

# EMPOWER

An OWL Magazine



fall 2020

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**OWL**  
Advancing Diversity in Leadership



# The Importance of Belonging

As I sit down to write my final President’s Letter for EMPOWER, I could have never imagined this year, which has been unlike any other we have experienced in our lifetime. Our lives have been disrupted by a global pandemic and confronting issues of racial divide in our society, leaving us to grapple with the unknown and a new normal. And while these changes can seem insurmountable, I’ve been inspired by how OWL has embraced the challenges and led the way – beginning with the webinar series: Instigating Change: An Honest Discussion on Race in Ophthalmology. Several hundred of our members attended this informative, insightful, and impactful series of discussions. If you missed it – you can find it on our website.

“Diversity is like being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance, and belonging is dancing like nobody’s watching.”

Gregory Lewis

Our amazing Executive Board, Georgette Pascale, Abby Markward and Erin Powers recently came together virtually to review our 5-year vision and 2021 objectives. OWL’s mission and vision is, and has always been, anchored in diversity and the events of 2020 have become a north star as we finalize our programs and plans for the year to come. Gaynor Fries, our equally amazing Executive Director, shared a quote from a 2017 LinkedIn blog that resonated with us all and helped put our vision and mission into perspective.

In the blog, Gregory Lewis states, “diversity is like being invited to a party, inclusion is being asked to dance, and belonging is dancing like no one’s watching.” In other words, it’s not enough to simply have more seats at the table for the marginalized if they don’t feel safe, or believe they need to act like someone they’re not in order to fit in. The challenge is there for us to recognize others for their accomplishments, provide the opportunity to express an opinion freely without judgment and value everyone’s contributions – these were all ways respondents of a LinkedIn survey shared to help them experience a sense of belonging. These are very large topics for OWL’s focus, and they will continue to impact the decisions we need to make to ensure OWL remains relevant.

Our Fall 2020 issue introduces you to our award nominees. I think you will enjoy reading about these very special nine individuals who represent OWL’s vision and mission and specifically the qualities that make a Visionary Leader, Catalyst or Rising Star. As a follow-up to our ASCRS Signature Event, Julie Swidler, Executive Vice President of Business Affairs and General Counsel at Sony Music Entertainment shares her thoughts on turning conversation into action. And a big shout out to our Champion members, we truly appreciate your commitment to OWL!

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And so, with this focus on belonging, we are empowered to continue to build a stronger organization that embraces change and is reflective of our diverse membership and of the industry we are a part of. Through our programs and actions, OWL is committed to connecting with you, our members, and others to make a difference in our endeavors. I know that, while separate, we've been through a lot together in 2020 and I also know OWL will continue to offer a sense of belonging.



Beth A. Marsh  
OWL President

Ophthalmic World Leaders (OWL) • Advancing Diversity in Leadership

## OWL Initiatives for 2021



**Fellows**  
*Early Career*

### OWL'S FELLOWS PROGRAM

Building on a successful launch in 2019, this program is directed at people in their early career stages. The OWL Fellows Program will increase support and connection opportunities by pairing interested rising leaders with established leaders in the ophthalmic space. These connections should allow parties to grow, share experiences and impact careers – and will be a way for OWL to elevate underrepresented parties in the ophthalmic space.



**Leadership Summit**  
*Mid-Career*

### OWL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Targeted at people in mid-career looking to achieve the highest levels of leadership, OWL's new leadership course aims to create skilled future leaders who will build and lead diverse teams. The program will help attendees:

- Learn critical decision-making and team building leadership skills
- Build a personal brand with an effective virtual leadership presence
- Deliver an impact from the podium, and show how to land and develop internal and external speaking opportunities.



**Get-on-Board with OWL**  
*Senior Level*

### GET-ON-BOARD WITH OWL

The objectives of this new program are to increase diversity on Boards and interrupt the current situation where a majority of board seats come from referrals from other board members. OWL's new program will help prepare diverse candidates to position themselves for Board roles by:

- Providing education and awareness of roles & responsibilities of private and public board of directors.
- Preparing attendees to understand the process of board selection and how to gain access to the network.
- Developing diverse candidates who may be ready for board service and have in-demand skills that boards require.



