

Lynn Teo Transcript

Lynn: I think for Gen Z, it's about how you make yourself relevant and helpful. So as they age up and enter different phases of their life, you become that default brand that they think of. That's where the holistic planning starts to kick in because you would have established by then a relationship with your financial advisor. So I think the beauty of it is Gen Z expects you to understand them and Gen Z doesn't want to be sold. Gen Z wants to be engaged.

Matt: So how do you engage them? 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 thrilled to be joined by Lynn Teo, the CMO at Northwestern Mutual. Lynn's responsible for the brand, the marketing, the research, the insights, the events, and everything in between for this \$34 billion revenue business. Lynn, it's so great to see you here at CES. Thanks so much for joining today.

Lynn: Well, thank you for having me, Matt.

Matt: Absolutely. So, Lynn, I was going through your background, and I saw that you started your career on the agency side.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: I spent many years running an agency myself, and I know that it is stressful, but you do learn a lot, and it brings a lot of benefits. When you look back at that part of your career, what are some of the takeaways that you have that you think helped prepare you for the role you have today?

Lynn: I have to say it helped me engage in transformation initiatives with no fear and no playbooks. Because I think when you're on the agency side, I would categorize consulting in that same vein if you are being a service business. That's right. You're given a very small amount of time to understand the business that you're trying to solve a problem for. And you have to add value as a consultant, as an agency person. You're brought in because they couldn't solve the problem in-house quickly enough. And so you've got to bring it. So I think that my agency has trained my ability to problem solve, to not be afraid of transformation, but to always look at the exciting side of innovating a solution. I think training your ability to change, training your ability to solve a problem and not just operate in the status quo. It's just an invaluable skill to have. So I think it served me well.

Matt: Yeah, and you also get to jump around from brand to brand. So while you have to kind of learn quickly, you also get the novelty of going from working on automotive to financial services to tech, and that can keep it fresh. And you can also take learnings from one industry and extract it from something else.

Lynn: Absolutely. And I would encourage any young upstart in marketing to consider formative years, five, or eight years in the consulting of any agency. To your point, I reflect on my 10 years. I've had an interesting career. Matt, it's been what I call the 5-10-10.

Matt: Okay.

Lynn: So five years at Bell Labs was the days before Google got big.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: And then 10 years consulting digital agencies, agencies, and then 10 client sides. So when I reflect on those 10 years in agencies, I tackle advertising, publishing, automotive, software, e-commerce, travel, banking, and dizzying.

Matt: Right.

Lynn: Right. And I think if you're a learner and you love understanding the business context, I just think that's a wonderful way for anyone who wants to be a CMO or a senior marketing leader to start their careers on the agency side.

Matt: So when you say go to the client side, I mean, it is interesting because you're on the other side of the table and it kind of flips. What's different about being a client that maybe you didn't expect when you joined and all of a sudden now you're on the side that's doing the spending that has the revenue responsibility, et cetera?

Lynn: Right.

Matt: How's that shift for you?

Lynn: Yep. Well, one of the biggest differences, I think, being on the client versus agency side is, you hold the budget.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: You have a P&L. You are accountable for providing results to your enterprise. For a lot of publicly traded companies, it's quarterly investor earnings reports. For me, in a private company, we still have to do our QBRs and our quarterly business reviews. So in many ways, you will know if your strategies are having the desired business impact. So in many ways, you can run, but you can't hide.

Matt: You can't hide anywhere.

Lynn: Because if it's not working, it's on you to pivot because if not, the enterprise is wasting resources.

Matt: You stuck with the consequences of your decision where, you know, if you run a campaign and you're on the agency side, yeah, maybe your agency loses the account, but presumably you'd work on another account.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: But whatever decisions you make, it's part of your role and you have to.

Lynn: That's the biggest difference. And I think you need to revel in it and you need to gain energy from it. Not be afraid of something that you thought was going to work, didn't work. But I think the key is how are you able to pivot. And I just think that being on the client side, you're also able to carry an understanding of how teams need to be motivated on the agency side, right? And I tell people that clients, deserve the agency you get because it all depends on how good of a client you are.

Matt: So true.

Lynn: Isn't it?

Matt: Well, ultimately, it's like if you expect people to spend late nights away from their family and put in that extra effort and think about your business when they're going for a run at the park. They need to like you and they need to feel respected. And throughout my side of the agency world, I've had clients that I'd run through a wall through because I wanted to make them proud.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: And I had other clients where it's like, they're not treating me well. They're not treating my people well. They're treating me like a vendor they don't respect. And like, I don't care about their business or their career.

