

Expert Interview I with Erica Martinez SVP Strategist

Including | thoughts on not being the smartest person in the room, continuous learning, and connecting ideas.

>> *Erica Martinez* guest curated *Strands* on October 27, 2022. [Read it here.](#)

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

There's a family story that says that my parents realized I could read when I looked out of a taxi window when I was around 18 months old, pointed at a street sign, and read "Madison Avenue." So I guess it's no surprise I'm in advertising? But really, it's been a journey. I did copywriting, marketing, worked at a dotcom start up, moved into custom publishing, then did trend consulting, brand valuation, and finally made it to ad agency-land.

What excites you most about what you do?

Connecting people. To each other. To ideas.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

It scares me when young strategists say that they want to be the smartest person in the room. First, it's not a competition. Second, there is always something that you can learn something from. I want to help make everyone else smarter. That's how I approach work and how I approach leadership. I also embrace the fact that I'm really corny.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?

Raising two kids.

But many years ago, when the iPad was first launched, I had a client that wanted the agency to build an app for them. We had 6 weeks. It took us 8. But it worked. We



had to integrate so many disciplines and imagine what could be possible. And we did.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

Since I work in healthcare, there is a lot of focus right now on health equity. The challenge is mainly helping brand/product managers differentiate between what they can really own, and what needs to come from the corporate level. There are unquestionably huge disparities in health care and services, but this is a societal challenge, not a "brand" challenge.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

Boundless curiosity sometimes makes it hard to find balance, but in other ways makes it easier. Things I'm doing for work can feed other interests, and other interests can feed work. I always make time for reading, and that is a great way for me to disconnect. I definitely get anxious if I see that I have unread emails/messages, so I do make sure to manage my inboxes.

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

I read a lot of newsletters. I also read non-US news sources to get other perspectives.



As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

When it comes to work (or really anything), it's better to be running TO something than FROM something. I don't remember where I stole this from - and I can't always be true to it - but it's really great advice.