I took it pass/fail."

Broadhurst actually *did* know something about business. She'd worked part-time in retail from age 16 when she sold socks at "This Little Piggy," a Chicago specialty store. She worked at other sales jobs throughout school, including at Banana Republic in Boulder. "I was good at sales," she admits, adding that she didn't think about that experience as business.

Her first job after college? Sales. She sold faxes and copiers and "absolutely hated it" due to a bad boss. She ultimately met colleagues in the marketing department, but soon realized that to succeed in that field, she needed a business degree. It was on to the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, where she was granted an academic fellowship by the Consortium for Graduate Study in Management for underrepresented students of color. Once more she was in new waters. "I'd had only that one business course—in business communications. I did have statistics, biology, chemistry, and calculus, but I knew nothing about accounting, or marketing, or operations. This was a completely different experience."

MBA in hand, Broadhurst was hired by the pharmaceutical division at Abbott for a three-year management-development program. It entailed rotations in sales; then market research/analytics; then a year marketing the clot-buster abbokinase, an early biologic. Her career path came into focus.

She still wanted to work in a field related to human health. At Abbott, she could combine her love of science with her predilection for psychology. "Marketing is the psychology of business," she says. "You're figuring out what people's needs are. You're understanding insights of human behavior. Doing that in the healthcare space enables me to tap into both my areas of interest."

What emboldens Broadhurst to take risks repeatedly with trust in the future? Perhaps it's because she always asks, "What's the worst thing that could happen versus the development I might receive?" before making any change. For example, she had an offer to work for Novartis in Switzerland after nine years at Abbott. "The worst might be maybe I don't like Switzerland or the new company and I have to get a new job. I can do that. It's disruptive, but it will be okay. Sometimes you just have to take the risk. Instead of thinking what I could lose, focus on what I might gain."

“One Job at a Time”

As a woman of color in the corporate world, early in her career Broadhurst felt an outsider. There were no women in senior management at Abbott when she started, and few people of color in the company, let alone in management. “How do you aspire to a senior role when you don’t see anyone like you who’s accomplished that level?” she asks. “This was not in my upbringing. I didn’t know the C-suite existed.” She reasons, “It’s not that I didn’t have confidence in myself and my abilities. It’s just that it’s impossible to dream what you don’t even know exists.”

She grew up having “no knowledge of the world of senior management or how to get there.” At Abbott, an exchange with a man in leadership who sat down at her lunch table led to an epiphany. “We were talking, and he described a ski vacation in Hawaii with Gerry. It took a while to realize he didn’t mean the Jerry I worked with, he meant President Gerry Ford.” After that exchange she thought, “How different people in these senior roles were from my life experience! I didn’t know inherently how to get those roles—or that I could even be in one someday. It didn’t feel like hard work and effort got you there. It seemed to be a different game, and not a game I understood how to play.”

After the “Gerry” conversation, she began weighing possibilities and remembers thinking, “Maybe I’d even get to be a director or VP of marketing. That would be a very big deal and a fulfilling level for my career.” She saw that “there can be all kinds of things you put in your own head around what level of success you can achieve.” A light came on, and “I changed my mentality to see how far I could go, one job at a time.”

This lesson she now passes on to people in early career. She counsels, “Don’t look ahead 10 levels because that’s too much, but think what you need to do to move up a *couple* of jobs. What skill sets do you need to develop, how will you be competitive with others who want those roles? If you think that way, it’s a game changer. Plan for a couple roles ahead and just keep going, a step at a time.”

Broadhurst’s career steps include nine years at Abbott in marketing, then sales and marketing operations; a year and a half at Novartis as Head, Global Gastroenterological Marketing; four years at Amgen as General Manager, Immunology and Cardiovascular; then Bone and Cardiovascular; and 14 years at J&J, including four positions leading P&Ls and now heading Global Corporate Affairs.

“One job at a time, that’s my motto,” she declares.

“All Jobs Are Not Created Equal”

The ever-calm Broadhurst gets somewhat worked up when she talks about what women need to know about career paths, but nobody tells them. “I want them to understand things I wish people had told me early in my career. We keep too many things quiet. Like what it means to be a senior manager or director leading people. Women don’t always understand early enough the roles that are feeders to the top. Why are these things kept so close to the vest?”

The 2019 [Seramount study](#) “The Gender Gap at the Top: What’s Keeping Women from Leading Corporate America?” found that women don’t understand there is a difference between the two career paths at a company: the P&L or line jobs focused on revenue generation and the staff jobs, functions that support those who bring in revenue, such as human resources, finance, communications, and legal. The study

found that most women don't know anything about P&L roles, they lack relationships to support them, and they have scant confidence to inspire them to aspire to C-Suite roles.

P&L jobs can seem intimidating, Broadhurst says, "because it's the area where people perceive the work to be harder as there are definitive metrics in place. The P&L is a report card that shows if you can grow market share, deliver margin, and construct the business to create profitability."



