Nancy Larsen
Profile of a STAR

Celebrating our 2012 WOTY
An inside look at men in the HBA
Tips for keeping your career innovative

Nancy Larsen, 2012 HBA STAR (right), has collaborated with countless other dedicated HBA volunteers, like Shellie Caplan and Donna Ramer (pictured above), to help build the HBA into the thriving organization it is today.
Letter from the editors

Thank you for joining us for another issue of the HBA Advantage. It’s been a year since we set out to build upon the vision of original editor-in-chief, Donna Ramer, and move further toward the HBA’s goal of delivering a timely, relevant and insightful publication that highlights the inspiring efforts of our members and digs deeper into the leadership and career issues they face in our ever-changing industry.

Over the past year, we’ve listened to our readers’ feedback, worked with guest issue editors and experimented with new approaches—all with the goal of finding the right voice of the new HBA Advantage. We’ve developed issues focused on specific topics of interest to our members, including an issue dedicated to women with advanced scientific degrees who have made career transitions into the corporate world and another focused on the power of mentoring. And, we’ve showcased some of our incredible members—coming full circle from our first redesigned issue last year, which profiled our 2011 STAR Daria Blackwell, to profile this year’s 2012 STAR Nancy Larsen in this latest issue.

In addition, we’ve started the process of enhancing the online components of the HBA Advantage, including offering deeper content and extended interviews for key articles in the online version of the magazine. Following this issue, look for the extended, personal stories of interviewees Jean Caton and Charlene Prounis on the HBA blog as they share more about their innovative career paths.

We’re also developing an editorial calendar to help provide relevant opportunities for advertisers.

We hope you’ve enjoyed reading the HBA Advantage this past year—and we welcome your ongoing feedback as the magazine continues to evolve.

Sincerely,
Carol Meerschaert, editor-in-chief, and
Danielle Thierry, managing editor

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An early passion for healthcare and a drive to push the boundaries leads a young woman into uncharted territory

Nancy’s parents were both great role models. As the daughter of an artist, musician and radio personality, Nancy was passionate about her father’s world of the arts. But, it was her mother’s role as a career woman—unusual at the time—that she wanted to emulate, picturing herself in healthcare as a nurse or doctor.

“I was a typical 60’s and 70’s girl,” Nancy recalls. “I wanted to be the first to try new things, push boundaries and take risks.” So when she started her career in healthcare, she decided to push beyond the traditional provider roles and into the even more male-dominated field of pharmaceutical sales. To Nancy, the position offered the chance to learn about diseases, build relationships with medical professionals, travel and move toward her long-term goal—a role in pharmaceutical marketing.

From the start, there were barriers to being accepted. But some forward-thinking leaders saw the potential in Nancy. She recalls one manager saying, “I don’t have to hire a woman; I’m hiring you because you’re the best person for the job.” It was this support—and the support of her growing social and professional network—that encouraged Nancy to continue striving for success in a challenging industry.
A fledgling organization helps support a growing career

Nancy always understood the importance of a support network. As an only child who lived far from extended family, she found strength in her friends after losing both parents at a young age. During high school, she became president of her sorority—getting involved in social events, charity work and fundraising she now sees as precursors to her work with the HBA.

Nancy joined the HBA in 1982, at the urging of her then boss—Joan Keith, one of the first women in the pharmaceutical marketing industry and the HBA’s 1992 Woman of the Year (WOTY). At the time, the organization was young, with only about 250 members. As she and other members helped further the HBA’s reach and impact, Nancy also built a network of strong professional allies and friends who have supported her throughout her career.

A determined professional carves her career path

Nancy quickly progressed through her career—earning her master’s degree in pharmaceutical marketing and a promotion to sales director. She later held executive positions on the agency side and co-ran a successful medical communications company for 15 years. Along the way, she also served in several HBA leadership positions, and was instrumental in creating the ACE (Advancement, Commitment and Engagement) award to honor corporate women’s leadership programs. Since her two-term presidency, Nancy has continued to serve on committees supporting flagship events like WOTY and the Leadership Conference. “Watching WOTY grow from 250 to 2500 attendees has been amazing,” she says. “It’s just one example of the strength of the HBA’s programming—a strength that comes from dedicated teamwork, not just the work of any one individual.”

Mentoring and support come full circle

Of all the roles Nancy has held in the HBA, mentor is the one she’s enjoyed most—passing on her knowledge and support to others, both as an HBA Metro chapter mentor and through individual relationships.

Recently, she’s also been on the receiving end of the organization’s deep support network. When the pharmaceutical industry underwent a major shift toward doing away with large medical education grants, Nancy found her highly successful med ed company at a standstill. “Eighty percent of that side of the business has gone away,” she explains. “As a result, my partner and I had to dissolve our company.”