# OWL Appreciates Champion Members

Champion Members are advocates and champions of the OWL Mission, Vision, and Values; they are leaders in their organizations; they actively recruit new OWL members; and they contribute significantly in OWL by attendance, and leadership at Board or Committee levels.

Learn more at [www.owl-site.org](http://www.owl-site.org)

- D. Michael Ackermann, PhD** • Chairman, Oyster Point Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
**Zaina Al-Mohtaseb, MD** • Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology & Associate Residency Program Director; Cornea, Cataract & Refractive Surgery, Baylor College of Medicine  
**Jacqueline Armani** • Medical Science Liaison, Alcon  
**Jeannette Bankes** • President & GM, Global Surgical Franchise, Alcon  
**Joanne Bara** • VP US Education and Marketing, Ziemer USA  
**Patti Barkey, COE** • Director, Dry Eye University  
**Kim Bartels** • VP, Vance Thompson Vision  
**Jan Beiting** • Principal, Wordsmith Consulting  
**Susan Benton** • President, Thea Pharma, Inc.  
**Ryan Bleeks** • National Sales Director, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Ltd.  
**Tamara Bogetti** • Executive Vice President & Group Publisher, Bryn Mawr Communications, LLC (BMC)  
**Hayley Boling, MBA** • CEO, Boling Vision Center & INSIGHT Surgery Center  
**Claire Bonilla** • CEO, SightLife  
**Renee Bovelle, MD** • Medical Director and Owner, Physician, Envision Eye & Laser  
**Laurie Brown, MBA, COMT, COE, CPC, OCS, OSA, OSC, CPSS** • Senior Consultant, BSM Consulting  
**Joan Buccigrossi** • Head, Global Diversity and Inclusion, Alcon  
**Rhonda Buckholtz** • CEO/Owner, Coding and Reimbursement Experts, LLC  
**Anita Burton** • Vice President, Human Resources, Carl Zeiss Meditec, Inc.  
**Arthur Chan, PhD, MBA** • Lead Medical Director, Eye Care - US Clinical Development and Medical Affairs, Novartis Pharmaceuticals  
**Evelyn De La Vega Stewart, RAC, MSRS** • Director, Regulatory Affairs, STAAR Surgical  
**Zachary Denning** • Project Manager/Product Science Specialist, ScienceBased Health  
**Valerie Ditterline** • Director, Glaukos Corporation  
**Karen Dobkowski** • CFO / COO, Glacial Multimedia  
**Jag Dosanjh** • SVP, Medical Therapeutics, Allergan  
**Thomas Dunlap** • CEO, Mynosys  
**Laurie Ferguson** • Head of Ophthalmic Devices Global Communications, Carl Zeiss Meditec, Inc.  
**Bradley Fundingsland** • President, The Fundingsland Group  
**Mark Gordon** • Global Head, Regulatory Affairs, Alcon  
**Whitney Hauser, OD, FAAO** • Director, Peer Education for US Ophthalmics, Novartis  
**Jeanne Hecht** • Chief Executive Officer, Ora  
**Tad Heitmann** • Head of Communications, Aerie Pharmaceuticals  
**AnnMarie Hipsley, DPT, PhD** • Founder & President, Ace Vision  
**Sondra Hoffman, COE, CPC, CMPE, LHRM** • CEO, Florida Eye Clinic  
**Kristen Ingenito** • Vice President, Market Scope  
**Amy Jacobs** • Vice-President & Co-Founder, Sandbox Strategic  
**Ranna Jaraha** • Director of New Media, Bryn Mawr Communications  
**Matt Jensen** • CEO, Vance Thompson Vision  
**Anish Kapur, MD** • VP Sales & Marketing, iMedWare Inc.  
**Lisa Kim** • Director of Communications & Public Relations, Allergan  
**Patricia Kitchen** • COO, Ocular Therapeutix  
**Kate Kline** • VP Marketing, Kala Pharmaceuticals  
**Amelie Koch, PhD** • Head of Global Strategy Ophthalmic Devices, Carl Zeiss Meditec, Inc.  
**Dick Lindstrom, MD** • Founder, Minnesota Eye Consultants  
**Jaci Lindstrom** • Consultant and Mayor, Pro Tem: City of Minnetonka Beach  
**Marsha Link, PhD** • Principal, Link Consulting  
**William Link, PhD** • Managing Director, Versant Ventures / Manager, Flying L Partners  
**Nancy Lurker** • CEO and President, EyePoint Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
**Carla Mack** • Global Head of Professional Affairs, Alcon  
**Zaiba Malik, MD** • Physician/CEO EyeMD, LLC; Assistant Professor, Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine; Medical Director, Medpace, Inc.  