Lynn: That's right. You don't care about them as humans.

Matt: Yeah, right. Because we're only, we're human beings.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: I say the same as to pitches. It's like, I'll never forget. I worked on a pitch. And I want to say it was like Memorial Day weekend. It was for a big technology client. And to this day, I've never found out if I won the pitch or not. And that was 15 years ago. And you put your heart and soul. They don't even tell you if you win or not. It's like, we're spending all these hours and you can't take 30 seconds or any. And I'll say, thanks so much. We're going in another direction. I just think ultimately you need to treat people with respect. It's a long road.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: And ultimately, you get from other people what you give to them.

Lynn: You said that so well, Matt. Thank you. And I feel sorry for you.

Matt: Oh, it's okay. I'm kind of over it.

Lynn: I know. But I think that for me, it affects me as just like a human.

Matt: Yeah, exactly.

Lynn: You don't do that to someone. When I think about the first RFP I ran, and this was two gigs ago, right? Not my current role. And I remember we had six agencies at the table. And we were very

thorough in assessing them. But, when we landed on our decision, Matt, we took the time to call every single one of them. And we said we are willing to give you a half-hour or 45-minute slot so that you and I can talk very candidly about what we liked and what we didn't. And I take that very seriously because I was on the other side and everything you said about late nights and you're pouring your heart and soul into it. I think that's the least we can do as clients. But I still remember one gentleman telling me, he's like, Lynn, no one that we've worked with has taken the time.

Matt: Yeah, it's true. It is unique that you guys do that.

Lynn: We did that. And even though we didn't pick them, that individual is in my very special circle of friends right now. And I think that for me.

Matt: It's a long road too.

Lynn: It's a long road.

Matt: Other opportunities will undoubtedly come up again in the future.

Lynn: That's exactly right. So I think that my being from an agency before, helps me appreciate what it takes to get the best work out of people. I see my agencies as extensions of my team. And in fact, I love it when they come together and they ideate. And you have to be that kind of leader that can bring the best out of people, regardless of where they are and where they work.

Matt: Right, right.

Lynn: So I think for me that's.

Matt: Interagency, collaboration.

Lynn: Exactly.

Matt: All of that.

Lynn: Exactly.

Matt: And if a new partner, a vendor, or an agency wants to do business with you on the client side.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: Obviously, I'm sure you don't like being cold-called and spammed and bugged. Who does?

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: What does work? I've always wanted to ask this of a CMO in terms of advice on some of our listeners and, you know, getting in front of somebody like you and how to add value and ultimately be able to do business with you.

Lynn: Great question. I think that you have to earn your right to open up a conversation with a CMO. So I've had multiple meet and greets at CES. Some of them are 15-minute quick pulse meet and greets.

Matt: To see who to work with?

Lynn: Yes. Or there is an agency that feels like they have something unique to offer. And I think you should always show up having done some homework about the client.

Matt: Because you're giving up your time. At a minimum, they should give something back for your time, which is doing some work, adding some value.

Lynn: Adding some value. And I see that as part and parcel of life.

Matt: So true.

Lynn: If you're going to get someone to spend time with you, you need to show that you're interested in that particular potential client. So that, for me, goes a long way. And having a point of view about what is working or what isn't working from any publicly facing asset would be a website.

Matt: A corporate earnings call. You name it.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: A quote that you gave in a podcast. Anything like that.

Lynn: Exactly. And it doesn't matter if it's not 100% accurate. But what that tells me is that there is critical thinking. There is some level of assessment that's been done. And it is a teaser in terms of telling me, how would this person work with me and my team.

Matt: And you can see the intellectual plane that they're playing at.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: How high level are they thinking? How tactical are they? How truly comprehensive do they understand your business and what you're trying to accomplish?

Lynn: Absolutely. And I always believe that everyone has something to offer. And so I can go into a conversation with someone who's fresh from college or someone who's an intern. And if they demonstrate this drive and hunger to do something for my brand and they put in the time, I will give them the time.

Matt: And if they have aptitude and they're good, then they have a shot.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: I get so many emails. People want to do business or even potential employees. And I would agree 99% of them. It's like you're copying, pasting my name for somebody else's and you didn't take any time.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: So it's like, you want me to take 15 minutes to grab coffee with you, but you couldn't even write an email or do any research, et cetera. And I think a lot of people lack patience or they just think I should be able to just will my way through. But you do have to earn it.

