

## Suzanne Kounkel Transcript

**Suzanne:** First and foremost, our people have to believe in the brand's promise. So they are always going to be our strongest brand investors. They will always spend a lot more time with their clients than any marketing organization. So that's a big piece of who we are and what we're trying to do from a marketing perspective.

**Matt:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at 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. Today, we're excited to be joined by Suzanne Kounkel, the Global and US Chief Marketing Officer at Deloitte, where she's been for almost 30 years. She's future-focused and instills into all of Deloitte's brand marketing, strengthening the connection between marketing and sales. And Suzanne, it's so great to see you today.

**Suzanne:** Thanks, Matt. It's great to see you and to be here.

**Matt:** Absolutely. So 30 years is no short stint and you're still going strong at Deloitte. In this world, we see so many people kind of jumping around, roll the roll every couple of years. What do you think is giving you such staying power at Deloitte?

**Suzanne:** Well, it's a good question, Matt. And part of my advice to people that are up and coming is to be curious. So to be honest, I have often thought about where else should I be and whether Deloitte was the right place to be and not would be. Of course. Anybody is to sort of always re-up your engagement and your commitment. However, there were several reasons why I have stayed at Deloitte for so long. And it has been one of those things where I've sort of said, I've had seven major roles and I don't believe that I would have been able to have those and the length in that 30 years had I not stayed at Deloitte. Because if you think about what makes you successful in the work environment, a big part of it is your network. A big part of it is your reputation. And third, and probably in that order, is your skill level, right? So because I stayed at Deloitte, I brought my reputation and my network with me, which allowed me to progress faster than I might have needed to do if I went from company to company. And Deloitte's a special place. Most consulting firms are concerning the ability to move to a new company. And I think that's a really important part of the work environment. A variety of roles in a way that a lot of corporate environments don't allow you to. So I didn't need to go to a new place to get the next role.

**Matt:** Yeah, and Deloitte is essentially an agency. And when you're working as part of an agency, you're not just focused on one category or sector. So you work with, I'm sure, a variety of clients across a variety of different industries, which also within itself, I assume, keeps it kind of fresh.

**Suzanne:** Absolutely. And a new team, a new problem solving. So that's what's kept me going.

**Matt:** Absolutely. So take us back to the beginning when you first joined Deloitte. Did you think that you wanted to join a consulting organization out of college? Did you kind of just fall into

it? And what type of changes have you seen in both your role and the company at large over the three decades that you've been at the company?

**Suzanne:** So I did join Deloitte after I got my master's and I was pretty deliberate, as you might imagine, about where I wanted to be concerning the type of environment. And probably it was the type of environment more than it was the actual skill set. I did look at PR agencies. I looked at insights and research. I looked at joining big brands that I had an appreciation for. And then last but not least, I looked at a variety of consulting firms. And again, as I said, I continue to kind of push on that decision all the time, which I think is an important part of the engagement process. Specifically, I picked Deloitte because, again, for the reasons that you mentioned, I like that sort of evergreen notion of environments and different sets of problems and teamwork and bringing multidisciplinary things together. Deloitte has always been good at assembling very diverse teams, which was important to me. There is a critical notion of the team as unifying, but it also allows for a stronger voice when you're more junior than, you know, you don't have to wait to be senior to have an impact on the work you're doing. That was very, very important to me. And just again, problem-solving and always doing new things were of high interest to me. A little bit of your question was sort of what's changed over the years, particularly with the business. For sure, the big thing that has changed is compliance. The complexity of the business and the breadth of the advice that we can bring to the table that has changed demonstrably. The scale and scope of a lot of the projects we do has changed very significantly as well. When I first started, you could kind of rely on a small team to kind of work through problems. Today, we would always say it's people plus technology. We would always say it's worked with our clients, not for or to her clients. So some of those things have stayed the same. But really, sort of the magnitude of the change and the impact that we can have on our clients has changed dramatically. That would be one. The second thing I think has changed very dramatically is we do believe as a brand that sort of life's biggest problems aren't solved by single actors. So you've seen us over time really have co-creation with our clients, with third parties, whether that's alliance partners or government agencies or whatever the case may be, really solving problems across industries. So I would say that's one of the things that we've seen. I would say that and then we're no different than most big firms with respect to the global aspect of the problems presenting themselves. So I would say those three things are the big things that have changed.

