

Mark Kirkham Transcript

Mark: You think about the number of data touch points we have, the number of direct-to-consumer and through-partner and through-customer touch points that a large-scale company have. The question isn't, can we do it? It's, how do we do it in a scale way?

Matt: To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move in an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to The Speed of Culture. Up today, we're super excited to welcome Mark Kirkham to the show. Mark's CMO at PepsiCo International Beverages, based over in Dublin, Ireland. Mark's been at PepsiCo for nearly 15 years now. Really excited to dig in. Mark, thanks so much for joining today.

Mark: Hey, Matt. Thanks for having me. Look forward to the chat.

Matt: Absolutely. So one of the most common recurring themes that we see here at the podcast is so many people who have risen to prominence in the marketing field cut their teeth, so to speak, at P&G. And your background is no different. Tell us about your time at P&G and what were some of the key learnings you were able to extract from that experience?

Mark: Look, I think it's a great testament to P&G, all the people who've kind of come out of the ranks. I actually wasn't born there. I didn't grow up there. I came out of the Gillette acquisition. I was literally recruited by Gillette and hired by P&G back in 2005, 2006. And I worked most of my career on what they call the legacy Gillette businesses, Brown, Duracell, some of the Gillette work. And I think the one thing that you can always give P&G credit, I mean, they were the first brand manager company in the world and they invented the role back in the day. But the focus on brand building, the key fundamentals, the focus on teaching and training, I think is a foundation that a lot of marketers will get in grad school. Some marketers will get in just different experiences. And it was a very traditional approach to kind of brand management and brand building skill. And I took a lot from that. I think the other interesting thing is if you go back and now we're talking almost 20 years ago, the world has also changed a lot. And so the type of experience and the type of marketers develop, the type of companies people are coming from is so much more diverse. But I think all of us who spent any time at P&G, whether they grew up in the system, grew up in different parts of P&G around the world, or they were part of an acquisition, there's just something about the learning agenda, the training, and the kind of core focus on brand building that I think has helped many of us throughout our careers.

Matt: Yeah, for sure. And when you talk about brand management and brand building, one thing that struck me... I mean, in recent years, just that the notion of brand obviously is changing. As you mentioned, marketing itself and the entire world that we play in has changed so much. Is brand more important now or less important now than it was when you entered P&G 20 years ago?

Mark: I think brand is more important than it ever has been. The question isn't, is brand important? It's how to make brands important. Or said differently, how to make brands relevant. I think in the early stages of my career and over the history of kind of traditional CPG

marketing, the brand stood alone and the brand was the message and the mediums were more direct and it was simpler. And you think about how brands engage and drive relevance today. And I think about the portfolio I manage at PepsiCo. It is far more complex. It is far more complicated. It is far more interesting in many ways in terms of how we engage. So I think the role of the brand and what brands stand for and how brands can build relationships and drive relevance with consumers is probably more important today because there are so many different channels, distractions, competitors that really change the landscape much more than it was even 20 years ago. And it's more how. How do you build the relationship with brands today than maybe you did 10, 15, 25 years ago?

Matt: Yeah. I mean, you think about the barriers to create attention. And I'm a Gen-Xer. When I was growing up, the advent of the cable TV was a big deal. And the only way that you could really create mass scale was getting heavy rotation on a Clear Channel Radio or obviously being on one of the big TV networks, etc. Individuals did not have the ability to have a megaphone and smaller brands did. So really, the airways were dominated by large brands and they got larger and larger, and many of them are still the largest brands today. Is it possible for new mega brands to be created in this world where there is such fragmentation?

Mark: Well, I think the Barriers to entry for brands is much lower than it was in the old days. I'm a Gen-Xer as well. And I think the traditional build and add, create a key visual, buy some media, some marketing, that's gone. It's still part of our mix, but it's not essentially all you were trained to do. So I do think it's possible. But I do think that while the barriers to entry may have gone down a bit for brands in different categories, the challenges and the skill set, and I think why those large scale CPG brands like PepsiCo and Pepsi and Gatorade and all of our brands have the wherewithal to stand touch the time is because we've learned to adapt. We've learned to adapt in terms of how we communicate, the channels we use, the engagement we play. And as you said, influencers, people, our brands themselves, our partners, our brands themselves. So I think the larger brands who have learned to adapt quickly and actually have found ways to connect in new ways are the ones who will actually be able to really, really continue to build and build that kind of brand love and that relevance to consumers around the world.