Lynn: You have to earn it.

Matt: That's how it kind of should be.

Lynn: I agree.

Matt: And I think it's a good message for, I think, people in business to understand that.

Lynn: Yeah.

Matt: But that also creates sort of like a meritocracy where if you can break through, then there's a lot of opportunity out there.

Lynn: That's exactly right. Because like I said, it is a taster of how this agency partner is going to work with you.

Matt: Yeah. Looking at your background, I also saw that you've worked all around the world, right?

Lynn: Yeah.

Matt: You've worked. So I envy. I never got the chance to work overseas and I love traveling. Tell me about that experience and how you've been able to adapt to local cultures.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: And local business norms in new markets as you've been able to.

Lynn: Yeah. Well, I think a lot of it is my background having grown up in a multicultural, multiracial, city, state-

Matt: Where did you grow up?

Lynn: I grew up in Singapore.

Matt: Okay.

Lynn: And I was there for my undergrad years. And so going up in a multicultural society, you understand how to flex. And you understand that not everyone views the world in the same way. And so I think that's been my default. In any situation I step into, I'm intellectually curious about what makes one category of people different than another. And so you kind of walk in with no preconceived notions. And maybe because I grew up in a multiracial country, I have an innate understanding of maybe social conventions or cultural differences in how people are with each other and preferences in communication. So I think that's been very helpful as I go into a new

market or a new geography and understand, all right, well, what would it take to connect? And I think the core of it is believing that research and insights serve as the basic kernel of either good advertising, or good marketing. And I would even say I've kind of coined the term un-marketings. I think the best marketing is when you're not trying to overtly market, but you're there to tell the person, I understand your situation. I understand you. And then I understand how my brand can add value to you.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah. What do you think about when you wake up in the morning and where does my brand fit in? How can I help? That's ultimately, the first way. And that shifts the, I think, paradigm for brands from advertising, which is pushing my unique selling proposition to content, which is adding value and trying to enter people's lives contextually where they feel like there's value-added and they will put your brand in the consideration set.

Lynn: That's right. It's either you entertain them. You educate them. You inform them.

Matt: That's exactly right.

Lynn: You tell them something that maybe they didn't know. So you're adding value.

Matt: Yeah, totally get it. So let's talk about your current role at Northwestern Mutual. So, very big company, a big financial services organization.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: If you met somebody at a cocktail hour and they said, what does your company do? How would you describe it?

Lynn: I would describe it as a 166-year-old financially sound financial services company that had its roots in insurance. But over the last 40 years or so, we've branched into full, holistic, integrated financial planning. Very few people know this, but the combination of those two things, we call them risk products and investment products, they work in tandem.

Matt: Insurance and wealth management.

Lynn: That's exactly right. And the beauty of Northwestern Mutual is we manufacture our risk products.

Matt: It's on the balance sheet?

Lynn: Not so much on the balance sheet, but how these products work to pay you dividends over time while still giving you the protection and coverage.

Matt: Like whole life insurance policies.

Lynn: That's right. We have a whole life, we have a term life, we have a disability, we have long-term care. Very few people know this, but the investments that you make, and maybe I shouldn't be using the term investment, but we pay dividends.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: And so at the time of when you have to make a claim, you are being given whatever your insured amount is. But what people don't know is that you have dividends that are paid out as the year's roll.

Matt: And you can borrow against the cash value as well.

Lynn: That's exactly right.

Matt: A lot of young people especially don't understand the value of whole life insurance as a sound investment product.

Lynn: As a mechanism. But it is a set of instruments and tools that work together. And when you think about the market volatility that we're seeing in the days when crypto was what everyone was running after.

Matt: Rising interest rates, that's so much, right?

Lynn: Rising interest rates, right? But the philosophy here is that at the time that you retire, you want to be able to protect your assets. You don't want to be subject to the fluctuations of the market. And that's the reason why the combination of those two things gives you the trajectory of growth, but also gives you the stability of what you need to live. So there was a whole science and a whole set of algorithms that go, along that calculation. And so that would be kind of a large part of my description, which is holistic financial planning. And the only way that products and services reach the consumer and our clients is through our financial advisors. They are, in my opinion,

Matt: They're on the front line.

Lynn: Front line. But they're also second to none. And when I think about the history of Northwestern Mutual, we have 8,000 financial advisors who truly, truly care about their clients' financial futures. You hear stories of people being wheeled into the emergency room and the call that they want to make is to their financial advisor.

