

Turnaround Specialist Focuses on Diabetes

By TODDI GUTNER

Sandra E. Peterson, 50, likes to fix things—companies, specifically. **Bayer HealthCare** tapped her as president of its diabetes care group in 2005 to turn around the struggling global division. Ms. Peterson, now CEO of the company's medical division and the highest ranking executive woman in a German public company, is credited with propelling the diabetes business from a market laggard to a market leader in diabetes monitoring.



Sandra E. Peterson

Q: How has your career path prepared you for doing turnarounds?

A: I worked as a management consultant at McKinsey & Co. for six years. While I was there, I worked with many different industries [and products]—from cookies to jet engines. In many cases, I was fixing their problems. Mercedes Benz was one of my clients.

[By the late 1980s], Mercedes had sold more cars in the U.S. than ever before. Then the Japanese came and bottom fell out. We did a strategy review and reorganized the way they did business in the U.S.

Q: What led you away from consulting?

A: As a management consultant, you get an opportunity to see everything. I realized that I

liked managing as opposed to advising others how to manage.

From McKinsey, I went to Whirlpool and then Nabisco, where I was executive vice president and helped to jump-start their research and development and innovation [groups]. Before I came to Bayer, I helped to spin off Medco Health from Merck & Co.

Q: What strategies do you use to help jump-start a struggling division?

A.: I ask a lot of basic questions, always keeping in mind, what does the customer need and how do I need to think about those needs from a marketing and business standpoint? Then I supplement my team from the outside. I don't hire experts from the industry, but rather look for people who have functional skill sets and leadership and management skills that translate to the industry. I then figure out how to put a team together and have them work in a very collaborative way.

Q: What was your first connection to Germany?

A: My parents lived in Germany. My brothers were born there and my parents always spoke fondly of [their] time there. We also hosted German students in our home. In college, I [studied] German and did my thesis on Germany.

In graduate school I worked in Germany as a Bosch Fellow with the German Federal Ministry of Finance and the Federation of Germany Industries. [Then], I married a man from Germany.

Q: How has often being the only woman on a senior management team affected you?

A: I have always been a strong advocate for women. Wherever I work, I try to create an environment where women can achieve. Since you spend half your life at work, I figure it is important to create a work environment that you enjoy.