Matt: Yeah. And I think what's interesting is when you talk about adapting, especially in terms of how to get the message out, many times in recent years, what adapting means is going to the areas that are dominated by the smaller players. If you think about a lot of the big brands that kind of came out of nowhere in the early to mid 2000s really were brands that took advantage of social media and then larger brands were saying, oh, well, if we just keep bringing linear television, we're going to get lost. We need to go where the smaller businesses are. And a lot of ways they have been able to dominate that space. But I think one of the challenges is how do you actually do something? Social media. Or influencer content at scale, especially if you're in a global position, we can move now to your position at Pepsi. I think that customization and execution at scale in something that was arguably built for more hand to hand combat is always a challenge for larger companies and larger brands of portfolios like PepsiCo.

Mark: I think there was a period of time it was a challenge for everybody. I would say it's an area, it's a space that's open to everybody. And actually having scale may actually be an advantage. You think about the number of data touch points we have, the number of direct-to-consumer and through partner and through customer touch points that a large-scale company have. The question isn't, can we do it? It's, how do we do it in a scale way? And I think

if you look at the example, say we have capabilities that we call Demand Generation. We fundamentally take our own first party data. We take our customer data. We work with third parties and partners on data. And because of the scale of our company, we can actually turn that around on our own. Instead of outsourcing personalized engines, we can actually create our own engines. We can use technology to be an enabler for scale for our brands. And we're doing that. For example, we do in Gatorade, we target athletes based on the occasions and the types of products that meet those occasions based on profiles we can make by triangulating data. And we're doing that in scale markets like the US, but also in developing markets like Latin America. And we're taking this combination of first party, third party, and partner data in many cases and actually pulling it together to create profiles, to create automated personas around how we target content. And that will allow us to, A, flex our digital social skills and muscles. Even some of the programmatic that we bring in-house will allow us to actually be much more precise in messaging. And yes, while this was maybe a medium that started as kind of a low barrier to entry into the social kind of media world, it's actually become a powerful tool to drive scale. Just as TV did 20, 30 years ago. So I think we're at a unique point in time where I think the playing field is equal. The question is, who's got the powerful brands and who's got the powerful data and capabilities to actually make the most of it at scale?

Matt: Yeah. And I'm glad you mentioned data because that's obviously, especially in the world of AI, the secret ingredient. Everybody is going to have access to these large language models and new AI technologies. And what's going to differentiate brands and companies in terms of how they activate is the data that they bring to the table. Pepsi traditionally is a company that has sold its brands through big box retailers, third parties, and hasn't had the advantage of first party data like other companies that sell direct. But I know in recent years, given the growing importance of first party data, Pepsi's done a lot of work at getting its hands on all sorts of data, first and zero party data from your customer base. Can you talk a little bit about some of those efforts?

Mark: Yeah. If you think about it, just the move to digital and social, whether it's through your own apps, your partner apps, through existing online media platforms. While we don't have access to first party data in all cases, we have access to the ability to profile, to the ability to understand behavior across platforms that we never did before. And if you think about how we're able to target through the right messaging, working with partners, I mean, think about some of our away from home or we call it food service customers. We can actually do very specific deals through their customers with working with them and their data. Sometimes directly, having access to data in other cases, just working with shared profiles. The other thing we actually can do is actually work through aggregators. Think about the DoorDash, the Grumhams of the world. Now, again, customers like that may not share all their data with us, but they have data that allows us to actually better target, to better look at different meal occasions and understand what's right for our brand. And then there's the data we have internally. And I'll give you a great example. We have a group within Gatorade called GSSI Gatorade Sports Science Institute. It is literally the nutritional science and the experts, within our sports nutrition field. Now they produce publicly available reports all the time through industry association, academic association, and we have tons of data and knowledge. Most recently, we took that and used AI to create an avatar. We called her Anna for the sake of giving her a name, but we're using it for education. And just to also kind of bring to life these reams and years of research in a really relevant way. We launched it at SportsBeach at Canon a couple weeks ago, and this avatar literally allows you to ask simple questions. Hey, I'm going for a 5k today. How many electrolytes do you need? What's the best solution for me? Or what

should I be thinking about in my personal workout? This ability to take data, which was our data, and now be able to interact through AI and actually capture responses and actually learn by the responses I'm creating creates new ways to take, make really powerful tools and messages around research that is super consumer relevant. In the past, it would have been handed out at different forums. And it would be available online. But now we've created a way to kind of educate and engage. And I think that's how data is changing the engagement story for marketing.