**Matt:** Absolutely. And given all the changes you're seeing, I guess, and you talked about the different sorts of roles, how did you end up as CMO? And CMO of a consulting company the size of Deloitte, which last time I checked has over 450,000 employees. It's a major deal. It's a major role. And Deloitte does so many different things that the CMO role has to play at a pretty high altitude. I guess, how did you end up in that seat? And then we'll talk a little bit about, I guess, what your day-to-day looks like and bringing your initiatives forward.

**Suzanne:** Sure. So I often joke that my current role is penance because I spent about 20 years providing advice to CMOs and COOs. So when I first started with the firm, I spent a good number of years providing sales marketing and customer experience advice to primarily big hardware and software companies. That was the work I did. And so because of that, when I was offered my first role, which was as the CMO of the consulting part of our business, it was because of those things that we're a complex organization. So they felt that somebody who knew the way the firm was wired was important, but they'd tried going that route exclusively that didn't have the depth with marketing. That hadn't worked so well. They'd also tried with the marketing sort of prowess from outside. And because we're a very networked organization,

that didn't work. So they had hoped with me that they would get the best of both worlds. And that connection with marketing and the customer experience was very important to them as well. So hopefully that's panned out. And then about four years ago, I became the US CMO. And then a year ago, I became the global CMO as well.

**Matt:** Gotcha. So in the role of CMO, I would imagine one of the primary things you're focused on is just establishing what the brand Deloitte means in an ever-changing world. Deloitte has been around for so long, which provides you a lot of benefits because you have that trust, but you want to make sure that your customer base and prospect base know that your company is evolving with new trends in the marketplace, like AI, for example, and globalization and everything that we're seeing in the world. When you look at the Deloitte brand, what's most important for you as CMO to get across to the marketplace? And how do you go about doing that?

**Suzanne:** Well, it's well said. That's exactly what we as a brand are trying to do lean into the heritage and the trust and integrity that people know that they can trust with the Deloitte brand and the legacy of that, but also make sure that people or clients always know the most current set of solutions that we can provide to the marketplace. So I'm always working on that. In that regard, I think there are a couple of things that we're doing that are different than maybe other organizations, although I would argue that we're all kind of in this together. But first and foremost, our people have to believe in the brand's promise. So they are always going to be our strongest brand investors. They will always spend a lot more time with their clients than any marketing organization. So that's a big piece of who we are and what we're trying to do from a marketing perspective. The second thing is always to get the demand and the brand piece of it. And obviously, I work very closely with the business units. The business units aren't going to allow you to do as much on the brand side if they don't think the demand and growth side is being met. So that's always a balance. And then last but not least, our people and our clients are proud of their affiliation with Deloitte and believe that we have the best set of capabilities in the brand. And that, Matt, to your question, we center that on three things. One, our brand purpose is an impact that matters to our people, our clients, our communities, and the planet. All of those constituencies are very important with respect to the way we think about the work so that's a big part of, you know, we're not doing frivolous things. We're doing things that matter a lot.

**Matt:** That drives business results ultimately.

**Suzanne:** Exactly. And then there's this notion of progress and always modernizing what we're doing with the best set of capabilities and the best set of tools. But really in uncertain times and challenging times like we see today, people do want advisors that they trust and that they believe have character and integrity and that they want by their side. And so we're always trying to pull the threads of those three things together concerning the brand.

**Matt:** And in terms of bringing the work of the company to life, because there's so much breadth and depth of work that Deloitte has across so many different industries, how do you go to market in, I guess, a more systematized way, if you will, for the brand? Because obviously, you want to be able to speak to a multitude of industries and use cases, and at the same time, you don't want the work to be unwieldy or lack consistency. So I'd imagine you have to put some frameworks in place as you roll this out across such a large organization.