**Bindu Manne** • Director, Market Development, Ocular Therapeutix  
**Abigail Markward** • Director of Business Development - PentaVision LLC  
**Beth Ann Marsh** • VP, North America Sales & Marketing - Ophthalmology, Apellis Pharmaceuticals  
**Caren Mason** • CEO, President and Director, STAAR Surgical  
**Antony Mattessich** • President & CEO, Ocular Therapeutix  
**Deanne Melloy** • Vice President, Aerie Pharmaceuticals  
**Jason Menzo** • COO, Foundation Fighting Blindness  
**Jim Mazzo** • Executive Chair of Neurotech, Chair of Avellino  
**Magda Michna, PhD** • Vice President of Clinical Affairs, AcuFocus, Inc.  
**Yari Mitchell** • VP Global Medical Affairs & Business Strategy, AcuFocus, Inc.  
**Schalon Newton** • Chief Business Officer, Trefoil Therapeutics  
**Constance Okeke, MD, MSCE** • Glaucoma Specialist & Cataract Surgeon, Virginia Eye Consultants and Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology, Eastern Virginia Medical School  
**Michael Onuscheck** • Global Franchise Head, Surgical, Alcon  
**Sandor Palfi** • Vice President, Commercial, Johnson & Johnson Vision  
**Jai Parekh, MD, MBA** • Former VP & Chief Medical Officer, Eye Care, Allergan  
**Andrew Parks** • Director of Professional Development, Sun Pharmaceuticals  
**Georgette Pascale** • President, Pascale Communications, LLC  
**Craig Pisoni, PhD** • President, Pisoni and Associates, LLC  
**Carey Powers** • Vice President, Marketing, Visus Therapeutics  
**Megan Pritchard, COA** • Lead Surgical Coordinator/Clinic Liaison, Brazos Eye Surgery of Texas  
**Heather Ready, MBA** • Senior Manager, Marketing, Surgical, Johnson & Johnson Vision  
**Tracy Ripley** • Executive Assistant, Carl Zeiss Meditec, Inc.  
**Tommie Rowland** • US Clinical Training and Support Manager, South-Central Region, Alcon  
**Joe Salchert** • Executive VP of Live Project Development, Bryn Mawr Communications Group, LLC dba Avenue Live, LLC  
**Robert Sanchez, PhD** • Sr. Director of R&D, Glaukos  
**Scott Schachter, OD** • Founder, Advanced Eyecare and the Eyewear Gallery Optometry  
**Steven Schallhorn, MD** • Chief Medical Officer, Carl Zeiss Meditec, Inc.  
**Erin Schallhorn Powers** • Sr. Director, Medical Affairs & Professional Education, Carl Zeiss Meditec Inc.  
**Michelle Senchyna, PhD** • VP of Clinical Development and Medical Affairs, Aerie Pharmaceuticals  
**Christy Shaffer** • Partner, Hatteras Venture Partners  
**Allison Shuren** • Partner, Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP  
**Candace Simerson** • President/CEO, iCandy Consulting, LLC  
**Rich Small** • CEO, Neurotech Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
**Mark Smythe** • Head of Sales and Marketing, REF, Alcon Refractive  
**Jerry St. Peter** • CEO/Co-Founder/Director, EyeVance  
**Sheryl Stevenson** • Group Editorial Director, Eye Care, MJH Life Sciences  
**Susan Stratton** • President, Eye Med Management Solutions  
**Forrest Beau Swann, MD** • Cornea and Refractive Surgeon, Brazos Eye Surgery of Texas  
**Audrey Talley-Rostov, MD** • Partner and Director of Cornea and Refractive Surgery, Northwest Eye Surgeons and Global Medical Director, SightLife  
**Judi Tauber** • Overseer, Tauber Eye Center  
**Euan Thomson, PhD** • President Ophthalmic Devices - Head of Digital Business Unit, Carl Zeiss Meditec Inc.  
**Tracy Valorie** • Founder, TMV Associates  
**Jake Vander Zanden** • Principal Consultant, McDermott+Bull Executive Search  
**Linda Villaneuva** • Global Director, Medical Affairs Post-Approval Studies, ZEISS  
**Domenic von Planta** • COO, SCHWIND eye-tech-solutions GmbH  
**John Vukich, MD** • Eye Surgeon, Summit EyeCare of Wisconsin  
**Al Waterhouse** • President and CEO, AcuFocus, Inc.  
**Clay Wilemon** • Chief Strategy Officer, Brado  
**Joanna Williams** • COO, Lexitas Pharma Services, Inc.  
**Ravaughn Williams** • Head, CDMA Vision Care Franchise, Alcon  
**Nivine Woods** • Head, Global Marketing, Instrumentation, Johnson & Johnson Vision  
**Jared Young** • VP of Marketing and Communications, CorneaGen