Matt: It's interesting because we mentioned earlier how brands are people and people are brands. And really what you're doing through an activation like this is you're really personifying the Get Ready brand and allowing people to talk to it. And I wonder what your thoughts are like, is that the future? I know, obviously we can't pigeonhole into one area, but if you think about the opportunities that exist, in scaling out a strategy like that, where you can talk to Pepsi brands, you can talk to Mountain Dew based upon whatever genre or type of consumer it goes after and get information and bring the content and brand to life. That seems like a fascinating approach.

Mark: Look, I think the world will continue to evolve in a more automated space, but behind each one of those ideas and automations are real people. And I think that's the one thing that in the debate around AI, creativity comes from ideas that are conceived, not spit back to you in ChatGPT and I do believe that as we evolve as we become more integrated in terms of creative development and using technology and tools. Like AI, what I ultimately think about when chatbots first started, think about when voice recognition for, remember when that first time you called an airline and an automated voice asked you for your information, and we know that behind that, you would always hit, you know, star million times when you get to a real person. So, I think the reality is, technology enables us to be more efficient technology, enables us to be more accurate. But technology is only as powerful as the people and the creativity behind it. And the example I just gave you is a perfect example of great science done by real people brought to life through an amazing institute called GSSI and brought to life through technology so more people have access to it. They can learn more, they can educate, they can learn about their own health and wellness. But also, we do it in a way that feels, while it may be AI or it may be an avatar, it actually feels like you're having a conversation. And I think this idea of having conversations of brands, that's what technology enables. Because one-way conversations through traditional media have a role to play at driving awareness and scale. But what they can't do is build that engagement and that relationship. And you see that more and more as we look to leverage both new platforms, new channels, and new technologies.

Matt: Yeah, when you talk about scalability, I mean, what used to mean bringing a brand to life through personification was a brand's Twitter handle. Where you would kind of reply. And we went through that whole era where brands were talking via Twitter. Now there's so much more scalable. And I think what makes that activation that you just described possible is the fact that you had GSSI. So you had all this data and kind of this rich treasure trove of insights that you were able to sort of unpack into essentially a brain that you can impart into wisdom and to consumers. And I think what I'm learning over time is the brands that have invested over time in research, in custom content, well, now they can tap into that. To make their AI applications really unique and critical to their brands.

Mark: 100%. And it's also part of storytelling. Just another quick example. And it's different. It's another good example. About two, three months ago, we created a piece of content that was based on a grassroots program, what we call Confidence Coaches. Now, Confidence Coaches, we have a program called 5E5. It's a five-a-side soccer or football tournament. It's had 151,000 kids participate in the last five or seven years. And we were giving confidence to young kids. We know that 40% of most young athletes, quit because of a variety of things, cost, safety, but actually confidence is one of the biggest ones. And it's even worse for young female athletes. And it was an amazing footballer, played for England, played for Arsenal. And she always told the story about how when she was nine years old, she had to cut her hair to play with the boys. Okay. Now, you can tell that story and people can relate to it. But until you picture it, until in this case, we use technology and AI to recreate Rachel Yonke's nine-year-old self so she could have a conversation about the barriers that she had the confidence that she had to overcome and then let her tell her story to other young girls as they play sport, that is leveraging technology and data. But it all started with a human-centric idea. Like Rachel had a real story and we just made it more engaging. We just made a different angle to her. I mean, when I was with her and she's watching this for the first time, you see the emotional connection that even technology can have, but it could not have gone anywhere if we didn't have that story to begin with. So technology amplified creativity. It created new way to tell stories. But ultimately, when you're trying to build that emotional connection, it still has to be that authentic, kind of feel it in the heart kind of moment.