Matt: To make sure their family is taken care of.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: And those relationships have been built over tens of years. Our average relationship with our advisors is 42 years. The company is 42 years old.

Matt: Wow.

Lynn: That's pretty phenomenal. So I think it's a sound, financially strong company that has stood the test of time. Let me get my facts straight. But since 1872, we have not failed to pay a dividend. Think about all the life events. Think about all the world events that have happened.

Matt: The global financial crisis. Everything.

Lynn: Everything. Wars. Depression. Very few companies can do that. And we're about the long-term. We're not the flash in the pan, that moment in time. We're about discipline, and long-term, holistic financial planning. Extremely proud to be holding up the brand for Northwestern Mutual.

Matt: We'll be right back with The Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors. So as CMO, obviously you want to steward the brand, but ultimately it is about driving the growth of the business, I would imagine.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: And a big part of that is acquiring new customers.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: Right? So the average customer has been with your company for over 40 years.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: The entry points aren't every day when a consumer would be ready to switch. Life insurance is something that, from my experience, is something that a lot of people push off.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: I don't need to do it today. And I don't know if your entry point is more on the wealth management side or the life insurance. But, how are you going about driving growth, and getting new customers? How are you translating that great story that you just talked about from Northwestern Mutual to the millennial generation and younger people who are starting on their financial journey?

Lynn: Fantastic question. And we are very focused on Gen Z as we think about how we start them young.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: Right. Because if you...

Matt: Best time to start.

Lynn: Best time.

Matt: Yeah. Power, compound interest. Yeah.

Lynn: Bingo.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: Right. And I tell people that like, don't make the mistake I made, which I realized much later in life. And there are all sorts of cultural reasons why we form belief systems about money and saving.

But I go back to the 20-somethings who are maybe in their first job, getting married, having a baby, having a first corporate job, first 401k.

Matt: Buying a home.

Lynn: Buying a home. And I see our brand, the Northwestern Mutual brand, as being there to provide guidance, to help the information that they need to be of service and to be helpful. And maybe their first product could be a disability product. Because when you're in your 20s, you've got an entire lifetime in front of you, you can't afford to be disabled. And maybe that first product is a disability product. But the way we connect to new clients is, I call it a segment approach. So what are the needs of this particular segment? These are folks who are getting established. We have people who are maybe further along. They might be the sandwich generation where they have parents and children. But I think for Gen Z, it's about how you make yourself relevant and helpful. So as they age up and enter different phases of their life, you become that default brand that they think of. That's where the holistic planning starts to kick in because you would have established by then a relationship with your financial advisor. So I think the beauty of it is Gen Z expects you to understand them. And Gen Z doesn't want to be sold. Gen Z wants to be engaged.

Matt: So how do you engage them?

Lynn: Well, if you look at our presence on TikTok, you'll see that we've done pretty well in terms of the financial services industry. We're one of the leading financial services presences on TikTok. If you look at Instagram, we're also very much attuned to what are some of the visual elements that serve that platform well. For this great realization, we launched a campaign on Pinterest, highly visual. You want to visualize your life, whether you love traveling, you're remodeling your kitchen. So you have to think very creatively about how you will intersect with someone's life.

Matt: Their passion points, things they care about, and where does your services fit in.

Lynn: That's exactly right. The other area that we're very hyper-focused on is partnerships. Because partnerships open up new avenues and new audiences.

Matt: And you get barred brand equity of other brands that might be more relevant in certain areas as well.

Lynn: That's right. So you may have heard about the Brewer Sponsorship. So we went into a Jersey Patch sponsorship with the Brewers. Milwaukee Brewers for two historical legacy brands based in Milwaukee. But the interesting thing is that that team is going to travel all over the US.

Matt: Of course.

Lynn: Spring training. So we see that as a wonderful way to extend presences in communities where we have financial advisors that will then maybe invite the clients to be part of our Brewers' experience. And so we think very creatively about partnerships. We think about what other affinities can we identify financial literacy is one of them. Women, Sustain Action for Racial Equity, SARE. That's a program that's been launched at Northwestern Mutual for about three-plus years. After the murder of George Floyd, we asked, what can we do to change the conversation around financial inequity in the US? And we went all in, right down to suppliers. Who are we using as our suppliers? Funding Black founders in our accelerator fund, right? So these are all things that I think

Gen Z finds highly resonant because there's a social impact component of it. So again, I think about these partnerships.

