

DARE Q & A with: Martha McGill



As Chief Operating Officer of Miami Children's Hospital, Martha McGill, RN, MBA, MHA, is responsible for overseeing overall operations for this 289-bed pediatric hospital and its six ambulatory care centers.

Ms. McGill came to Miami Children's Hospital from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, where she served for twenty-three years, most recently in the dual role of Senior Vice President of Operations for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston and President of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Hughes Spalding.

Ms. McGill graduated from the Valdosta State University nursing program and earned a master's in healthcare administration and a master's in business administration from Georgia State University in Atlanta.

Q: What is the most challenging thing you have ever had to do?

A: My greatest challenge professionally and personally has been to garner the courage necessary to drive transformational change. The scale of change I am referring to isn't incremental, but of a much greater magnitude. It is the kind that keeps me up at night with excitement and, at times, worry. With this level of change, the stakes are very high. You stand a chance of bringing greater risk to the situation. On the flip side, you also stand the chance of creating something wonderful. In these high-stakes situations, we all know it is necessary to have a clear strategy and a well thought-out plan of execution. But the critical question becomes, "Do I have the courage to actually execute?" The times in my life when I have stood strong and made bold, risky decisions have been my greatest challenges and have yielded my greatest rewards.

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It's one thing to desperately desire change, but quite another to actually make the bold decisions necessary to drive change.

Q: Where did you get the courage and confidence to accomplish this matter?

A: First and foremost, my greatest source of courage is my faith in God. I am a firm believer that if we pray and ask for God's blessings and guidance, we will receive it. I also believe God will meet us at our (cont.)

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A: (*cont.*) level of expectation. So, set the bar high and receive all of His wonderful blessings!

I have also always had a strong and supportive family, people who encourage me to reach higher and constantly strive for excellence. My family is my greatest source of happiness, which is a motivation more easily understood than described.

Additionally, I have had the wonderful good fortune of being surrounded, professionally, by incredibly gifted mentors. I am a healthcare leader, and practicing in this field, as in many others, not only requires strong business acumen, but also (as one of my dearest mentors, Dr. James Tally, often reminded me) an understanding that “people are people first, and they don’t care what you know until they know you care.” Remembering this has always served me well, regardless of the situation.

Q: What is the biggest mistake you have ever made? What did you learn and how did you recover?

A: The biggest mistakes in my life share a common theme: I tend to process tough decisions for prolonged periods of time. This is especially true when they involve significant impact on others. I have overcome this

tendency simply through experience. After toiling for months over one particularly tough decision, I finally moved forward in a direction I knew months prior I needed to go. I at last realized that the toll had been much harder on me and on my organization than the impact of the decision would be on others. The fact is that life at times makes us feel as if things are tougher than they really are. So, take initiative, trust your gut, rely on your wisdom, and make bold, decisive moves.

“Seek out the wisest, most experienced person in your field and ask them to mentor you.”

Q: If you had a young woman you cared deeply about entering the workforce today, what single piece of advice would you have for her?

A: Be well prepared. Invest in the best education you can afford.

Ask for help from others. Seek out the wisest, most experienced person in your field and ask them to mentor you. You will be surprised at how many very accomplished, highly experienced leaders are honored to help.

Work hard. No one said the job would be easy, and the fact is that we really do value and appreciate those things for which we work hardest.

Find a balance that works for you and your family, given the season of your life. A very wise mentor, Becky Webster, once advised me, “Your work will ebb and flow. Take time for you and your family when (*cont.*)

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A: (cont.) you can.” With work, there will always be deadlines and commitments. This is true with family as well. I’ve learned to schedule my family time a year in advance (yes, a year!). This approach ensures that I can fit the work around my family, which is top on the priority list.

Seek opportunities to gain experience working with relating to people from diverse cultures. As the global economy continues to develop, this breadth of experience will serve you well. My goal is someday to serve in a leadership capacity with an organization which brings about positive change for children on a global scale. In order to prepare for this role, I took a position in a global market. This gives me exposure not only to global consumers, but diversity on the business side as well. This opportunity has afforded me the opportunity to learn valuable lessons in the differences among cultural norms and how they impact both the consumer and the way business is conducted.

“The merger brought about tremendous change, and with change always comes opportunity.”

Pray. Ask God for His blessings and guidance in your career. I’ve chosen to live a life serving others, and I trust God’s guidance. It has served me well in every aspect of my life.

Let your light shine. Don’t be afraid to share your faith, love, wisdom, and skills with others. Hire the best talent you can afford. Love them, and give them the resources necessary to make the organization successful. Remind them often that they are valued and appreciated.

Q: What advice do you have for building self-confidence?

A: My best advice for building self-confidence is to start with a solid education. This arms you with the essential tools necessary for success. Next, you must believe in yourself. Remember, you can accomplish something only if you believe you can. Whether you believe you can or whether you believe you can’t — either way, you are right! To enable and constantly reinforce this mindset, surround yourself with others who believe in you and support your success. Also, always remember to be strong and courageous. This will prepare you to make bold decisive moves that others will admire. This, in turn, will give you strength.

Q: How did you make the leap from middle to senior executive leadership in your company?

A: I had years of experience, which provided me with a solid foundation. With those years came increasing levels of responsibility. My breakthrough opportunity came when the organization I was working for (cont.)

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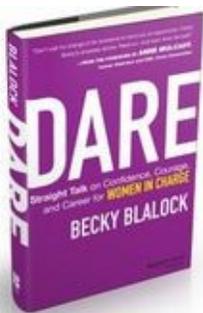
A: (cont.) merged with another. The merger brought about tremendous change, and with change always comes opportunity. In the midst of this, I expressed myself boldly in meetings with top executives to voice my commitment to the organization and interest in growing professionally.

My biggest single break? It came when my boss, who was retiring, recommended me as her replacement. It was her trust and confidence in my abilities that resulted in my promotion.

Q: What is your greatest fear today?

A: As the mother of two daughters who will be seeking to enter the workforce over the next two years, I worry about their future. During the recent recession, I saw that women were losing jobs at an alarming rate, which far exceeded the rate of their male colleagues. We must continue to be steadfast advocates and mentors for young women entering the workplace, and we must continue to demand compensation parity with men.

I do sometimes fear that women will never break the ultimate glass ceiling by achieving election to the presidency of the United States. When a woman finally accomplishes this, her victory will create a tremendous halo effect that will touch women globally.



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