

Adrienne Lofton Transcript

Adrienne: “Organizations can wait for the world to do the thing, or they can be the example for the world to catch up”. And that phrase has stuck with me because that's what I've been trying to do my whole career without having those words to express it and Google is being what the world we need to see is or should be. We are a representation of that and at scale.”

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. Today we're going to be speaking with Adrienne Lofton, Vice President of Global Consumer Marketing at Google. Adrienne's passion for storytelling and empowerment has impacted major Brand and household names including Nike, Under Armour and Target. She's also been armed with accolades that include Adweek's Brand Genius Award and Ebony Magazine's most powerful woman in business. Adrienne, so great to see you. Thanks so much for joining today.

Adrienne: Matt, it's great to see you. Thank you for having me. It's always strange when you hear someone talk about you when you're in the room.

Matt: So, I know, super awkward, right?

Adrienne: Thanks for making it as easy as possible.

Matt: No worries. So, I'd love to hear a little bit about your background. More specifically, even before you got into the workforce, when you were at college age, did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up? Not like to say you're actually growing up now, but when did you get an inkling of what you actually wanted to do in your career?

Adrienne: It's a fun question. You know, when you spend so much time heading down in the work, you really get to lift your head up and look at the journey, which to date myself is over years in this industry, which I can't believe how quick it goes. And when I talk to folks coming into our industry, I have to say, and I'm very different, I think, than this generation, I was one of those special cases that I knew very early on.

Matt: Why?

Adrienne: You know, I didn't know it was called marketing or strategy or advertising, but as a young athlete, there was a moment of transition in my life where I went from living in a city with my core family cousin next door, you'd run through the bushes, you'd get to your aunt's house, and we were moved from that place in Cleveland to like a foreign land of Houston, Texas, with our nuclear family. And we found a sport. My parents actually threw us in sport, And it was the first thing that allowed me to see a different side of myself. But when I think back to those moments, And this is going to sound so cheesy, Nike as a brand, my parents bought me a pair of Huaraches volleyball shoes, And I was not good, to be very clear. I laced up those shoes And thought I could do absolutely anything. It made me feel invincible. So if I look back at that now as a brand girl, it was what the brand told me I could be before I even thought I could. And it was at that moment, moving into college, where I went to the placement school. It was in the school of business. There was an office you'd go to, and you'd

tell them what you think you want to be. And I said, I want to do what Nike did for me. I don't know what that means. And they're like, oh, easy, school of business, potentially marketing as a concentration. And you want to be a storyteller. You want to bring experiences. And that's exactly what I wanted to do. And that started in high school. And then I was so myopically focused on this goal. I wanted to work at Nike when I was at Howard. And so it was like, not just marketing, not just advertising, not just storytelling, but at Nike. And it was only because of how that made me feel. So I knew, and then I shaped my career at every chapter and stint to get to what I thought was my ultimate goal. I always tell this generation, you may not know that crisply what you want to be and do. You actually will never figure it out unless you start to push yourself in spaces where you find that natural passion. And then you go deeper, then you investigate, then you explore, and then you land it.

Matt: Yeah, I mean, Nike's brand promise is so empowering. And so many people just need that inspiration and just knowing that, hey, you can go for it, just do it, so to speak. And I guess for you, you took it literally. And here we are today.

Adrienne: I did.

Matt: So you started off not at Nike, but at Target, which I think that retail experience with a company like Target, I would imagine, taught you so many lessons that you still hold closely to today. Talk to us about just going right into the workforce at a company like Target and what you're able to extract from it?