**Suzanne:** Yes, that is exactly the opportunity and the challenge for sure. Again, part of it is making sure our people broadly understand enough about the way the brand needs to show up in what I call the little lived moments of every day. That's important. We've had to really sort of work hard. We have been the last couple of years undergoing a major marketing transformation, and it has been all about right-sizing the amount of work we do at the brand level with the amount of work we do at what we call the demand gen level. And making sure that there were people when I came into the role, I felt that at the brand level, we were talking too much about what we did and not enough about who we are and how we're different. And as I mentioned a couple of times, our product set is too complex to hook people in because of the specific service.

**Matt:** You could typecast yourself in a way if you talk about the brand level, that might alienate certain opportunities.

**Suzanne:** Exactly. And when we do our best work, it is when we are solving bigger problems that require lots of combined sets of services, not just single services on their own.

**Matt:** Gotcha. So that's at the brand level. And then when you said demand gen level, that's probably where you look at the kind of use cases, more industry-specific stories. So what's worked for you? I'm sure that a lot of what you do has a strong measure of analytics breadth behind it to make sure that you're putting your resources in the right place. When you look at the last couple of years, especially in your role, what have you found has consistently worked at driving business as a result of your marketing?

**Suzanne:** I would say that most CMOs would say something similar. But the first thing that's worked is having a much more collaborative approach with the businesses. So that means that I don't have to be omniscient concerning what they're seeing in the marketplace. We can partner together to make some of those choices together. And that sounds easy, but it's pretty hard in practice.

**Matt:** So you mean the partners on your client? And when you say collaboration?

**Suzanne:** When I say partner, what I mean is the people that are running the business units. So the leaders of those business units work in close collaboration from a marketing perspective.

**Matt:** Understanding their needs, understanding what they're seeing, the opportunities, providing those things that help the customers believe.

**Suzanne:** Right. They're the front lines of the market. So they see things very differently. And then combining our superpowers because they do certain things exceptionally well. We do certain things exceptionally well in pulling that together another thing that I would imagine every CMO should be saying is leaning into insights and analytics to be able to drive the activity and see things holistically that they can. That has been a huge unlock for us because it's allowed us to be more creative, which you wouldn't naturally expect. We own a lot of the channels so we can listen to clients in a different way than the business often does when they're delivering services. So that's been a big unlock for us. Certainly doing a big digital transformation and being able to do more activity at a lower price point has been an important part for us as well over the last couple of years.

**Matt:** And in terms of making stuff in the seat of a marketer that your customers and prospects want, do you find this form factor has changed? Because ultimately, a lot of what you're talking about is content. When you talk about insights and analytics, that boils up to not necessarily ads, but actual stories, and behind those stories is content that they're going to find value in. So have those form factors of content changed over time and have you used channels like social media to kind of push those out and in what ways?

**Suzanne:** We're always looking at the mix of those channels. And I would say that we're leaning in much more significantly now with social and with digital than we did for sure five, six, seven years ago. But I wouldn't say, you know, we do a lot with sponsorships because they're a great forum for us to partner with the organization, to do work for the organization, as well as use that as an experience to host clients so they can see kind of the magic of who we are. As you mentioned, we do a lot of content marketing, and that's an important thing. We also have been doing a lot more in the last couple of years around really showing, again, the personal side of what the brand looks like. If you haven't seen the WNBA campaign that we did in the WNBA finals last year, that was a really fun way to lean into our brand purpose, which was kind of under the notion of girls who play become women who lead. And this notion of that we've been cheering professional women on and off the court for a great many years. We've done some other. So we're trying to do this mix of really showing the personality of who we are in addition to what we do and the results that we can have.

**Matt:** Yeah. I would imagine the level that the business leaders that you collaborate with play at being at some of these large events and bringing the brand to life, so to speak, through sponsorships, provide you an added benefit because you're also relationship-building along the way.

**Suzanne:** Yes.

**Matt:** And how would you say, because most of the CMOs that we talk to on the podcast are B2C marketers. I'm a B2B marketer. I've been a B2B marketer my whole career. I believe there's a lot of overlap, but there are nuances that go into B2B marketing. I guess, what are some things that you've learned along the way about B2B marketing that you believe that maybe others don't believe or just sort of, I guess, tools of the trade that you've uncovered that you lean into in your role?