# Nominees for the 2020 OWL Awards

OWL is pleased to introduce the nominees for the Visionary Leader Award sponsored by Ziemer, Catalyst Award sponsored by CorneaGen, and Rising Star Award sponsored by Zeiss. The winner in each award category will be announced at the OWL Virtual Signature Event.

## Visionary Leader Award Nominees

*OWL's Visionary Award honors an individual who has paved the way for diversity in their field through significant achievement. Nominees have demonstrated leadership in their field through their careers.*



Frank W.  
Bowden III, MD

Frank Bowden is the founder and president of Bowden Eye & Associates in Jacksonville, FL; owner and medical director of the Eye Surgery Center of North Florida; and co-founder of Dry Eye University and Dry Eye Access. His “super power” in leading his practice has always been his team approach, working closely with his CEO, techs, staff and optometrists – and treating each one as unique and valuable. While Dr. Bowden has been a clinical pioneer and a scholar, he also has a great sense of humor. When he turns on the fun, no one can resist wanting to join the effort, according to his nominator.

Dr. Bowden has the distinction of being the first African American to complete an ophthalmology residency in the U. S. Navy and the second African American to complete a corneal and external disease fellowship at Will’s Eye Hospital. During a 12-year military career, he was awarded the U.S. Navy Commendation Medal in 1982 and the U.S. Navy Achievement Medal in 1987.

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Magda  
Michna, PhD

Magda Michna, PhD, is the Chief Global Clinical and Regulatory Affairs Officer for AcuFocus, and has previously held senior scientific and clinical development roles at Alcon, Johnson & Johnson Vision, and Presbia. She has dedicated her career to research in human vision, which has spanned both academic research as well as the pursuit of the development of novel technologies in the ophthalmic industry in the United States and globally.

Dr. Michna, who holds a PhD in optical physics, is inspired by helping young women enter STEM programs and mentoring women in STEM careers. She was instrumental in the development of programs with the Australian Institute of Physics to support women in physical sciences, and has served as mentor for many young women in industry. She co-chairs the Southern California OWL Chapter.

As a former refugee who has lived, studied and worked in several different countries, she has impressed colleagues with her ability to overcome challenges and achieve her goals. She is admired for her leadership, resilience, courage, and integrity. Her colleagues say that she has an “uncompromising adherence to strong ethical principles and values.” ■



P. Dee  
Stephenson,  
MD, FACS

Dee Stephenson is the founder and director of Stephenson Eye Associates in Venice, FL. She began her career during a time when there were few female ophthalmologists and fewer still in leadership – something she has worked to change.

Dr. Stephenson helps run the CEDARS/ASPENS mentorship program and is a mentor for residents with the Bausch + Lomb mentorship program; she has been instrumental in creating a path to the podium for many young female ophthalmologists. She helps to educate her colleagues around the world as head of the education committee for the Global Education & Research Society of Ophthalmology (GERSO) and through extensive publications, conference presentations, and her work with industry to drive innovation.

Dr. Stephenson is a recognized leader in the field of ophthalmology. She has received the American Academy of Ophthalmology achievement award, the Castle Connolly Exceptional Women in Medicine, Outstanding Female Leader in Ophthalmology, and the Melvin Jones Lions Humanitarian award (twice!).

*Continued on page 8*



## Catalyst Award Nominees

OWL's Catalyst Award honors an individual who has contributed significantly to helping others advance their career in eye care. Nominees have demonstrated leadership in supporting the advancement of diversity. (For example: mentoring/sponsorship of promising individuals; diversity advocacy; or creating a culture of equality).