Adrienne: So man, I might even take you further back. So out of Undergrad, I applied to Nike in the Black CV Box, wherever those things go, like blank and cold, and no one would ever respond. And I was like, all right, so at some point, I'm going to make this company want me. And so I actually started at the Gap out of Undergrad, and this is back in And this is when the blue box was the most iconic thing in the world that you can aspire to. And so I got very lucky joining a retail management program that still exists to this day, where for a year, you went through every functional area of expertise, finance performance, production performance, planning performance, marketing, finally got to marketing, And my marketing was inside of Old Navy when they were launching that Brand with a woman named Jenny Ming. It was like my MBA. And so you very quickly learned how to think about retail through the best company in the world, with a merchant called Mickey Drexler, he's one of the best. And we just followed him around, we just soaked it all in. And so from the Gap, one of my first roles, I got permanently placed, thank goodness, in the international division. So I launched Gap Japan, Gap Germany, Gap Canada. So I learned there how to speak to consumers who aren't the core demographic. So I think that also helped me really think about the unique point of view of understanding a consumer insight And how that translates around the world. So it started in mass retail, but with an iconic brand that cared deeply about brand and storytelling. And then from there, I went to the auto industry, GM for just a bit, because I wanted to learn how to manage billions of dollars in a space that at that point haven't really talked to underserved communities the way that they deserve. So I actually joined a newly formed division on their multicultural side. My only job was to think about basically non-white men, African-American, Latinx, LGBTQIA, back when it was just GLBT, Asian Pacific women. And so we launched Saturn. We thought about Buick for her. We did all of these things to drive share in a massive industry that was pretty staid in how they thought about the world. And then from there came Target, which was, when I think about the schools that I had outside of Undergrad, it was Gap And it was Target. There's a way to think about the consumer. There's a way to create magic for a woman who just wants to see themselves. So the strategy there was taking a suburban woman and letting her feel urban and cool. She may come in

for bread and bleach. We wanted to leave with a basket of the newest fashion design collaboration we have in the space. So I call myself lucky for the roles that I got to be a part of, the teams I got to help build from scratch. And those learning grounds allowed me to get into sports like Under Armour and then Nike and continue to shift how I think those Brands thought about the world.

Matt: Yeah, I mean, it's very helpful. And we usually dig deep when we do the research of this, but you even took us deeper, which is great. Into some of those early stints that you had.

Adrienne: I don't even talk about those places anymore because it just keeps you real back, but they are special.

Matt: Yeah, it sounds super formative. And then you started this journey into the apparel space and worked at Under Armour, really when they were first forming as a powerful brand in the US. And then you spent some time also at Levi Strauss and then going back to Under Armour. So you were in this world of apparel, I guess, you were starting to set your sights on Nike, it seems like, and you were circling them until you ended up there. So talk to me about your time in the apparel space and what you were able to get out of it leading up to your state of Nike.

Adrienne: Yeah, I mean, apparel in the world of sport, it has such deep specificity on how you must understand the categories of play, whether it's running, training, team sport, and you must build through the lens of innovation. Under Armour was mostly apparel. And when I moved to Nike and really started to understand, we had footwear at Under Armour, but Nike is the house of footwear and understanding the innovation and the technology. Also why I think it's been a nice transition to tech. There's so much tech that lives inside of the walls of Nike and how they think about the world. It's just through the lens of sport and performance and making the body better, unlocking every possible potential. And so moving into the retail space is where I knew I found a love because you think about the things consumers covet, apparel and footwear are one of those things, not a massive price point. We can have the level of accessibility that really brings me joy. Everybody deserves to have the absolute best at every good, better, best price point. And just being able to tap into new ways to build, partnering with merchants, designers, innovation leaders, it has always been a sweet spot for me. So I knew that was a place I could continue to grow, learned it first at Target, but really getting into the Under Armour space where to your point, when I got there, there was no women's division. So Kevin Plank who went to Under Armour when I was at Howard playing volleyball, he was playing football, we had friends in common. He had heard I was this woman at Target speaking in she's and hers, that is how they used to speak, I'm sure they still do. And he gave me a call and said, I need to start a women's division, I don't quite know how to do it. We laughed about how he would say we're going to shrink it and pink it. And I was like, first of all, don't ever say that again. And let's think about what you unlock, which was game changing in those days for American football. And that brand, Under Armour when I joined, was knocking at the heels of Adidas in North America and Nike.

Matt: Yeah, they were the ultimate challenger brand, right? That was their whole role, was to challenge the big established players.

