

RENETTA McCANN

FOUNDER, PUBLICIS GROUPE'S VIVAKI PEOPLE PRACTICE

Renetta McCann's rise to the very top of the media agency world over 30 years is notable in many contexts: as an executive, as a woman, as an African-American.

She takes great pride in her commitment to remain in the industry and create a path of firsts for others to follow—all the way up to first African-American CEO at Starcom MediaVest Group. Last June, she stepped down as global CEO to form and lead the people practice of VivaKi, a new Publicis Groupe umbrella organization for Starcom MediaVest, Denuo and ZenithOptimedia.

She says her decision to put more focus on other aspects of her life—she plans a yearlong sabbatical starting in January—represents another first.

"I hope it serves to inspire others who might want to take unexpected journeys," she says.

Ms. McCann, 51, has two pieces of advice for those starting out. The first is to learn how to manage paradox and the second is to build resilience.

She notes her own personal paradox: The balance between what it means to be a business leader and what it means to be a black business leader.

"I am remarkably proud of my race and my culture. It is one of my greatest assets," Ms. McCann says. "Granted, it is sometimes a double-edged sword. If nothing else, I'm used to walking in rooms and having to prove myself every day. The people in that room may have a negative



[perception] of me, or they may expect less than I can give. But because I've had to walk into that room and prove myself every day, I know my own value. Having fought for it so hard, for so long, it is now second nature. I own it."

She says resilience is powered by coping mechanisms and conflict resolution techniques.

"It can be the ability to keep performing with excellence even though you have been passed over for a VP title. It might be deciding to stay in a company or an industry where there are precious few role models or mentors. It is finding a way to blow off as much steam as we need to in the most productive manner possible and then go back to work."

—Nancy **Coltun** Webster