Renee Bovelle,  
MD, MS

Renee Bovelle is the owner and Medical Director of Envision Eye & Laser Center in Glenn Dale, MD, and assistant professor of ophthalmology at Howard University. She has significantly contributed to advancing others through mentorship and advocacy by supporting three key concepts: Diversity, leadership and innovation. She personally embodies these concepts, as well as attesting to their importance in medicine and leadership, according to one of her nominators. In addition to her busy practice, Dr. Bovelle educates medical students, residents, and physicians locally and nationally, and has been an advocate for diversity and inclusion in the ophthalmic space.

Dr. Bovelle has held a number of leadership positions, incoming President of the Maryland Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons (MSEPS) and councilor to the AAO. She is a board member of OWL, and recently helped to organize and chair the OWL webinar series on race in ophthalmology. With a Master's degree in cybersecurity strategy & information management, Dr. Bovelle is actively involved in devising policies and practices that protect critical health information. In every role, Dr. Bovelle has worked towards creating a culture of equality. ■



Abigail  
Markward

Abby Markward has 20 years of experience in the ophthalmic industry. She is currently the National Director of Business Development for PentaVision, an ophthalmic publishing company. She has extensive experience in advertising, marketing and product management, working for companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Bausch + Lomb.

Ms. Markward volunteers for SightLife, a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating corneal blindness worldwide. On behalf of SightLife, she traveled to Nepal for the Women Advocates' Trip to raise awareness of blindness prevention. She is also a dedicated OWL volunteer, serving on the program committee since 2017 and coordinating content and speakers for OWL's national signature events. She is a board member and the incoming OWL president.

Ms. Markward has worked throughout her career to be a mentor and to enhance diversity. In nominating her, a colleague emphasized that "She is the ultimate catalyst, always looking for opportunities to connect people across our industry to add value and establish connectivity – and does so with ease and grace." ■



Denise  
McEachern, JD

Denise McEachern is a recognized global regulatory expert with 40 years of experience in the medical device, diagnostics and pharmaceutical industry, including 30 years in ophthalmology. She is currently the Global Head of Regulatory Affairs for STAAR Surgical and has previously served on executive management teams for Bausch + Lomb, LifeScan, and Johnson & Johnson. Her identification, development, and mentoring of key talent has resulted in strong teams able to address emerging issues and deliver approvals of new and innovative products.

Colleagues say that Ms. McEachern has always been a champion for diversity, personally mentoring minority women and helping them develop in their careers. She is recognized as a great teacher, an effective leader, and one who has been able to successfully take on great challenges.

But even beyond her years of dedication and commitment to the ophthalmic industry, she exhibits a compassion for others that is rarely seen in the business world, according to a nominator, who recalls her support and advocacy for an employee with brain cancer, helping him to maintain his health insurance and a semblance of normalcy as he battled the disease.

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# Rising Star Award Nominees

*OWL's Rising Star Award honors an individual who is an emerging leader in the ophthalmic space. Nominees are in their early or mid-careers and demonstrate high potential for making an impact in ophthalmology.*



Kristen  
Brotherson

Kristen Brotherson is the Vice President of Marketing for Alcon's US Surgical business. As a 15-year Alcon veteran, she has held roles in sales, training and marketing with Alcon Surgical's US and Global organizations. Her nominator describes her as someone who "Thinks big, while also thinking responsibly." She helped lead Alcon's branding shift during the height of the pandemic, encouraging marketing efforts that focused on support for doctors and patients rather than on advertising products and equipment.

Throughout her career, Ms. Brotherson has always focused on building dynamic, effective teams. She has a particular passion for career development and diversity and inclusion in the workplace. She currently serves as a member of Alcon's North America Diversity Council and other Alcon employee groups that focus on supporting working parents, racial equality and women in the workplace. She also volunteers with a children's autism organization in Ft. Worth, TX. ■



Ranna  
Jaraha

Ranna Jaraha is the Director of New Media at Bryn Mawr Communications (BMC), where she works closely with leading physicians and industry leaders on creating digital programs such as video series, podcasts, and live surgery programs, as well as hosting the weekly news broadcast, EyewireTV. In this role, she has had the opportunity to interview high-level industry executives and produce large-scale educational programs, with a level of confidence and ease that is unusual in someone so early in their career.