How to Increase Women in P&L

- Inform women early on about differences between line and staff roles and impact on career paths.
- Ensure women have mentors and sponsors.
- Provide opportunities for exposure to senior leaders.
- Have senior leaders/HR monitor succession planning.
- Require diversified slates for P&L opportunities.

From her senior executive seat, P&L advocate Broadhurst tells young women that "all jobs are not created equal when you're trying to get to the top. To get the big jobs leading businesses, you need P&L experience to understand how the business works. You see the construct of how the corporation produces revenue and returns equity to shareholders. In a staff position, you can see a slice of that; but when running a business, you see soup-to-nuts." Most CEOs have led businesses.

Like Samuel Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* compelled to tell his story to all he meets, Broadhurst admits, "I tell everybody about P&L jobs." She's found that women and women of color don't always understand what makes a general manager—the person who manages operations to increase profits and a prime step on the ladder to the top—or that they need early P&L experience for the role. She's observed that many women in staff positions at all levels don't know they're not on a pathway to CEO and believe

they can move over to lead large businesses. Even high-potential women at times decline P&L opportunities. "We need women to make this choice as early as possible. It's rare for a VP to move from staff to line with no previous experience."

“Wealth Accumulation Accrues from Incentive Compensation”

Broadhurst stresses how critical this information is to women’s futures, particularly when it comes to lifetime income. She finds that women historically have lacked knowledge about wealth accumulation and how it is linked to career advancement. She points out that no one explains that at some point as you rise, you will start receiving long-term incentives (stock options, restricted units, etc.) as part of your total compensation. “CEOs and C-suite executives are generally created out of P&L leaders. Getting into that P&L pipeline can change your life for your family and your children. If women understood this, they might be open to making moves and taking more risks.”

Broadhurst debunks the myth that a P&L position precludes family. “It is doable,” she states firmly. She’s found that many women fear that the more senior one is, the greater the time demand. However, her own experience proved that it was the content of her jobs that changed, not the time required. “My earlier roles took a lot of hours, but it doesn’t get a whole lot harder from a time perspective. I don’t work more hours and I do control my life.” She brings it home: “The P&L is not a life-wrecker.”

Building equity for the future is one reward of P&L positions, but Broadhurst reveals yet another: “Owning a P&L is like a Rubik’s cube. It’s a puzzle. You’re working to get the insight that leads to a solution to deliver to your customers. As you grow revenue, you can think of ways to do it more creatively to create efficiencies. You solve puzzles on a continuous basis, and you get to provide new ways of doing things.”

Broadhurst’s career escalation occurred while she raised her family. She is married with two daughters. Sinclair, 20, attends college and may turn her love of gaming into a career in technology. Rylan, a high school freshman, plays lacrosse and field hockey, does costume design, attends a Taylor Swift concert when possible, and is funny, according to her mom. Broadhurst met husband Kennon in graduate school, where both focused on marketing, and three times they worked at the same companies. His passion: coaching lacrosse, including at Rylan’s school in New Jersey.

“You Have to Believe in Yourself”

Broadhurst’s first mentor, Ed Fiorentino, ran marketing at Abbott and kept an eye on her to ensure she was navigating management roles before this was part of her plan. When early on he asked her to take over a marketing operations group—her first director role—she wondered if she’d done something wrong and asked him, “Are you pushing me out?” “No,” he told me, “it’s an opportunity, and you’ll learn a ton from managing 50 people.” He continued monitoring her progress until she was running an 800-person business unit with several marketing and sales teams.

Now Broadhurst looks out for up-and-coming talent, with a particular focus on confidence. “You have to believe in yourself,” she will urge. “You’d be surprised at what you can achieve if you put your mind to it and you’re willing to step into the game. And you’ve got to be able to dust yourself off, as it’s not always pretty. You won’t always have the best manager, or what you perceive as the ideal job, but if you get in and stay in, you can complete great things.” She will corral a high-potential individual and say, “We think highly of you. I can’t guarantee you anything, but you have the raw potential, the intelligence, the emotional intelligence to get someplace

huge. You should know that and work on how to develop.” This counsel she calls a critical “confidence booster.”

Her door is open to all comers. “People come talk to me perhaps because they identify with me, or my leadership style has struck a chord and suggested an open door,” she says. Reshema Kemps-Polenco, former President, Janssen Cardiovascular and Metabolism, and now Executive Vice President at Novartis, sees Broadhurst as an uber mentor, noting that “a lot of women mentor other women, but Vanessa goes deep into the organization and finds time to talk to junior women. She knows that propelling women and people of color forward requires relationship capital. She creates network access early in their careers so others see their talent.”

Such mentoring develops into sponsorship as Broadhurst offers visibility to women and minorities and uses her clout to champion them for opportunities. Kemps-Polenco credits Broadhurst with a personal career save. When work/life commuting issues piled up, “I went to Vanessa and told her I had another offer. With HR, she figured out a way I could stay.” She adds, “If it weren’t for Vanessa’s empathetic leadership activating the influence of the organization, I would have left J&J for the wrong job.” Years later, when she did move on, she says, “I needed to be a Vanessa somewhere else.”