**Suzanne:** Well, first and foremost, I do think about both of those mental paradigms, if you will. I think about B2C very significantly when it comes to engaging our people because that's a little bit more of a B2C motion. And then obviously, I think about B2B very significantly concerning our clients. I think historically, there hasn't been enough sort of cross-referencing. So I would argue that B2B marketers should take a lesson from B2C concerning engagement analytics and insights. But I would say that B2C could learn a lot from B2B with respect to they've had to adjust quite a bit because the relationship part of a consumer experience has changed so dramatically over the last five years. And I think that B2B has to get both sides. They have to get digital engagement, but relationships and personal things and that sort of thing. And so really pulling those things together, I think, is a big part of being successful today.

**Matt:** We'll be right back with the Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors. One of the benefits I imagine you have with partnering with the business leaders is just gaining that sort of continual feedback loop back from your customers in terms of what they're looking at

relative to Deloitte services and where they're leaning in because that would probably drive the things that you talk about. How does that work and how do you, I guess, facilitate that feedback group so you can continually evolve for your customers?

**Suzanne:** So one is, again, we can look across a lot of the MarTech and the digital transformation that we did. We can look holistically across. We can also see things across categories of customers and categories of service that oftentimes the business may not be able to see as easily. So really partnering together on what that looks like and how we want to take a look at that and then locking on what is the ideal outcome. And then that allows us to be more strategic and to be a little bit more playful, a little bit more creative with respect to the actual activation. And then again, doing that jointly with the things that the business is better at, which is a lot of the in-person delivery. Human touch is what we're always trying to navigate towards.

**Matt:** Yeah. And when you talk about the business in general, the business of consulting, what are some of the broader, I guess, macro trends in your industry where perhaps it will be a different Deloitte five years from now than it is today? What are some of those external factors that are driving some of the areas that you're planning in?

**Suzanne:** Yeah, so I think that the complexity of Deloitte would surprise most individuals. And so you will continue to see us playing into who we are and how we're different, what that looks like. What you will see is, that this exists today, but you'll see an increasing amount of solution-based kind of assets. If you think about historically, it was if you were meeting with your auditor, it was meeting with a physical person and then doing the audit results. The same thing was true with consulting. Now we have a lot more solutions that we embed in bigger transfers.

**Matt:** Like product hyping your service offerings almost?

**Suzanne:** Yes. And that allows speed to market. That allows for a reduction of risk. But when you look at why somebody would go with Deloitte, it's that they can get that plus the human judgment, plus the technology prowess, plus the cross-industry, plus the private and public partnerships, plus the third party alliance relationships, all of those sorts of things. I think you'll just see us do more and more of it. And candidly, it's what our clients want, because that's really what progress means concerning a lot of the fundamental challenges that they are seeing in the marketplace with growth and navigating an increasingly complex technology environment. And again, you think about most of the big things, again, involving multi-industries, multi-governments, globally complex. It's just sort of all of those things. And that's a perfect place for us to be. And you'll see that in increasing fashion.

**Matt:** Yeah, and prepackaging solutions also allow you to optimize it over time. Where if you're building things bespoke for each customer, it's really hard to build technology and data-based solutions that can get better over time because you're always reinventing the wheel. So it also probably makes it easier for the business people to storytelling around it because they're telling similar stories over and over again, which allows them by nature to get better at those things.

**Suzanne:** Right. And knowing where it matters, because a lot of those assets are in places where the velocity is critical. There's a reduction of risk when they are road-tested to your point that when they're not starting fresh every year. But then also knowing where it has to be

a team that has the experience and the expertise and the judgment, you know, to make decisions and how and when to apply those things is what we are very good at.

**Matt:** Yeah. And where do you see AI playing a role within your general industry and with Deloitte specifically in the years ahead? Because there's been so much written about how AI is going to disrupt and revolutionize the consulting industry. And I think that one thing many people don't realize is how slow to move a lot of these large organizations who you count as customers are, where just because they can do more automated things doesn't mean they will anytime soon. But at the same time, I think many of us believe that AI is going to have a massive impact on the way that these large organizations are serviced. So I guess, what is your personal take on it? And what are some of the things that Deloitte is starting to do within the AI realm?