Ms. Jaraha has the energy, curiosity and intelligence to drive her to high achievements within the eyecare industry, according to a nominator. As a first-generation Iranian-American, "She recognizes opportunities to learn and grow and steps right up to connect with others." Ms. Jaraha is a member of the first class of OWL Fellows. She was eager to participate in the program as she believes in the empowerment that comes through mentorship. She also contributes her time and talent to the OWL Marketing Outreach committee, where she is described as hardworking, compassionate, and someone who consistently brings new ideas and energy to the table. ■



Julie Schallhorn,  
MD, MS

Julie Schallhorn is Associate Professor of Ophthalmology and Associate Residency Program Director at the University of California, San Francisco, where she specializes in corneal and refractive surgery. Dr. Schallhorn was part of a movement to increase the diversity and gender balance of the UCSF grand rounds. She is an active member of OWL, WIO, and the ASCRS Young Eye Surgeons Committee and has been an advocate for the promotion of women in both clinical and business settings.

Dr. Schallhorn is truly a rising star in ophthalmology. She is sought after by peers for her clinical care acumen, by industry for her critical-thinking guidance, and by residents for her superlative teaching ability. Her work is greatly appreciated by organized ophthalmology, as evidenced by numerous requests to participate in local and international symposia, committee memberships and leadership roles. Her many peer-review publications are often cited as vital to the advancement of ophthalmology.

Dr. Schallhorn is described by one of her nominators as being "incredibly approachable" and "a kind and thoughtful person who uplifts and amplifies others." Others noted that she is always thinking about how she can improve access to eye care for all. ■



## OWL Award Nominees *continued*

### VISIONARY LEADER

Frank W. Bowden III, MD *continued from page 5*

Dr. Bowden was one of the first ophthalmologists in the country outside of an academic center to fully embrace dry eye treatment. Starting when there were few available tools, Dr. Bowden “MacGyvered” solutions that previously did not exist - developing his own diagnostic algorithms, treatment protocols and dry eye-centric practice flow. As an industry developed around dry eye care, he has helped to shape and inform it. ■

P. Dee Stephenson, MD, FACS *continued from page 5*

Dr. Stephenson is a founding member of AECOS and CEDARS/ASPENS. She is the immediate past president of the American College of Eye Surgeons (ACES) and president of the American Board of Eye Surgery (ABES). ■

### CATALYST

Denise McEachern, JD *continued from page 6*

“Ms. McEachern helped us understand the importance of lifting each other up when we need it the most,” said her nominator. “She understands that we are not just employees – but people she truly cares for.” ■



**REGISTER NOW**

**YOU'RE INVITED!**  
**JOIN OUR MISSION IN MOTION**  
**THREE-DAY CHALLENGE!**  
November 13 - 15, 2020

In honor of Eye Donation Month, OWL, SightLife and ZEISS, invite you to join the inaugural *Mission in Motion* Three-Day Challenge to raise awareness and support for the 12.7 million men, women, and children worldwide who suffer needlessly from corneal blindness. The only requirement for *Mission in Motion* Three-Day Challenge is to move your body as much as possible throughout the weekend. Your children, parents, or coworkers can also join in on the fun – with the chance to win an award for Wackiest Mover or Most Inspired Mover!

Upon registering for the *Mission in Motion* Three-Day Challenge, participants will receive a personal fundraising page to share with family and friends. All funds raised during *Mission in Motion* Three-Day Challenge will be MATCHED by ZEISS in generous collaboration with long-time SightLife supporter, Robert LeRoy, up to \$20,000 – effectively doubling your impact!

For added fun and comradery, consider joining the OWL team. When registering, simply select to Join a Team and search for “Give it OWL you’ve got!”



# MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT EXEC SHARES THOUGHTS ON Making Changes in Challenging Environments

AN OWL EXCLUSIVE

Untangling sexism and racism in the music industry is not an overnight job. Nor one for the faint of heart. But Julie Swidler, Executive Vice President of Business Affairs & General Counsel for Sony Music Entertainment, was part of a task force to do just that.

Swidler's career includes an impressive list of [roles](#) throughout the advertising and music industries. She received the 2020 Presidential Award for Outstanding Executive Achievement from the Music Business Association.