Adrienne: Yes, and it's a lesson that I bring to my team today. Google is massive, but the businesses I worked on are challenger. So there's never a moment where a challenger unlock doesn't have an opportunity. And when you can tap into that consumer mindset, that psychographic, it is limitless in what you can do. I look back at those days at Under Armour, helping build that positioning, helping to see a new generation of kids choose us. In my third year there, we knocked off Adidas as the

number two North America Brand. We were number two. And so it wasn't just because of the apparel and the footwear, it was the story that we told, we were a brand company. And so that's super special, and all of that I think comes inside of these industries where you can tip into the emotional high ground and the reason for being and changing a conversation. Kevin And I would talk about our goal is to zig when sport is zagging. That is a strategy. And you need to be quite nervous on some of the things you're ready to come out with, launch, say, but that's actually what's going to create a reason for someone to pay attention. No one needs more brands in the world. So if you don't have a real reason for being, then like see the back door and get out of here. And our goal was to always have a reason to be pulled into the conversation, not pushing ourselves through a door.

Matt: Absolutely. I think the way that you talk, Adrienne, is a really great reminder just in terms of the power of brand. Because as you go through your story, you talk about how Nike impacted you. You're talking about leaning into brand and Under Armour as a challenger brand. And I think in this world today, so many marketers, perhaps to a fault, are so focused on performance marketing and bottom of the funnel, especially in the B2B space. And what they don't realize is that the B2B shopper is no different than A consumer walking down the aisle at Walmart And picking Tide versus a private label. Why do they spend more? Because they trust the brand. So why is the brand so fascinating to you? And do you think the role of a Brand Manager and a Brand Storyteller has changed over time since you've been going through this journey?

Adrienne: It's a wonderful question. It's also something that we talk about quite a lot. And one of the reasons why I wanted to move over to Google and work for powerhouse women like Lorraine, my leader and Nick Drake, is that we all understand that marketing is moving at the speed of light. We're all using language like, we want to represent a modern marketing organization, that modern world is the new, hot thing that we want to toss in a room, but what does that really mean? And what it really means in my opinion, And I'm biased when it comes to this, I deeply believe in the power of brand. I believe that some of the best brands and products in the world come from marketing and storytelling and positioning as much as it is the value and the quality of the product. You cannot have one without the other. And so when I see teams that are shaped, and this happened in a couple of my past lives, where you have a performance team, a DR team, a direct team, call them wherever you want, e-commerce team, and then you've got the brand team. And they sit on opposite sides of the building. And one of the things that I was able to do at Nike, running North America, was pull those teams together. And we had one marketing organization that was full funnel. And you are nothing if you can't tell A big emotive story, A real reason for being in caring And pulling that all the way down to the retail experience, digital and physical. And so I've been tapped for interest in these massive roles in the industry. And the first thing they'll say is, we got a couple of board members who are really looking to quantify everything that we do. We need to kick out all the brand things we've been doing. We need to go away from these big platform moments. And we need to be all DR. And I politely decline those conversations because any company that the pendulum swings from left to right, all brands or all DR are going to miss. That's not modern. What is modern is full funnel, always measuring, always iterating that plan, but it's the art and the science. And being able to blend those two things is the future. And we're at a little bit of a moment where organizations are deciding who they want to be. And if you only chase the bottom line, if you're only thinking about STV, then you're going to lose that consumer long-term. And that's something that I will pulpit on for as long as I'm in this industry because that is the future I believe of modern marketing.

Matt: Yeah, in some ways, no pun intended, but it's a race to the bottom because then you're just going to be chasing the cheapest way to acquire a customer, maybe not the best customer. And it's

just not a long-term strategy. And we're seeing that play out right now, especially in the wake of an economic downturn. In many ways, what we've seen is the most powerful brands rise during double down during economic headwinds on brand versus growing out brand and just focusing on what you think CFOs want you to do may be pushed down to the just performance paper. I want to just go into Nike because you talk about how you've always dreamed of working at Nike. So you're at Under Armour and I guess the call came where you're like, this is it. I'm out. Like, was that a hard decision? Because you were covering a lot of ground and making big progress at Under Armour. What was that decision like? And tell us about your experience at Nike.