All three mentees interviewed for this profile point to Broadhurst’s empathy, honesty, and authenticity as a leader, advisor, and sponsor. Ginelle Julien, Vice President, Digital and Business Transformation, MedTech Supply Chain, believes that directness



Advice To Share with Early Career Women

- Take accountability for your own career.
- Ask tough questions early. Say, “This is what I want to do; what steps do I need to take?”
- There is no best next role. Have conversations about competencies. You need many roles to get competencies needed to advance to the top.
- Have open-ended discussions with the lens turned toward what you want to do. For example, if you want to be a general manager, ask “What do I need to do?”
- Don’t see these conversations as threatening or worry others will think you’re getting ahead of yourself. Nobody will ever fault you for asking for information.

combined with empathy draws people to Broadhurst. “You know where you stand with her. She can be brutally honest, then put her arm around you.”

Erica Purdo Jeffries, Vice President, Strategy, Transformation & Analytics, tells how when she hit a difficult point in her career, “Vanessa went into action. She took time to think about the gaps in her organization and about my skill sets, then offered me the opportunity to come over and help drive results. She kept me at J&J when I didn’t want to leave!”

This concern for the careers of individuals like Jeffries and Kemps-Polenco reflects the value that Broadhurst places on talent retention, as well as her understanding of and sensitivity to what people need. Taubert, to whom Broadhurst reported at Janssen, offers insight on what makes her tick. “I’ve seen how deeply she cares about people—whether she’s advocating for health equity in underserved communities or supporting the careers of the next generation of aspiring leaders. It’s that passion that sets Vanessa apart.”

“Balancing Gender and Racial Diversity Takes a Lot of Work”

Broadhurst exercises the power of her position to support DEI, and her influence up and across the organization has impact. “She has everyone’s respect as a business leader,” says Kemps-Polenco, who notes that when she raises issues with senior leaders, they listen. Broadhurst’s traction, she adds, results from “making observations as facts. Vanessa sees diversity as a business issue and addresses it as if turning around a business. There’s no whining, blaming, or shaming.”

Over the years, Broadhurst has made the diversity of her teams a priority. She keeps an eye out for women and people of color to guide into the P&L pipeline. Candidly she says, “Balancing gender and racial diversity takes a lot of work. But if I want a high-performing team, I ask ‘what other opinions do I need?’”

In 2022, Broadhurst became EC chair for J&J’s African Ancestry Leadership Council (AALC). Julien, the ERG’s co-chair, is impressed with how Broadhurst “gets down to business and picks complex issues apart” and then goes to bat for the AALC and achieves consensus. Co-Chair LaMont Bryant, Head, Regulatory Affairs, Ethicon, calls her “tireless” as she brings AALC’s issues forward and spends personal capital in the process. She also spends actual capital, ponying up for the ERG from her own pocket, according to Julien.

“Be an Authentic Leader”

Bryant depicts Broadhurst as having a strategic, no-nonsense style: “She can have tough conversations because of who she is and how she delivers. She puts context around data, and these conversations are focused on deliverable results, not emotions.” He adds, “People know she has a high standard, her intentions are good, and that the overall outcome will benefit the collective. She’s demanding, but she has this beautiful skill of putting it all into context so it’s not a Vanessa solution, but one where everyone can see themselves as part of the solution.” He adds that she “creates an environment where other people can be better.”

The “Gerry” exchange with a senior leader back at Abbott not only catalyzed Broadhurst’s ambition, it also awakened her determination “to try to be a more authentic leader.” Back then, she couldn’t connect with “stories senior leaders told about what they did.” It seemed to her that the people in these roles operated in a world she’d never enter. Today, peers and colleagues see no such barriers between her and J&J employees at all levels. “Vanessa is authentic and direct and approachable,” says Jeffries. “She takes herself seriously, but she’s humble, she doesn’t portray herself as important.” In fact, Jeffries adds, “She gives you her attention and makes everyone feel *they* are important.”

Colleagues speak of her as a serious driver of business, with what Kemps-Polenco calls “sheer intellectual capacity,” yet with an instinct to leaven seriousness with humor. Julien states that “Deadpan, Vanessa will throw out a witty remark. She brings the temperature down in the room,” and often “brings levity” into the room simply for fun.

Another colleague, Antoinette Cheek, Senior Director, Global Corporate Affairs, gauges Broadhurst’s gifts as a manager: “Vanessa leads with humanity, with mind and heart. She can break with a joke, then rally us.” She ruminates: “She’s gifted, yes. But when you have someone that smart, and you’re confident she’s thinking toward the best solution, bringing the right people together in the room, and leading with compassion—that creates a mindset to get things done. And that’s a gift to us, the people she works with.”

What she’s most proud of

“Taking and building the Cardiovascular business from scratch and seeing organizations I’ve built thrive. But in my heart, it’s seeing people I’ve helped develop who are now thriving. That people value your opinion and insight enough to reach out, and that you’ve had that impact on someone’s life—that sparks joy.”

What drives her

“I want to live in a world where, as Martin Luther King said, people are judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character. That’s the world I want to live in, and I try to make it a little more that way every day.”