Matt: And you're trying to make the world a better place along the way.

Lynn: Absolutely. Most authentically, we firmly believe in it and Northwestern Mutual believes that we can change the conversation around the inequity of financial lives. When we think about Hispanics and how they've grown in their population in the US. We think about the LGBTQ community, right? So women, I mean, I think the key here is being highly attuned to communities that need us.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: And how can we serve?

Matt: And you can't go after Gen Z without having a diverse approach because by nature, a diverse demographic.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: Yeah. And when you talk about TikTok and your ability to engage, there was probably a lot of learning that you had to undertake to understand this is a new platform. It's a new environment.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: And TikTok specifically is a platform where you need to be able to fit into the form factor of how people seek out and consume content there.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: So what does a process like that look like in an institution like yours, which is it's been around a long time?

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: So you have to now all of a sudden adapt.

Lynn: That's right. And I give my social media team a ton of credit for this. They lean into what it takes for the post to show up on people's feeds. Because there is a science behind that, the algorithm. But what's the right content to put in front of people? So you have to entertain, but you also have to draw brand relevance, like, what it is that we do that we believe is going to be helpful. So little clips about what's helpful, little tips. We're also going to be doing much more work in the video, long-form video space as I look at YouTube.

Matt: Yeah, I'm hearing that a lot.

Lynn: Yes, because I think there is a hunger for that kind of information. And instead of someone, a non-financial services entity doling out that information, I think we have 8,000 plus financial advisors who have all the right licenses to be able to give out the right advice.

Matt: And you guys can underwrite it because you have presumably a business case on the back end of it if you can win more customers and build your business.

Lynn: That's right. We have a chief investment officer who has a point of view about our philosophy, and we have product experts in the entire array of our portfolio. So we feel really good about being at the forefront of that because you know the information has been vetted and it comes from us.

Matt: Absolutely. And how are you able to land the plane? So you're creating this engaging content, you're entertaining, you're educating people, but then I would imagine eventually you need to start to collect leads or do something. So you know down the line, you are paying it off.

Lynn: Absolutely. I tell my teams that the problem with advertising that stays at the emotional side of things is I said, you can emote till the cows come home. If the person's not going to take action, then we wouldn't have done our jobs.

Matt: Right. And if it's Coca-Cola and they're seeing it every day on the shelves, it's different because they're going food shopping every day, but yours is a little bit different.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: It's a little more intentional about.

Lynn: That's right. And for us to start the lead, it is when someone raises their hand and says, I would like to talk to a financial advisor. We have a matching algorithm on our site where it is informed by the demographic and the geographical area. So we have a little bit of a secret sauce behind that matching process.

Matt: You are matchmaking, you're creating a relationship, and that relationship's the work.

Lynn: That's right.

Matt: For that relationship to thrive and then be a 40-year customer one day.

Lynn: Exactly. And it might just start with a conversation.

Matt: Of course.

Lynn: That doesn't convert tomorrow. It doesn't convert in three months, but we have found that a year tends to be a pretty reasonable amount of time where you're kind of giving the person time and space to learn about us and build trust because it's a different kind of product. We're not selling sneakers. And we also say that in the space of insurance, you'll hear this often, that they'll say that our product is sold, not bought. But I say that because the selling process has to be so attuned to what that person needs. It can't be a hard push. It has to come from a deep understanding of that particular person, and his or her family structure. How many children do they have? How did they grow up? So the questions that our financial advisors ask are what we know as the differentiating factor. The questions you ask then lead to the answers that we provide. But are you asking the right questions? And I've always believed that Northwestern Mutual advisors are so well-trained. And so diligent in kind of their understanding of tax laws and all the instruments and vehicles that they know which questions to ask.

Matt: Yeah, totally makes sense. So we're at CES here in Las Vegas. It's all about innovation and what's next.

Lynn: Yes.

Matt: In your category in financial services, there's been just a slew of new fintech innovations.

Lynn: Absolutely. Yes.

Matt: Also on a wealth management front, there are companies like Wealthfront. There's platforms like Robinhood where people can invest on their own. How do you see these sorts of innovations? Gen Z does gravitate towards what's new. Is that an area that Northwestern Mutual is also looking at in terms of, obviously, you always want the human touch in a relationship? But is there an element of technology that can enter the fray that can also help you contemporize a little bit for this new generation?