Matt: Yeah, well, it is the heart. But while AI might be the brain, the heart is the human component. It's the emotional component. It's the component where you don't feel like you're talking to a robot or pressing zero a million times to get to a human. If you can inject both, right, then you really win. You're bringing the brand along for a story that creates engagement like we've never seen before.

Mark: Absolutely.

Matt: We'll be right back with The Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors. So you've been at PepsiCo now since 2010, so it's 15 years. And as you mentioned, a whirlwind of change that's occurred over the last decade and a half. Talk to us about your journey at PepsiCo and what has been so appealing about that organization that's made you stay there and rise up to ranks to where you are today as a CMO of International Leverages.

Mark: I think the first thing I'll say, and it may sound cliché, but it's 100% true, is culture. Culture defines not just a job and not just an office. It defines the community in which you work. I joined in 2010. I left P&G, came to PepsiCo, and I went into innovation in the US. And the reality is innovation in a CPG company like PepsiCo, actually, it's a much more fast turning than you realize because of the category dynamics that we play in. But very, very consumer oriented, very, very system driven, really focusing on how do you get an idea to market as quickly as possible. And that, to me, was a really exciting time because you were in this big company doing innovation, some of them big, some of them small, but you had a cycle that was pretty dynamic. But then around 2012, we created the Global Groups, which we were originally, I was originally based here. And it was actually the first time that PepsiCo had really taken a global approach in terms of marketing and brand building. And when I say that, we hadn't structured for it like many companies do, but P&G for a world example, or even when I was on the Gillette side, very global in nature. And what we saw was how you can actually learn from and build from the different dynamics around the world. And so I spent a lot of time from 2012 to 2016

running big global brands like Pepsi and Mountain Dew and really understanding the different dynamics around the world.

Matt: Out of purchase, out of the purchase headquarters.

Mark: Originally out of purchase. Yeah. And out of New York. And then when I actually got the opportunity in 2016 to go abroad, not only, I has lived abroad a couple of different times, I'd gone to school in the UK. I got to spend time really going deep. And so for me, the culture then goes into understanding the markets, their market cultures, the market dynamics. And this is the culture of the people, the culture of the business, and the world in which those brands operate. And that's where you have to figure out the balance between global scale and local relevance, especially in today's world. When digital and channels are so much more locally presented. We talked about personalization, really understanding the dynamics from Mountain Dew in India. Mountain Dew is the second brand for Mountain Dew in the world is India. It is the biggest software we have. It's massive, massive business for us. But the dynamics there, it's not the same as what you had when I was a kid in New Bern, NC, North Carolina. And so you learn to understand the role that these brands play, the role that the product plays. And so from 2016 and beyond, I've been basically working in international. And came back and then took over juice and energy businesses. I've taken over CMO for the last two and a half years. And what's made it really amazing. And it's always, you're always learning because every time there's a new dynamic, there's a new market, there's a new competitor, there's a new category trend. And when you look at it, there is no average. You want to scale to be globally kind of consistent. And especially for iconic brands like KFC, Gatorade, Mountain Dew and others. But you need to find a way to be local relevant. So you do that through influencers. You do that through local relevant messaging. You do that through adapting communication to work in different ways. You do it some cases through innovation. But ultimately, it still has to be the same brand. So the challenge you have as a global marketer is how can I drive global scale? Because you've got these amazing multi-billion dollar powerful brands with long histories and really unique distinctive assets. But making them really relevant, whether you're in Lucknow in India or you're in São Paulo, Brazil, or you're in Chennai. You've got to find a way to kind of find that balance. And that to me is one of the most exciting parts and why I've really enjoyed the last set of an eight and a half years outside the US. And it's a really powerful learning experience that ultimately you can take anywhere you go. And when you take that learning, it doesn't matter if you take it back to a domestic role, you take it to a local role, understanding those nuances, I think makes you a stronger marketer. And last thing I'll say is at the heart of everything, human beings. One of the things I that I've also learned in taking so much, it's so special to me is just getting to talk to and learn from consumers around the world. Understanding the delivery driver in Seoul, the mom from Mumbai, the restaurant touring in Mexico City, whatever it is, I've learned so much about human beings as well as what it means to be a marketer, just by being close to those people throughout the last 15 years of PepsiCo.

