

LEGENDS



RISHAD TOBACOWALA

CEO, DENUO, AND CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER,
PUBLICIS GROUPE MEDIA, CHICAGO

In an industry in the fast lane, few can claim to have been out in front for decades. Rishad Tobaccowala, 49, CEO of Denuo, a Publicis futures company that brings new media and marketing technologies to clients, is still a leader of the pack.

At the same time he serves as chief innovation officer of Publicis Groupe Media, a board that oversees media specialists Starcom MediaVest Group and ZenithOptimedia. His successes include founding and developing SMG Next, which spawned a variety of innovative media practices to leverage video games, word-of-mouth, mobile marketing, search applications and consumer engagement with video marketing.

He came to the U.S. from his native India in 1980 to study for an M.B.A. at the University of Chicago. As a student who knew little about American culture, he realized he needed to learn fast. His drive was later fed by "a fantastic boss," who told him soon after he joined the media department at Leo Burnett Co. in 1982 that he was not going to be evaluated on his work. "You do your work better than anyone. You live in America and don't know how to talk about sports. [You need to] get to one sporting event every two weeks. You need to understand American male culture."

In an environment where acceptable small talk included the weather or sports, Mr. Tobaccowala understood that his boss "meant white male culture. I recognize in 2008 human resources would tell him he couldn't say anything like that—and yet that was the best advice he ever gave me."

He says today the world is much more multicultural, and young people are "living in a world where it is easier to advance." He advises those starting out to avoid building walls, "celebrate who you are—but don't be overly sensitive to people who are critical.

"Successful people, in addition to having opportunity and drive, are very passionate about what they do. They find something that aligns with who they are. Define yourself by who you are. You are not defined by where you come from and what you look like."

—Nancy *Coltun Webster*

CAROL H. WILLIAMS

PRESIDENT-CEO & CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
CAROL H. WILLIAMS ADVERTISING, OAKLAND, CALIF.

Carol H. Williams thought she had retired from advertising in 1986 after creating highly memorable campaigns for major brands and racking up many "firsts" at Leo Burnett Co. in Chicago and Foote, Cone & Belding in San Francisco: the first female and first African-American creative director and VP. But the phone kept ringing, and it was former clients on the other end of the line.

When the work started taking up most of her time and bedroom, "my husband lovingly kicked me and my papers out," and Carol H. Williams Advertising has since grown to rank as the country's largest African-American agency. "I [realized I] had a particular talent for helping Fortune 500 companies successfully connect to African-American and urban audiences," she says.

It was fate that got her into advertising in the first place. While she was a pre-med student at Northwestern University, an advertising executive took note of a play she wrote and offered her a summer internship. "I ... was hooked and have been in the advertising business ever since," she says.

Ms. Williams, 59, says her father's philosophy influenced her life: "You can't make the basket if you don't take the shot," he told her. And when she saw a player thrown out at a Chicago Cubs game, he said that it didn't matter if the player was right or wrong. "I can't win if I'm not in the game," she recalls.

Mentors at Leo Burnett helped her gain her own confidence: Charles Blakemore, her creative director when she created the campaign, "Strong Enough for a Man, But Made for a Woman" for Secret deodorant; Rudy Perz, copywriter and creator of the Pillsbury Doughboy; and Bill Haljun, a 30-year-veteran until his retirement in 1995.

To help others, Ms. Williams is active in philanthropic efforts on behalf of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, Congressional Black Caucus, NAACP, U.S. Dream Academy and National Newspaper Publishers Association.

—Nancy *Coltun Webster*