Lynn: Oh. We have a client experience team. And that's where all of our engineering, and digital product tech teams operate out of. Our mobile app is something that we put a lot of time and investment into. We believe that that mobile app serves as the daily pulse. That daily engagement, whether it's what your spending patterns look like. I think that for us is a doorway. So for us-

Matt: And people expect that now.

Lynn: People expect it.

Matt: From their banking partners. Yeah.

Lynn: Absolutely. But what also, again, I go back to your value prop. Our value prop is integrated, holistic financial planning. So when you power up our apps, right, we're innovating in terms of how do you give people this full picture of the elements in that portfolio that they don't have? And if you start with a disability product, there would be a logical next adjacent product that you should be thinking of.

Matt: Complete the puzzle.

Lynn: Complete the puzzle. And if you think about the power of AI and the tons of data that we sit on top of, right? And again-

Matt: Knowing about the customer, where they are in the life cycle, what their needs are, you can feed them.

Lynn: Absolutely. And make no mistake. We protect our client's data with a tremendous sense of responsibility. But I think what you're able to then do is be able to aggregate some of those patterns that you're seeing. So we have a data science and analytics team, the DSA team, that feeds into a lot of the propensity to buy a second product. And if so, what that product is? And I think about marketing as showing up at the right moment in time.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: We're also thinking about innovations in the service space. So when someone calls and makes a claim, I mean, I think about that moment as being a moment of truth for the brand. Because you have to be empathetic. But you also have to follow through with your promises that you're going to pay this claim out. And I also think about how we can innovate in terms of what then happens to that claim. What's the best way to invest in that claim? Do you need all of it all at the same time? And so I think about the innovations we make in the services side of our business. It's fascinating.

Matt: Yeah, it's all connected.

Lynn: In an industry that is at the cutting edge, but also with the breadth and the longevity of having done this for 166 years.

Matt: Right, you don't want to be bleeding edge and lose the principles of what made the company great. And a lot of what remained true 50 years ago in terms of compound interest and saving and risk management still exists today.

Lynn: Exactly. And expertise. I put a lot of weight behind the expertise that we've gained over those 160-plus years. And so I believe that Northwestern Mutual has a unique value proposition of the human combined with the technology.

Matt: Yeah, awesome. So wrapping up here, Lynn, you have a lot of passion for what you're doing. You're in the right role at the right time, right now. When you look back at your career, what are some of the things that you think that you did right and decisions that you made along the way that sort of enabled you to one day end up in the CMO role, which is a place where many marketers want to end up in one day? It's such a prominent institution.

Lynn: You know what? I think what's propelled me is I've just been innately curious.

Matt: Yeah, you can tell.

Lynn: Curious.

Matt: I'm talking to you.

Lynn: I just want to learn. I don't take anything at face value. I don't believe that things stay static. And I lean in because I believe that that's the only way for a business to stay relevant.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: I lean in into insights. I lean into what people need. So perhaps it's that combination of me starting my career as a usability engineer and a human factors engineer. It says that right there in my title at Bell Labs. So I think I started with this very deep empathy for people and what people need. And then I kind of translated that into a career in digital products and digital native and being digital first, but never saying no to traditional media. And I think that's important because it's the synthesis of all of it that helps you be a good CMO. I tell people that I don't have statements that go, oh, if it's traditional, it's bad. If it's digital, it's good. No, I want to think about how I can orchestrate these things in the best possible way and bring systems thinking into my philosophy of marketing.

So that has served me well. And I'm hoping that listeners will maybe take away something here and say, continue being curious.

Matt: Absolutely. Is there a mantra that you would sum up the way you look at your career?

Lynn: I would say find a way to get there.

Matt: Yeah.

Lynn: And that's because I grew up in Singapore and I had big dreams about coming to New York. And figured out a way to get there, and I think that mantra has served me well. Whatever obstacles I might meet,

Matt: Perseverance,

Lynn: Perseverance, hard work, things don't come easy. But I believe that if you set your heart and your mind to it, you can achieve a lot.

Matt: Yeah, that's for sure. We're going to leave it at that. Thank you so much, Lynn. This has been awesome. I cannot wait for our listeners to hear about your journey and the great work you're doing at Northwestern Mutual. So thank you so much.

Lynn: Thank you for having me, Matt.

Matt: Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and the Adweek team, thanks again to Lynn Teo, CMO of Northwestern Mutual for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review The Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. We're here live at CES in Las Vegas, and we'll see everyone soon. Take care, everyone. Bye-bye. 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/podcasts. To find out more about Suzy, head to 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.