Adrienne: Hardest decision I've ever had to make. Deep loyalty to Under Armour, to Kevin, to the organization I built. You know, I started as a women's leader, I ended up running all categories. And so it was the head of marketing role that I always coveted. And when Nike came knocking, it was the most unexpected moment because I realized I said by like year six of ten at Under Armour, I've done too much here. There's too much Steph Curry, too much Cam Newton, too much Tom Brady, too much Misty Copeland on my agenda. I'm never going to get a look at the place I thought I'd be. And I resigned thankfully that my intention was to get into sports. Under Armour didn't exist when I was an Undergrad, so I didn't realize it may have been Under Armour. It really was a sport. So I resigned. No Nike. Nike calls out of nowhere, offers me an opportunity and my love for this brand and what I built Under Armour, you know, in the back of my mind, it's what Nike did for me. That's how I got to success at Under Armour. So I couldn't say no. And so I did make a very difficult decision and had a really good conversation with the founder on why I needed to have wonderful relationships with that organization to this day. I still cheer for them. I think we can cheer for everybody in an industry. I don't have to only cheer for Google and not cheer for competitors. You know what I mean? So I watch them. I have a lot of feedback on their last five years, but like they are family. And so moving into Nike, I knew there'd be a couple of things I needed to figure out. One, Nike is full of lifers who are all swoosh till the day they die. And here comes an Under Armour woman with a point of view. So I knew one, I needed to figure out a way to embrace myself with this new community. And what I realized very quickly is as long as I am my authentic self, which is always looking for better men for everyone around me with positive intent, we're going to find a way together. And it was actually easy joining the team and becoming part of that family. And I have a non-compete in sports, so I had to sit out a year. And I would give anybody advice. If you have to sit on a non-compete for a year. I took a bunch of classes. I took digital courses. I did a Harvard thing. Just go to the beach. So I took a year, unnecessary classes and teaching, and got to Nike. And within a year, we were in the middle of a pandemic. We were in the middle of an economy that was falling. You know, the ceiling was falling and sport basically closed down. The NBA shut down. There was no sport around the world. And running North America, which really is the core of team sport, we had to very quickly pivot. And I do think my learnings from driving a challenger brand at Under Armour, challenger human, challenger brand, got me so suited to lead that organization in a very new way of thinking. And by the way, you said this earlier, we cut the budget. We didn't cut the brand. The voice that needed to keep people inspired through one of the hardest emotional and mental wearing times of our lives was a brand like Nike that needed to be in the room. Google did the exact same thing, by the way. Double down to make sure the consumer had everything they needed. Humans had what we needed to get through. And we were able to break significant records in engagement at Nike, in building a digital portfolio. So we always talk about the membership model. When you go to nike.com and you sign in, you're a member. The increase of membership was gangbusters, the increase of revenue, gangbusters. People are buying sneakers in the middle of the pandemic because we got them working out in their house. We shifted our strategy entirely. So being able to pivot is one of the things I think Under Armour gave me, but I was able to deploy in a place like Nike and bring a modern mentality to a team of folks who were ready. And so those two experiences, you know, I

think about top chapters. I mean, those two are the top two. And then people will say, well, then why the heck did you leave? Why would you move to tech? That may be a question of coming. So I would preempt it to say there's only one industry and one company that I ever had on my vision board, not Nike. And that's Google. You create narratives. We sometimes create narratives that are unnecessary. One of the narratives I create in my mind is I've been in apparel, to your point, manufacturing, retail for years. Tech is the polar opposite. It's too late. Too late for me to go learn a new language, learn a new space. So I'm going to take tech off my board. And Google came calling. And that was the second hardest decision I've ever made, leaving my family to go to this place. That is you think about the impact tech makes on the world. I used to think maybe a little naive as a longtime athlete that sport has the highest impact in the world possible. But I'd argue Google may have a higher power of impact, higher power worldview And the ability to shift what's possible for every human around the world. And so, when I resigned at Nike with my team of whatever on a Zoom call, half live, half Zoom, I was in tears thinking about leaving there. But it was for my personal growth and the ability to see what I'm capable of. I had to take the leap.

Matt: It reminds me of a similar story. My former Chief Customer Officer, Sophia Hernandez, who she was like family and she still is, TikTok came calling in the middle of the pandemic and she called me in tears. This was her opportunity and she did it and now she sits on our board, but it was a similar thing where you have to put aside your passion for something in a business for what you think is best for you and what your journey and what your calling is. And it's not always black and white and the decision sometimes isn't always clear, but you have to follow your instinct and it sounds like that's what you did.