Her HBA network has provided Nancy not only with moral support, but new opportunities as well. “My years with the HBA and the network that’s grown from it have gotten me through this time,” she says. “They’ve also helped me find new potential positions as I move on in my career.”

A STAR’s goals for the HBA

Nancy is passionate about the HBA—in a sense, she’s grown up here—and still has goals for the organization she continues to shape. “As I look to the future, I believe the HBA will continue to be built from the bottom up,” she says. “The organization helps women who are just starting out in healthcare to grow a network of support and achieve their goals. As they move through their careers, it offers not only continued support—but also the opportunity to give back.”

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—Nancy Larsen, 2012 HBA STAR
Career innovation
8 tips for finding your path to success

By Danielle Thierry

Charlene Prounis began her career as an ICU nurse. Jean Caton started out as a teacher. Today, both run their own businesses—Prounis as the CEO and managing partner of Flashpoint Medica, a healthcare communications agency, and Caton as a business coach and professional speaker and owner of The Profitable Woman Coaching and Consulting.

Their winding career paths reflect a growing trend of innovation and flexibility that is often necessary to succeed in a world where job descriptions—and even entire industries—can change drastically in just a few years.

“The world is going to continue to change at an ever-faster pace,” says Caton, who calls herself a serial career re-inventor. “You have to embrace it.”

So how does one do that? I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Prounis and Caton to find out.

#1 Look for ideas everywhere

“Innovative people are resourceful and curious, bringing to the table a storehouse of information,” says Prounis, who encourages her employees to read a lot, network often and open their eyes to everything around them. “Look around and recognize the trends, both in business and the larger world. And then cross-pollinate—see how you can apply various ideas to your own field.”

Caton agrees: “The key is remaining state-of-the-art in a bigger sense than your own small world and opening yourself up to more than just the vision of going up a ladder.”

#2 Always ask “What’s next?”

This openness can be applied not only to ideas about how you can do your job, but also what job you can do. “A lot of people feel handcuffed to a job title, or an industry,” says Caton. “And women, in particular, tend to hold themselves back by their own limiting beliefs.”

Caton coaches her clients to focus on their passions and strengths, rather than specific skills, and to remain open and explore alternative or non-traditional ways to use those talents. This can be particularly important when an economic recession or industry layoffs reduce the availability of positions in your field.

“My career evolved as I saw an opportunity and stepped into it, and along the way I evolved into my natural niches,” Caton recalls of her own journey from teacher to dietitian to corporate marketing executive and, finally, business coach. “It wasn’t like I had a job description or title where I said, ‘That’s where I’m going to go next.’ It was more organic and open, saying ‘What’s next?’”

Prounis recalls similar experiences; always keeping her scope of possibilities broad to find challenges that would fulfill her need to be creative and innovative.
#3 Take advantage of volunteer opportunities

“Volunteering can be an excellent way to stretch your creativity,” says Prounis, who helped bring to life a number of novel creations during her tenure as HBA president—from the first roundtable of healthcare CEOs on the topic of women in the industry and full-scale study of the issues to the Rising Star initiative and HBA Leadership Conference. “While the environment and rewards systems at many large companies often limit risk-taking and innovation, an organization like the HBA is a supportive and open-minded place where people are more willing to try new things.”

Volunteering within your own organization can also help you branch into new areas. “You don’t always have to change careers to take on a new challenge,” says Caton. “You can reinvent your current job or broaden your experience by simply volunteering for a cross-functional committee.”

For many women, having a child can spur innovative approaches to dealing with the unique challenges of motherhood. Take, for example, the often reported explosion of “mom entrepreneurs” in recent years, as more and more women take advantage of technology to stay at home with their children while also starting their own businesses.

“There is no one right way to approach your career,” says Caton. “People often spend so much time looking at their ‘career plan’ that they forget to look carefully at their ‘life plan’ and ensure the two match up.”

#5 Ask yourself “Why not me?”

Even when Prounis became an agency executive, she didn’t think a start-up agency could go for big business. Then, she remembered the message of ad man Donny Deutsch. “Instead of ‘Why me?’ He asked ‘Why not me?’” she says. “And it’s so true. Opportunities present themselves—you need to take them and stretch yourself, even if you don’t feel quite ready. Remember, if someone asks you to take on a new challenge, it means they’re confident that you’re ready.”

#7 Accept risks—and move on from failures

Sometimes, despite all the hard work, things don’t pan out the way you want them to. “You’ve got to set expectations for yourself and those around you so you have an allowance to fail,” says Prounis. “And you’ve got to have a plan B.” For Prounis, who has founded two start-up agencies, this means maintaining strong relationships and never burning a bridge so there’s always a network to fall back on.