We were thrilled to have her as our keynote speaker in our first Virtual ASCRS Signature Event in May. OWL members tuned in as Georgette Pascale, Immediate Past President of OWL and CEO of [Pascale Communications](#) interviewed Swidler - preceded by a fun introduction by OWL member and longtime friend of Swidler, Dr. Joe Tauber of [Tauber Eye Center](#).

Swidler said for her, gender didn't seem to be an issue at first, but that changed as her career advanced. The sexism she later experienced wasn't outward, but something she felt, knowing she had to work that much harder to overcome a stigma prevalent in the industry.

"As I was growing up in the music business, I didn't really think of myself as a girl. I knew I had to work really hard. Then, all of a sudden, as you become more senior, it gets more and more evident," she said. "Always feeling a little bit like I had to work just that much harder because of the fact I didn't want people to expect less of me and ... just always having to prove myself a little bit more."

At first, Swidler thought it might be enough to keep her door open, helping everyone who asked. But she said she realized she needed to "be more active." That meant helping other women and people of color in the industry. It's not just hiring minority groups to

fill roles, but making sure they have a seat at the table in meetings and then are seen and heard when it's time for promotions.



"If I'm one of the few women in a room and there's another woman that's trying to get her point across ... I will very often say, 'By the way so and so woman was making a very good point.' So I started focusing more on the inclusion piece," Swidler said. "Then it's making sure the women you hire get trained, that they get invited to the meetings, that they are not always behind the scenes."

Of course, making sea changes in an industry that operated for years like a boys' club required more than just one person. And that's how Swidler became part of a task force in 2018 to find a better path forward in the music business. The [task force](#) began after the then President and CEO of the

Recording Academy Neil Portnow made a comment after the 60th Grammy Awards about how [women needed to "step up."](#) Around that time, the "me, too" movement swept through the music and movie industries and others. People called for a shift in attitudes and protocols to include women and people of color in leadership roles and eradicate sexism and sexual misconduct among the music industry's leaders.

"People were feeling like enough is enough, and it was definitely in the middle of "me too" and I think a lot of the women in the music business were feeling like, 'We've had it. Nobody's really talking about what's been going on. Enough is enough.'

The fact that this guy could be head of the recording academy for 12 years and this is what he says to so many women and men just felt completely clueless. Is this who's running the organization that is supposed to be there to support artists, songwriters, labels, etc.? And so, it felt like a crisis. Maybe an existential one. But it felt like a crisis."

The task force produced a 47-page report, breaking down the structures of the industry and making recommendations for change. One of the simpler steps, Swidler said, was changing mentorship methods. Often male music producers would mentor young men. But to bring more women to the industry, that needed to change.

Even if you work in a company or industry that's not creating task forces for change, you can make a difference around you, Swidler said. Mentoring and leadership are critical. It can't just be about hiring the right percentage of women or people of color. It has to be about making a diverse range of people part of your organization's fabric, giving them a seat at the table.

Many companies have hired Chief Diversity Officers, something Swidler says is only part of the answer. What makes a difference in an organization's inclusion is a permeating attitude at every level to encourage professional growth – and that's something each one of us can do for someone else.

"I had a conversation at one point with a senior executive, and I talked to him about a particular woman. And I said, 'What do you think of her?' And he said to me, 'She's terrific.' And I said, 'Great, do you think she's ready to be'... 'No, she's not ready.' And I said, 'OK, how do you think she will get ready?'" And he looked at me. And, very often, what happens, just as it had in this case, she was preparing the men who walked into the meeting – yet she was not invited to the meeting. When I explained the situation he looked at me, and he went, 'Point taken.' And, that's all it takes sometimes, getting someone to see. Getting one person to open a door for you makes a huge difference. Just one cheerleader."

Finding a mentor might not be easy, Swidler said, but it's OK to look outside your own organization or industry. We learn different things from different people, and sometimes, that occurs even when you're the one mentoring.

Swidler said she never really had a mentor; she learned by watching others and learning what not to do. And then, as her career continued, she learned by mentoring others.

"You take whatever you can from the people you work with so that you're constantly learning, and you're constantly being mentored even if it's not a formal process," she said.

Swidler's primary advice is to be authentic if you are searching for ways to advance yourself as a leader or grow professionally in a challenging environment.