Adrienne: When you least expect it is when you have to make those decisions. So I couldn't agree more. And I'm glad she's on your board. That's the best way to do it

Matt: It is the best way to do it. So what was the biggest surprise when you joined Google about the culture and the way they did business versus maybe your expectations when you were joining there?

Adrienne: It's a great question. I think the first thing is that the speed that Google moves is uncanny. I try to explain this to folks in my old industry and they're like, yay, we get it, we get it. I was like, no, no, no, no, you don't get it. Like software doesn't have a launch date. And when you think about where I come from, there's a gate, there's spring, there's back to school, there's a footwear drop.

Matt: Planograms, all that.

Adrienne: Yeah, all the things. You have a month's window to actually develop and launch a thing. We have patent holding geniuses in our building who may come up with a unique iteration to a technology, A bit of software we already have or something entirely new. And we don't have the luxury to wait. And so the level of speed and the intellectual stamina in this organization, like flat out smarts and curiosity are next level. I knew the intelligence and the thoughtfulness was there in meeting Lorraine and Nick, but I didn't realize the speed. And so then I didn't realize how you must underpin speed with operations, some level of rigor or it's flat out madness. And so how I've been able to bring a little rigor from my past life into this beautiful speed is starting to help us shape how we want to go to market inside of platforms and ecosystems. But also what I learned inside of Google, I wish I had in my past lives, like collaboration at the next level, right? You're in a Google doc, you're in a deck and you're building it together. You're seeing comments from teammates in real

time. You're updating it to make it better at every second. There's no finish line, literally. And so the ability to do all of that and have your mind in different spaces at once, you could be in a very serious conversation and then pivot to a presentation or a, by the way, docs, white papers are as powerful as decks. I come from a life of beautiful decks with maybe like one word on it and beautiful imagery and you would just sell whatever you're selling in the room. Here the content is king and queen. And so a white paper is just as good as a deck. It's what information you're trying to deliver in the room and you will be pushed to make sure that you're really thinking through every nuance at pace. I have never been so challenged to really step my game up at every moment. And it has been wonderful. I mean, it is invigorating the way folks move here. And I think the last thing I'd say, and this is again, my own bias I had in my mind about tech and one of the reasons why I was like, ah, it's too late, I'm not going. I had a perception in my mind, I know a few tech folks from a few other companies. I didn't have a lot of Googlers in my Rolodex. I always thought tech was a little bit of a boys club, maybe a bit hardcore, meaning not friendly. And I was like, no, I don't really want that world. You know, a little bit of that happens in sport. I've done it, I don't want to break down another wall. I met the Googlers and I was like, well, they are wonderful. What on earth is the real passion for humanity, for everyone in the room having a voice? There are people that have built and invented things like Android in a room with someone who just got out of Undergrad and everybody has a table. Everybody can have a point of view. Your voice is valued. I did not see that coming. It has been the most pleasant surprise and the ability for me to sit with some of the strongest product makers in the world, and give them my perspective from a consumer first standpoint, help them think about that art and the science has shifted how we think about the world and adding that value quite immediately, I didn't expect and I'm proud of. And I'm proud that I have partners and colleagues presenting to Sundar, you know, And he's asking, well, what do you think? It's game-changing. And I think having experience in a space like this is once in a lifetime. And happening this far in my career didn't see coming, but I'm glad it did.

Matt: Yeah, absolutely. So can you talk a little bit about your role and the specific things that you're focused on at Google? You mentioned earlier, you work on some of the more challenger-oriented brands. So can you unpack that in terms of where you're spending your focus right now?