Matt: Yeah. I mean, what an amazing experience. I mean, you speak about it sort of matter of factly, but the decision that you made in 2016 to go from a senior director of marketing role and purchase New York for Pepsi to go to London to be head of marketing innovation. I mean, that's a big decision to actually move across the pond and move out of the United States. What went behind a decision like that? And what were some of the biggest surprises you encountered when you started working overseas? You talked about all the great things that were unlocked, but were there any surprises or things that you had to deal with?

Mark: So first off, I'm half English, my dad's English. So go and I went in the UK. So it was a little bit of a softer landing, I guess. The second thing I'll say, I would encourage anyone that has the ability and the opportunity to go abroad, whether in uni or when you're a professional, you should. Why? Because it opens your eyes up to new dynamics and it's different business dynamics, it's different cultural dynamics, retail, whatever. And for me, it was also the first time I'd worked internationally and traveled and experienced so much before. It was the first time I brought my family. And so it was great to bring my family, have them experience the culture, experience something that was part of who I am. And ultimately, who they are, the English culture and the US culture are more similar, but because we were based there, they were able to travel to different parts of the world, whether it was the Middle East or whether it was Thailand, what have you. Now, on the business side, the interesting thing is you learn, especially when you come from the US. The US is so big and broad and vast, and there's so much opportunity here to learn. But you realize that in every country, no matter how big a site, there's so much opportunity for your brands. And in Europe, some of our brands are more challenger brands. So how you can act differently. And how you can approach channels differently and how you can approach brand building differently because of those local dynamics is probably the first thing you have to adapt to. What is different about West Europe versus East Europe, the UK versus Italy? What are the categories? How can I still build this campaign that resonates across these different market types? Europe in particular, again, is a great example where people average Europe to being the EU or Europe. Europe is vastly dynamic, even just within itself. So I think you learn also how to stretch yourself. I think one of the things you go in there thinking you understand things, and then you realize, oh my God, these people have forgotten more than you've ever learned. So you have to listen. You have to take the time to immerse with consumers, retailers. We also operate in a franchise environment in many parts outside the US. So I work with bottlers around the world. So my partners, in many cases, I'm two, three steps away from the end consumer. So actually your skills of building relationships with bottlers and retailers and media companies, all of that just opens your eyes up to a whole new dynamic. And for me, it was kind of something I always wanted to do and actually really get your hands dirty. But at the same time is how you take those skills that you can learn sometimes in a smaller market and then ultimately bring it back to bigger markets around the world. And so how we can lift and scale and lift and adapt ideas, I think that's the power of having these kinds of experiences because it's different, but also it's the same. And the sameness is what... This is what brand building is all about. Understand your consumer, understanding your brand, and knowing where you have the right to succeed in an authentic way.

Matt: That's right. Couldn't agree more with that. And global nuances aside, going from market to market, are there any kind of macro trends that are impacting the categories in which you play and that you have your eye on moving forward as we enter the back half of 2024?

Mark: Yeah, I mean, one of the things, especially as I look internationally, but my time in Europe, I mean, our no sugar business, we're over two thirds, no sugar, no and most sugar in Europe. And that was something we were very focused on. The category dynamics are different. Consumer dynamics are changing, in some case, faster than other parts of the world. So it was a great opportunity to really learn both from a portfolio standpoint, from a consumer standpoint, what is the right set of products that they are looking for? What we call Pepsi Max in the UK, but Pepsi Zero-Sugar. It's an amazing brand. It's been over 30 years, but we made some really, really important choices. We went all in 100% focusing on just zero sugar communication. We helped build the category in many markets. We got leadership in many markets versus in other parts of the world. It's a smaller piece of our portfolio. That learning you