"At the end of the day, your biggest success will come from being yourself," she said. "Figuring out who you are and what your strengths and weaknesses are. And it's OK to have those weaknesses. It's just figuring out how to continue and be successful by being yourself."

## Q&A with Julie Swidler

After our video interview with Swidler, we followed up with a phone call to answer more of your questions we couldn't get to during our Signature Event.

**Georgette Pascale, OWL:** Can you share a story about how you dealt with a domineering musician trying to browbeat you on a deal? What do you draw from yourself to stand up to a global music celebrity?

**Julie Swidler:** I think in most of those cases, I take a deep breath. And I end up being very direct and very logical, which always throws people who are getting emotional off.

**OWL:** Oh, I love that. And having things to back it up and make your point when you're having a conversation like that with someone, because we all get heated sometimes, but that's important as well.

**JS:** Sure, as long as you have all your information and you're very transparent with somebody like that. It helps enormously.

**OWL:** Have you seen any common mistakes or assumptions that those not in leadership roles make? E.g., not self-advocating, not being proactive. Anything else that you've seen folks do that aren't in leadership roles that they could do better?

**JS:** The one thing I think I see of a lot of people who are not in leadership roles do, is that they believe that if they've been anywhere, at a company, in an office or whatever it is, for a certain number of years, they deserve the promotion that they would like because of the length of time that they've been at a company. That does not work. You have to prove yourself every day, and if you want to get a promotion or be seen differently, you have to act differently. You have to show that you've grown, you have to show that you are deserving of a promotion, and that has absolutely nothing to do with how long you've been at a company. The worst thing that somebody could tell me is that they deserve a promotion because they've been at the company for X number of years.

**OWL:** What is your favorite business book, if any? Is there one that stands out to you that you suggest folks read for leadership?

**JS:** I don't have a book that I would ever recommend to somebody. Maybe I need to, I just don't.

**OWL:** How are labels and music corporations combating the pandemic, and how have you guys pivoted during this unprecedented period? Obviously, there are no concerts on the horizon and things of that nature, and we know so much more is going digital as we talked about last time. Anything else you're seeing as a trend in your industry that you see folks going towards during this crazy, unprecedented time?

**JS:** Well, it's funny to phrase the question as combating it; we're not combating it. We don't have the tools to combat it. But certainly, I think everybody is working from home. And I think that we're trying to make sure that we support our employees first. Then we need to support our artists and their creative process and what they want to do.

**JS:** Finally, it's about the world, it's really about global support at this point.

**OWL:** What's the best advice that you've gotten and given? So what's some good business leadership advice, if any, that you've received that's helped you out or that you've given that you like?

**JS:** The best thing that anybody ever said to me several years ago is that everyone is the hero of their own story. What that meant to me is that when you're dealing with people senior to you, junior to you, always remember that they are the hero of their own story. That will be reflected in their behavior. Sometimes I have to remind myself to think about that.

And then to give advice – I very often help people know that you don't have to yell and scream and demand. But I think that to be your most authentic self, make sure that you advocate for yourself. Advocating for yourself doesn't have to be pounding the desk.

**OWL:** So we talked a little bit about promoting yourself. What's next for you? What are you excited about for the future?

**JS:** What am I excited about? I don't know, because there's going to be so many things. You know, I just think the world itself is going to change. So I'm excited to see how things are going to be changing over the next year or two in terms of diversity and inclusion, in terms of hopefully, our political landscape. So, to me, that's really what I'm excited to see. And hope for.

**OWL:** If you could speak with yourself 20 years ago on how to advance yourself, what would you say? I think you and I are both pretty progressive, aggressive people, but is there anything?

**JS:** I'm actually not aggressive at all. That's part of the issue. I am assertive when I need to be. But I'm definitely not aggressive. I would say, your value is higher than you always believe it to be, so believe in that.

**OWL:** This is a little bit off the topic of leadership. But anybody you want to give a shout out to that we should be looking out for? Musical artists in the future?

**JS:** Let me think about it. The one that I love is Rex Orange County. He's British. There's a new female singer that will be coming out with new music called Yebba. There's two national artists that I absolutely love - one called Kane Brown, and a group called Old Dominion. And then, you know he's not that new, but I just love him. Is Khalid. ■

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