Adrienne: Yeah, so platforms and ecosystems is the title that no one knows what it means. And so if I lay out all of Google, we're set up in product areas, massive verticals, probably Fortune 50 is each vertical in any other organization. So you have what you will know well in our first party products like Pixel, Nest, Fitbit, Hardware, And that is a team we partner closely with because we are the operating systems, the brains across all of these things. You have your Search and Apps Teams, everything you know and love, Gmail, Duo, Meets, all of the apps and maps, all the things that we rely on and the core of the company in Google Search. You then have B2B with Cloud, which we all know. And then we have, of course, YouTube, which I think is part of the Search organization, but these all separate as vertical entities. And then we are platforms and ecosystems is the powering system that actually feeds across all. So I have every Operating System in Chrome and in Android. And then we've got some powering technologies that are up and coming, like Auto, GTV, Chromebooks, Education Developer. We partner with all the developers that are powering every app that you see in the world. So it's a pretty massive remit. But if you think About the products I'm most focused on, Chrome Browser, Chromebooks, Android, the Operating System, they are Challenger Brands. Android actually services more consumers than our biggest competitor in Apple around the world. If you leave the US, you'll see more Android devices and you'll see iPhones by a mile. Yet when it comes brand to brand, we are the underdog. And so thinking about how to position our Operating System, because when you're going to move from an iPhone into a Pixel or an iPhone into a Samsung device, in which we partner with both, by the way, because we're the

Operating System, you better love Android. You better believe that this Operating System can support you like the old one did. So we're thinking about all new ways to tell our ecosystem story, to ease the pressures and pain that someone may feel in switching from iPhone over to our side of the fence. And it's fun because we're the underdog. It's fun because you can tell unique stories. You could poke at the giant. You could figure out ways to find new differentiated reasons for being. And by the way, we are owned by Google. And so we can partner with our apps team to get the best experiences. We can drop innovations first in our world. Those are things we hadn't necessarily thought about talking about consumer facing before. What I love about Google also is its humble nature. We have so many innovations inside that we just deliver open-source to the world because that's our value system. That's the way that we operate. But also, we don't always talk about them. And sometimes as a marketer, I'm like, hey, look at that thing over there. We need to talk about that. And so bringing those conversations to the room for these sets of Challenger Brand has been a ton of fun. But it's a different challenge because you do have to think differently. You can't think about how big we are. You actually have to think about what we mean in the consumer and culture space, which is actually quite different.

Matt: Yeah. And I would imagine in order for you to be effective in your role with some of these Challenger Products and Challenger Brands, it's imperative for you to constantly examine the consumer, have your finger on the pulse of some of the trends and their changes that are happening. How are you able to do so? And with that, what are some of the fastest growing consumer trends you have your eye on right now here in 2023?

Adrienne: What we're not short on inside of our walls is data. Quant, qual, proprietary, data comes at you at every corner. How you sift through that data to get to the nuggets of truth, I think is the real challenge. I've been in past places where we didn't have enough data. It was all gut. Here we have more data than one could ask for. So analysis paralysis can happen if you aren't careful. And so what I push my team on are, yes, we know all of the insights of what the consumer did with our products yesterday back, but the goal is to start to be future-forward. What do we want them to do with our products in the future? And so part of that is understanding cultural insights, what's happening in the marketplace outside of tech. We don't just have to talk About tech to understand where the consumer's headed. Really getting into the mindset of Gen Z And the millennial, how they actually look and think about the world from a psychographic perspective, not always about the products they're choosing. And then what helps us tap into edge-cases. The language of tech is quite different to where I come from. We talk about use-cases. We talk about the user. It's the human, it's the person. And what are things that we could do to unlock better experiences for them? Our goal is to be helpful. How can we be the most helpful organization, company, products in that consumer's wallet, purse, life? And so I focus more on culture insights blended with product insights to get us there. So just one quick example, And I'll talk about what we're all thinking about every second of the day, which is Gen. AI. You knew that was coming?

Matt: Yeah.