can extract and take it to other parts of the world. The context might be different, but the foundation is the same. Understanding the consumer, what are their overall kind of taste trends? What are their all behavior category consumption trends? So I think Zero-Sugar is a great example of something. I think the other thing is how you actually think about the retail landscape. When you start to think about international markets, you have to think about what we call traditional trade. We're talking about bodegas, small shops up and down the street, how you communicate consumers when you're literally in a stall this big. We build great big campaign messages, but it doesn't matter unless it lands on that shelf and that small stall in that country that's far away. And so I think understanding the market dynamics. So, how do you think about marketing differently? I've talked to one of our bottlers in Pakistan. He's saying his customers all get everything on their phone. And we're talking about customers who may be much older than we think they're targeting. We're literally engaging consumers in a new way. We have a partnership with Ambev in Brazil. They do almost most of their ordering through a platform they call Bees. It's amazing how they're interacting with all their shopkeepers. So there's an opportunity to really learn from technology differences in different parts of the world, category dynamics, and also sustainability. I mean, living in Europe, we've really been focused on some of the challenges and regulations and sustainability. It allows us to really learn and lift and shift to other parts of the world. And we've done some great progress going to 100% rPET and actually really focusing on reuse and recycle. These are the types of things where when you live in certain parts of the world or you see different dynamics, you fundamentally change maybe your perception of how you approach a challenge or a problem as a marketer.

Matt: Absolutely. And so it sounds like your role is fairly complex with even different business models. That you're operating, whether it's a franchise model or the more traditional model, which you have here in North America. Given all that, how do you spend your time, both when you're kind of working in the business and on the business? And what I mean by that is there's obviously a portion of time that you have to spend given how much global knowledge you have about just learning and keeping your ear to the ground and understanding the consumer markets. And obviously, you're operating a team and you have numbers to hit, et cetera, for your business. So given all that, where are you investing your time and where are you investing elements of personal growth to make sure that you obviously continue to develop as a professional?

Mark: You've brought up a key point, which is learning. I made a comment once that my team reminds me, it's that the day I stopped learning is the day I stopped being a marketer. And I mean that because as a marketer, you should be fundamentally curious. You should be always looking to understand your consumer better. You should always be understand the impact that has on your business. And I do mean this. And because of that, you have to still have, even at my level and in my busy schedule, you need to take time to understand the consumer talk to consumers. And I think every one of us needs to always carve out some time for spending time with consumers. And sometimes consumers should be your friends, your friends' kids. It could be anyone, but as a consumer, because ultimately we're all consumers at the end of the day, but more importantly, we're all human beings and we all have different wants, needs, and contexts of the world around us. The second thing is you also got to carve out time to shake. And I don't think we do enough of that. I color code my calendar. I've done it for a long time. I'm going to do it by brand or by different type of business meeting. But I also use the color black and I block out. It says block, but that's my thinking time. You need to make sure you carve out time to think because not that you're not always constantly thinking, but that dedicated

moment, that hour, that half hour, even 15 minutes sometimes will allow you to kind of challenge your perception, maybe open up to new ideas, maybe look at a different category for a moment that you hadn't thought about. So I think carving out time. The other thing I said, and this kind of ties to the earlier conversation, you got to get into the market. You got to understand, and this isn't just about understanding the humans and the business, but the teams. Really understanding the culture of the teams you work with. What drives them? What motivates them? What worries them? What's going on in their world that you may not be able to help in everything you do, but even just understanding, having the context and being able to step back and say, I understand the challenges or the opportunities that you face. How can I help? That's a big play. And I think that you have to bring it outside in. So for example, in our office in Dublin, we have 32 different nationalities. Okay, our core team's 85 people. So 37 nationalities and 85 people. That dynamic creates such an amazing environment for my teams, people from the US to Pakistan to Russia to Latin America, Venezuela. You've got so many chances to interact with people from all over the world in a floor that's the size of a football field. And so having that ability to learn from each other, share is really, really important. And then the last thing I say is just be open and create opportunities for people to share. And I think we're always busy. But sometimes you go step back and just ask the question around, hey, what are you guys up to? What are you working on? What is the biggest challenge of the day? Give people that open door to come to you because we're all busy. But making the time to understand what, regardless of level, someone's working on or where they want to go in their career. I mean, the smaller the office, the better. I'm lucky we've got about 3,000 people throughout Ireland, but our core international business team is marketing. It's just about 80, 85. But just having that time. So you're making the time, organizing your schedule in a way to make sure you have to think, be with consumers and your markets. Those are the things that I think make you successful. I think if you do that and you know your business, all the other things, all the leadership meetings, all the kind of more business focused things, it just makes you have more valuable in those sessions if you do the other things.