**Suzanne:** Yeah, I mean, I think it has and it will because it's unfolding so rapidly. I think that that's what's been so interesting, right, is the rate of adoption has been so.

**Matt:** The speed, for sure.

**Suzanne:** Right. But we do believe in a world where it's always going to be people with, that's a mantra that we have, people with Gen AI, people with technology, people with AI in general. We are fundamentally thinking about it sort of through three lenses. The first lens is how do we do the work that we do concerning like, if you think about the marketing organization, like what are the pieces where we want to invoke Gen AI and AI generally? We're certainly looking at it through the lens of how we deliver services that take advantage of that. Again, we talked about speed to market and how fast can you turn around advice that used to take a long time. That lens is really through the, what do we want Gen AI to do in areas where people aren't exceptionally good at it? You know, you think about looking through a hundred thousand contracts where people over time have done that, but we're not exceptionally good at doing that. So by all means, infuse that to do those parts of things. And then last but not least, there are lots of things that will be big unlocks because again, there were impediments because of the limitations of the technology that now we don't have. But again, we would see that there's an opportunity side of that and a huge risk side of that. So yeah. Being a partner by your side to help navigate that with respect to what you do with those technologies is critically important as we've all seen great stories and challenging stories unfold.

**Matt:** Yeah, for sure. I mean, I think both the challenge and opportunity that organizations like yours are going to have is that the C-suite is now starting to be taken over by millennials who grew up with the internet in the household, right? So Deloitte serviced the C-suite and Generation X didn't grow up with the internet in the household. So a lot of the processes, the systems you had deployed may have been okay for them, but when millennials entered a C-suite and they're digital natives, so to speak, I think their expectations of how they're serviced and the type of tools that they have that are accessible within your service offering are going to change. And that means that your brand is going to have to change along with that customer base.

**Suzanne:** Yeah, absolutely spot on.

**Matt:** Yeah. So it'll be interesting. So let's shift gears a little bit as we wrap up, Suzanne, just to your career. So obviously, not everybody has the opportunity to oversee a brand with a

company that has over 400,000 employees. I mean, it's a tall order. When you look back at the decisions you've made you decided to stay at Deloitte, which I think if you didn't stay there, you wouldn't have the opportunity to be their CMO. But besides that, you've probably made many decisions along the way that kind of put you in the position where you are today. When you look back at your career, what do you think are some of the decisions or choices that you've made in terms of where to focus on your professional development?

**Suzanne:** Yeah, sure. So the first one I would say is just always be curious and be curious around you, not specifically within your domain experience. So like, for example, I've always been in marketing and sales. So supply chain is something that candidly was a little off-putting to me. So I spent time with my friends who were supply chain experts because that interplay is actually where a lot of the opportunities unlock. So that's one. I would say learn the business. If you really understand what the business needs, it makes your job as a marketer so much easier because you understand their perspective. You can speak their language. You can bring the collective superpowers together. And then last but not least is I always talk with people that I mentor or whatever about kind of make your mark. We all are very different with respect to what we can bring to the table. For me, that was always like the highest intersection between being strategic, creative, and getting things done. So that's how I was always wanting to change things.

**Matt:** That's a great intersection, by the way, that a lot of people should focus on.

**Suzanne:** Of me being involved. What that is for another person would be different. But knowing who you are and what you bring to the table and then making it different as a result of you being involved is the other thing that I've always tried to hold myself accountable to.

**Matt:** Right, because for other people, it could be that they're very provocative or they're a thought leader or they're a great speaker or they have their finger on the pulse of what's next. Whatever that one skill set is that you can lean into to differentiate yourself because many companies cast themselves like a Broadway play and they want different types of actors to be on stage at the same time to win.

**Suzanne:** Yeah, I love that play analogy because that is right. Every actor needs their voice and together it tells the most compelling story. Love that.

**Matt:** Right. And I guess, how would you suggest one go into the self-introspective process to identify where the intersections that they should be playing in? I think self-awareness is a big issue, especially for younger people in careers, where they may not know where they should lean into.