Adrienne: But prior to that, we have a campaign, an initiative going on the Android side called Get the Message. And Get the Message was a campaign we developed, lo-fi with intention, social first, earned and owned to start to educate Apple consumers About the green-blue bubble problem, right? If you have an Android device and you have a bestie that is an iPhone holder, the iPhone user's blaming you for a broken text chat, for bad images and video quality, for not being able to name the chat. It's always Android's fault. And the first thing I learned when I got here, and this was not on our docket of OKRs for the year, but the first thing I learned as an old Apple user, by the way,

before I got to Google was, holy smokes, it's not Android's fault. It's actually Apple's fault. They actually have not adopted a simple technology called RCS that would lower the walls and the barriers of communication, and it would make it seamless across the fence. And they're doing that to have a walled garden to keep you in their ecosystem, smart, but also not equitable. And so when we started to think About what that's leading to, bullying, the ability to feel like one kid is cooler than the other, all of the things that Gen Z and millennials are deeply against, that became a perfect pain point to push on. And so we created this campaign to educate and call out the problem. We would have never done that in our past. Also, we're very nice. We don't like to call out the things that make us uncomfortable. And I don't know if we were thinking about that cultural truth that we're dealing with, that we're up against when we're thinking about shameship. And so being able to bring that into the market, the kinds of things we can do if you have cultural insights tied to tech and product and data that you need from a consumer perspective. So that's how we're deploying insights and how we use them. I think we're all thinking about Gen AI for the future. And how that is going to impact the consumers that we serve today and the products that we deliver against. And this could be a podcast on its own.

Matt: Of course. Maybe we'll have you back for A second episode.

Adrienne: Undoubtedly. I think the exciting thing is Google, as always, is not unnecessarily trying to jump in without the right product and safety that we know we need. Again, I think I'm probably a little biased now. One of the most responsible companies I've ever worked for and within. And being able to take Gen AI and its pace that we're seeing in the market at our pace in order to deliver like what you saw at IO, which is responsible thinking about how to integrate Gen AI, ML, all of the things into the products that we're already delivering, Search, Android, et cetera, to elevate the experience. So I'm fascinated with what's happening with Gen AI on the outside, whether it's like designers are being born out of never designing a thing in their life and now they're going to runways and showing work all the way down to how we're thinking about it, which is not getting ahead of our skis, but actually thinking about what product helpfulness can we elevate inside of our house to give the consumer responsibly what we know they need or what they may not even know they need, which is always the fun part.

Matt: Yeah, it's going to be fascinating to see six, twelve months from now where we are because the rate of change is just mind-melding. Every day something new comes out. I've never experienced anything like this in my career. And I can't imagine what it must be like to be inside the walls of Google during this time. So shifting gears as we wrap up here, Adrienne. One thing I definitely wanted to ask you about was your ongoing passionate support of DEI. One thing we didn't touch on is that at Target you introduced Black-owned and Hair Care products. You launched the Women's Category Under Armour as we spoke of. So you've been a champion for the underrepresented for minority voices your entire career. How do you plan to take that with you moving forward? And why is that something that's so important to you?

Adrienne: So it's so important because I am them.

Matt: Yes.

Adrienne: And when I think about my journey, and by the way, going to a historically Black college was a choice. I could have played volleyball at a big school. I chose Howard because I wanted to have a moment where I could see myself left and right. When I got out of college and into the industry, cross industry, if you think about it, I went from auto to apparel to sport. I could count how

many minorities were in a room with me always on one hand. And so I realized the deficit that we were at in times that were supposed to be moderate and progressive. And I knew that I needed to start to be a champion of something new in how to think about the world of diversity and inclusion. And so that has always been a passion point. And up until this week where we had another issue where we had to do the right thing on behalf of our organization from a representation perspective, the partners we bring in inside of Google, the partners I've always worked with in past lives must be representative and why I do it. So the things that I do, first of all, are trying to set a bar for representation in every room that I'm in. And as I've grown in seniority, I've been able to be one of the decision makers that ensures the agencies we hire, the production people that do our work, the strategists that come to our table are as representative as the teams that we are trying to build in-house. And by the way, it's a journey for everyone. No one is there yet. And the ability to say that and then set audacious goals and push yourself until we get there is something that I think I will champion until I am done on this earth. And I think one of the reasons why I wanted to move to Google, and again, Lorraine's the one you really want to sit with. I mean, her perspective on the world and her impatience with getting there brings me joy personally. And Google, you think about spending in the agency space, our impact is outsized. And being able to deploy new ways of thinking And driving equitable representation without exception will move the industry faster. And so that's something I've taken very seriously, Lorraine, Nick take very seriously, And we are pushing. And I think if we're able to be the example, my old CEO at Nike, brilliant man named John Donahoe, when we were going through the pandemic and racial injustice, we had a small call of black Vice Presidents And he said, Nike must become and represent the world we want to see. Organizations can wait for the world to do the thing or they can be the example for the world to catch up. And that phrase that he said in that room has stuck with me because that's what I've been trying to do my whole career without having those words to express it. And Google is being what the world we need to see is or should be, right? We are a representation of that and at scale. So that is why I do it. This has to change. We talk about it a lot. You don't see the output that we need. I believe especially in our industry. And that's the work of the work. Diversity is in the work, not on the outside. And so being able to bring that passion to the room day-in and day-out is challenging, a big weight on my shoulders, but I would do it no other way.

