

Insider Information

EBR speaks to Jon Weisberg about his career achievements, as well as sharing some of his industry know-how



Jon Weisberg is President of Weisberg Communications Company. He also heads public relations and communications for the industry consortium, SAFE-BioPharma Association. For 16 years, Jon was a senior public relations executive on the corporate staff of Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. Email: jonweisberg@inkandair.com

EBR: What was your entry point into the pharmaceutical industry?

JW: Bristol-Myers Squibb (then Bristol-Myers) was a client when I was a partner in a mid-size New York public relations agency. A few years into the relationship I joined the corporate public affairs department reporting to the chairman's office. For the next 16 years, I engaged across the entire organisation, supporting most of the business units in product support, global M&A activities and issues, and crisis management. I was able to take early retirement in 2000, which is when I formed Weisberg Communications Company.

Which part of your current role do you most enjoy?

Applying my knowledge to help organisations become better understood is quite satisfying. Most rewarding is participating in the global development of the SAFE-BioPharma digital identity and signature standard. It is an industry-supported initiative that facilitates greater collaboration through the use of trusted cyber identities for authenticating users and for applying digital signatures to electronic documents. Currently it's used primarily in R&D.

Which part is the most challenging?

Managing the tsunami of irrelevant and inaccurate information has become a social disease. The upside is that it creates opportunity for those who establish and maintain credibility through useful and valid information.

How would you describe your business philosophy?

In terms of my PR speciality, I believe that good PR is based on good policy. That means it's important to either be at the table or have the ear of someone who is. In more general terms, I believe in understanding the business landscape and navigating it with strong skills and common sense. I always ask questions.

What motivates you?

I'm motivated by having a clear understanding of strategic goals, peer review, and the personal satisfaction that comes with strong, professional performance.

What has been your proudest moment?

Two stand out from my Bristol-Myers Squibb years. Firstly, the campaign I implemented to get the Japanese government to establish a fair reimbursement price for Taxol, the ovarian cancer treatment, and secondly being one of the creator/developers of Secure The Future, the AIDS relief programme for women and children in five southern African countries. More recently, I'm proud of the impact SAFE-BioPharma is having on the biopharmaceutical industry.

And your greatest disappointment?

Not having ski-bummed for a few seasons after graduate school. Living a short drive from some of the world's best powder skiing is making up for that now.

What does the pharma sector need to focus on in 2013?

The pipeline is lacking and the pressure is mounting. It's time for a different approach to cost-cutting. Let's invest more in information technologies that will improve cost efficiencies and get us positioned for a more collaborative future.

How do you think the pharmaceutical industry as a whole will change over the next 10 years?

Significant changes are occurring in how we learn and how we understand the human organism. Over the coming decade, those forces will continue to develop and merge with powerful therapeutic results. I hope they'll raise the bar beyond dealing with our current economic and political pressures.

What is the most important lesson you have learnt?

Add value to everything you do.