“If you make a bad decision, just make another good one,” adds Caton. “If you fail, take responsibility for how you contributed to the failure and set out to do better.”

#4 Align your career and life plan

Innovation can also be a way to take charge of your career—and your life—by reacting positively to the competing pressures faced by today’s working woman. When Prounis was offered a pharmaceutical marketing job in Chicago, her husband’s desire to stay in New York led to an innovative solution—finding the job she wanted, where her family wanted to live. “It was the crisis of the dual-career couple,” she recalls. “But I used it as an opportunity to segue from pharmaceutical sales into advertising while staying in New York.”

#6 Have the perseverance to get things done

There are definite challenges to being a successful innovator. As Prounis notes, “You can’t just have ideas. There are a lot of ‘idea people’—to be truly successful, you also have to be able to get it done.” It’s something that any entrepreneur knows well. It’s one thing to take the initial jump to start a business, but it’s the perseverance to put in the 80+ hours a week, for months on end, that make it succeed.

#8 Be open to all possibilities

Looking back over the course of their careers, both Prounis and Caton feel they are much more fulfilled—and ultimately successful—than they would have been had they remained on their original paths. For both, the key to an innovative career is to keep looking forward—building on the past, preparing for the future and keeping your eyes—and your mind—open along the way. “There are so many ways to get to success,” concludes Caton. “Innovation is about seeing the possibilities where others may not.”
Numbers don’t lie—the HBA isn’t just for women anymore. The association has recently been catching the attention of many men in the healthcare industry—with a gain of nearly 100 male members in the past five years.

by Philip George

Why are so many men supporting an association whose goal is the advancement of women in healthcare? To find out, I contacted the HBA’s 2012 Honorable Mentor Michael Kaufmann, chief executive officer of the pharmaceutical segment of Cardinal Health, and two male members, Lynn Kendall, print and marketing specialist at Miles Printing, and Ira Flood, founder at TIP Medical Communications.

Why men support the HBA

For Kaufmann, the HBA’s mission aligns directly with his dedication to supporting women’s career advancement—and provides strong support, programming and resources to help his company realize that dedication. Kaufmann particularly appreciates the HBA’s focus on mentoring and networking. “I believe great leaders are always learning and this organization is full of talented members who are willing to share, learn and grow together,” he says. “Through my involvement, I have gained a greater appreciation for the challenges both women and men face in competing in and creating a more diverse workplace.”

Kendall, an active member of the HBA Indiana chapter and recipient of their 2011 LEAD (Leadership Excellence And Dedication) award, agrees: “Being a man in a women’s business group allows you to clearly identify the difference in how women and men see and act on things, and why having both on a leadership team is so critical to a successful business.”

How the HBA helps men

Kendall joined the HBA with the goal of professional growth—a goal he’s realized by taking advantage of several of the organization’s myriad in-person and online learning opportunities. “As I see it, the HBA culture is focused on three things: personal development, professional growth...
and community,” he says. “Through my involvement, I feel I’ve matured in all three.”

For others, the goal is recruitment.
“Being a small business in the pharmaceutical industry in the Los Angeles area, it’s hard to find top talent,” says Ira Flood, active member and marketing director of the Los Angeles region. “The many networking opportunities offer a fantastic way to meet other people in the industry with common goals.”

**What it’s like to be a man among women**

I asked each of the men what the experience has been like being a male member in a businesswomen’s organization. All three stated that the experience has been gratifying, to say the least.

“At first, I felt as if I stuck out like a sore thumb, but the women I’ve met have been incredible,” says Flood. “Unlike in some organizations, there are no egos here—everyone is clearly in it to help each other.”

“I felt welcome,” agrees Kendall. “We are all here for the same reasons and that’s the common bond. It has been a very rewarding experience and I would highly recommend membership to any business professional—regardless of gender.”

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**HBA Rising Star: a title with enduring value**

“Volunteering with the HBA increased my visibility at my company and led to being named a Rising Star—and my visibility skyrocketed when I joined the Boston chapter board of directors. The relationships I’ve formed have been invaluable to building connections within the industry.”

—Laleh Varasteh, vice president, pharmacy and clinical services, Adheris, Inc. and 2009 Rising Star
2012 HBA Leadership Conference
November 7-9, 2012
Orlando, Florida

Make plans to join us for a conference that only the HBA can deliver with top speakers, inspiring leadership stories, actionable skill development and opportunities to network with peers and senior women leaders from all sectors of healthcare.

We’re pleased to introduce to you the three keynote speakers for the conference:

**Pat Mitchell**, President and CEO of The Paley Center for Media

**Bonnie St. John**, Author and Olympic Athlete

**Noreen Fraser**, Founder of the Noreen Fraser Foundation

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