Matt: This is awesome. Thank you for sharing that. And it's definitely inspiring. And I have no doubt you're going to continue to do so. So finally, I mean, Adrienne, you've had such an incredible career and just hearing your journey has been so inspiring to me and to our listeners. And I get the feeling you're just getting started. As you look back on your career and over the last 20 years, what can you point to that you think you've done well? The right decisions that you've made have put you in the position you are today so that maybe some of our younger listeners here at Speed of Culture can make the same types of decisions and end up where they want to be and follow whatever their passions might be.

Adrienne: Man oh man, that's a good question. By the way, these are none of the questions we talked about. So I am on my toes. I love it. I think a couple of things. The first is I am a team first oriented person. And I think that's because I wasn't an individual athlete, I was a volleyball player. So team sport is where I find my superpower of indestructibility. There's nothing we can't do if we do it together. And it's like this very sappy way of looking at the world, but it is what has gotten me to where I am today. Being able to build how our teams who put each other first and like believe the win is in the work, not in the outcome. If you get a can award, that's awesome. But the win, what we talk about, you know, my Chief of Staff now at Google was my old Chief of Staff at Under Armour. And we always talk about not winning a can for Michael Phelps in the Olympics. Do you remember that time? Do you remember when we did these landmark moments in the work that created these

crazy unlocks that showed us how to think about our work, our business, our brand, our athlete, our problem differently. And so my ability, I think, to bring teams together, this was at every level of my career, a team-like mentality against one problem And just little unlocks one day at a time. And inside of that, championing the idea of progress over perfection and being able to like offer grace through myself, vulnerability, I would have thought about this different or I think this is the right thing to do, but vulnerability at every step, at every level of my career, I think is something that I am proud to have had. And I think I have that because the old athlete and old underdog, you know, I was an underdog as an athlete. So I think that has just come with me in this journey. We had a situation with our team a week ago where it was just people putting in the work, people were exhausted and were there tears in the room? Sometimes, and that has happened across all of my different chapters. And if I see a person cry, am I crying? Definitely. And am I okay with that? Absolutely. Because if we can't be human, our teams never will be. And I think this generation more than any other expects that. So I think that's the intangible secret sauce. And then the other thing I'd say is being able to take smart risks that you know are backed with the right data, quant qual, again, culture and like the science of the data and putting it all out there, get the message of something. We had to present to our CEO a couple of times and everybody wasn't sure if it was what we should do. And if that would have failed, my boss would have taken the hit because they're amazing, but it would have been on me. And the ability to know in your heart and in your gut, you've done all the work, you have all the alignment. And if this thing fails, sometimes you gotta fail, by the way, brands have to fail. We've all been skewered on the brand side. It's what you do in those moments to come out together, but also the fact that you were brave enough to go in. And so I think the ability to take smart risks, but do it always as a team are those two things that I hold pretty dear.

Matt: Awesome. I mean, I think that's amazing advice and I love the notion of progress over perfection. And it sounds like you've also really followed your instinct at so many junctures of your career when opportunity calls. And I think it's going to be really, again, fascinating to see what's next in store for you. So I really want to thank you for joining us today, Adrienne. I know our listeners have a ton of value from this. On behalf of Suzy And the AdWeek team, thanks again to Adrienne Lofton, Vice President of Global Consumer Marketing at Google for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, review to Speed of Culture podcasts 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 A-Guest Creator Network. You can listen And subscribe to all AdWeek's 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.