Matt: Absolutely. And we talked a lot about AI as a wrap up here and how it's going to impact so many aspects of society and obviously the marketing world. One part. I think it should be impacting and it'll probably take a while for it to impact is just how younger people are educated. Because the notion of memorizing things for a test and regurgitating it is going to be a skill set that's far less valuable in this new AI driven world than maybe in the past. So the question I have for you is what should young people, whether they're college age or later in their high school years, if they want to end up as a CMO one day like yourself, what should they be focused on learning and developing their skill set at earlier phases of their career or their journey?

Mark: I would say don't let a computer do the learning for you would be the first thing I would say. And this is not a comment about AI. It's a comment of what does it take to truly learn? When Cliff Notes came out, that was like the end of reading a book. That didn't turn out to be the case. So when Google came out, that was gonna make researching easy. People still go to libraries. When the mobile phone came out, oh, that was gonna till the TV. So people are watching TV. And AI is an enabler for so many things. Many companies around the world, we've been using AI on the back of house for years, right? Having to look at logistic, having to look at forecasting and planning. But now I think the interesting thing, it's impacting on the front end of consumers. And so I think it's soon to be college age daughter. She's a senior in high school. And look, technology helps her hone her skills. But studying, experiencing life, running her clubs, doing all those things, which by the way, universities care a ton about, is almost more

important than any tool or technology that helps you maybe understand something in a less linear way. I think style of learning has changed a lot too. We had a very different style when we grew up. It was probably more structured. It was probably more linear. It probably was more memorization. But these are actually students who now through experience and because of technology, they can go watch a surgery via Zoom. My daughter literally watched the surgery via Zoom during COVID in Ireland, in LA, someone was doing a surgery. And that's what inspired her to become a doctor. Now she wants to be a doctor because of things like that. So that technology enabled something that couldn't have existed when you and I grew up, but it didn't replace the experience or the kind of curiosity that my daughter has or that the technology enabled. So like any other technology before, maybe this one's a little bit different. Maybe this one offers different characteristics and maybe allows for more powerful outputs. But actually, the inputs are as important, if not more important than the outputs when it comes to these things.

Matt: That is fantastic advice. And I agree with you across the board in terms of just the core drivers that make somebody successful. And you can't lose that no matter what the technology is. So it's almost like the more things change, the more they stay the same. And that's sort of the best way to summarize that. So to finish up, Mark, and this has been a great discussion. I can't wait for our listeners to hear it. Is there a quote or a mantra that you like to live by? You shared so much wisdom with us today that I don't know if you could bottle it up in a sentence or not, but I figured we'd give it a try.

Mark: I think I said it earlier about this idea of the day you stop learning is the day you stop being a marketer. I mean, it's not even just about being a marketer. It's the day you stop learning. I don't think you'll ever be the person that you could ultimately be. I think also finding that kind of global and local relevance, how you find global scale, local relevance is tough. And then I'll always give credit to a writer, James Kerr, wrote a book about The All Blacks and what businesses learn The All Blacks. And it's a mantra that The All Blacks, the New Zealand rugby team has, which is always leave the shirt in a better place than where you found it. And it's a sport analogy, but it can go through anything in life. It can go as a kid. It can go as a leader. It can go as a teacher. This idea that I have this amazing opportunity to run these amazing brands, and I'm just trying to make them better for the next person who gets to take them over after me. And if I make successful in doing that and I learn along the way, I've had a hell of a career.

Matt: I love that. We're going to leave with that. Thank you so much for joining us today, Mark. And I really cannot wait for our audience to hear from your journey and your wisdom. So thanks again.

Mark: Thanks, Matt. Appreciate it.

Matt: On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to Mark Kirkham, CMO at PepsiCo International Beverages for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review The Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Until next time, see you soon, everyone. Take care. The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of The Adweek Podcast Network and Acast Creator Network. You can listen and subscribe to all The Adweek podcasts by visiting adweek.com/podcasts. To find out more about Suzy, head to suzy.com. And make sure to search for The Speed of Culture at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.