**Suzanne:** It's a great question. I think that you can find it in a lot of different ways. I mean, part is like your own personal interest. Part of it is taking an honest look at where you're having an impact. Part of it is asking people around you that you trust and know you well, what are the differentiators or distinguishing characteristics. And then I think those are all important. And those are what every individual should know is like, I bring this to the table. What I find sometimes people, particularly in today's world, don't think enough about is, okay, that's what I'm bringing to the table, but the table needs this. So where do those things meet? Where do those things come together? Because I often say to my team, you know what we want to say,

but you don't always know what they can hear. And so really making sure that you're thinking about it from both sides is something I would encourage people to spend some time on.

**Matt:** When you speak of your team when you decide to bring somebody on your team, because some of those things that we're talking about in terms of people finding the right intersection, so to speak, it takes a while for that to come out, especially within the context of a new organization. So what are some of those early signals that you look for where you're like, oh, this person, they're a great fit for what I'm trying to build?

**Suzanne:** Yeah, I do think I've said it several times. I do think of innate curiosity.

**Matt:** We hear that so much, Suzanne. So you're not the only one in a setting. It's probably one of the most common themes that we see and I see in talking to CMOs is they say the power of curiosity is just tremendous.

**Suzanne:** Yeah. And curiosity is important because all we know is we aren't going to be doing things tomorrow that we're doing today. So that curiosity and that kind of evergreen learning and thinking about what isn't there that could be there is important. For sure, there's a general optimism, the ability to work with people, kind of knowing that we're better together. That is a big piece of it. Increasingly, there's always going to be a component of technical expertise and skill sets and capabilities that you're bringing to the table. But again, we would want people to know that that's going to change pretty dramatically over time. But one of the things that has also kept me at Deloitte is that I always have said that these are the people that I not only want to solve really hard problems with during the day, but I want to go on a hike on the weekend. So it's that combination that's important.

**Matt:** Absolutely. Without that likeability and good chemistry, if you work together, then it's going to be hard, despite what talents people have to succeed and accomplish what you want to.

**Suzanne:** Yeah. And enough for bringing in hard perspectives and to have a voice. Like, that's critical.

**Matt:** Yeah, I think a lot of people younger in their career, find a hard time just having a voice because they just feel like they don't want to rock the boat. But I think what I'm hearing you say, and I agree 100% with our team, is the most successful people are the ones that have conviction in something, that have done the work. They do have curiosity, as I've sort of learned about these new things, and they're not afraid to speak up.

**Suzanne:** Yes, exactly. And that context is really important because I see it on both. One, people are afraid to speak up because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. There is no wrong thing. Everyone will tell you that. But on the other end, sort of coming in with conviction but not understanding context and picking up on that is the other sort of end of the spectrum but can be just as limiting.

**Matt:** So it's been a great chat. So informative. I know we've covered a ton of different areas. If you had to sum up your career in the way that you look at your professional growth, and professional life, is there a mantra or quote that you like to live by that you often find yourself saying?

**Suzanne:** Yes, there are three. The first one is Homer. And he said the journey is the thing. So I think a lot about that. I love that notion. And I think it's particularly important for all of us to be present in the moment, like look ahead, but appreciate the journey. The second thing is Socrates said, be as you wish to seem. I think that's important. I think about that all the time concerning brands and because be as you wish to seem. And then last but not least I'm a huge tennis fan. And Billie Jean King talks a lot about pressure as a privilege. And I think about that all the time and say that a lot to our teams is that there's a lot expected of us, but that pressure is an absolute privilege.

**Matt:** It's such a great way to look at things when you have tough situations or tough decisions to make. And it is a privilege to be in a position at a company like yours to be able to make those decisions that you're empowered to do so.

**Suzanne:** Absolutely.

**Matt:** I'd say, well, thanks again so much, Suzanne, for sharing a little bit about your journey your role, and where you see at Deloitte. And it's been amazing. I can't wait for our audience to hear it.

**Suzanne:** Thanks so much, Matt.

**Matt:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and I, we send thanks again to Suzanne Kounkel, and Suzanne Kounkel, CMO of Deloitte, 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 of Adweek's podcasts by visiting [Adweek.com slash podcasts](https://adweek.com/podcasts). To find out more about Suzy, head to [Suzy.com](https://suzy.com). And make sure to search for The Speed of Culture on 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.