

Expert Interview I with Margaret Rimsky Richards, Founder, Playable™
Clothing; Global Head of Marketing, C16 Biosciences
Including | thoughts on finding what you are looking for while building
something new.

>> Margaret guest curated Strands on November 24th 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?

By day, I run marketing for a biotech startup that's developed Palmless™ -- a sustainable palm oil alternative. It's a dream job. But my side hustle is Playable, a kids' clothing brand. We make interactive clothes for interactive kids.

In 2020 (yes, the same year I was zoom-schooling my then- 6 and 4 year olds and the sky was falling!), I had been in advertising for nearly 20 years, and while I had partnered with creatives and clients to drive towards great ideas, I was looking for 1) more creative ownership and 2) more purpose-driven work. Starting Playable and the job search were two concurrent paths towards that – plans A and B. I didn't plan on doing both, but here I am! But I found what I was looking for in both: passion, purpose, creativity, no shortage of challenges, and something I'm proud to show my kids.

What excites you most about what you do?

It's exciting to get to build something new. To start to fill in details, collaborate with people who bring different perspectives, and create. There's been a moment with both Playable and Palmless when they have started to feel real – when people could suddenly see and understand the vision and intent, and the executions matched the ideas in my head.

With Playable, I had been sketching for ages, making samples out of H&M sweatshirts, roving the Garment District and collecting zippers and patches and



materials. My background was in brand planning, so I could put the words on a page of what it was supposed to look like. But there was a magic moment when Denise Zurilgen, a Creative Director I had worked with, agreed to work with me and transition Playable from a great concept to a brand I'm incredibly proud of. That was a magical day: seeing her get it so completely. There were no rounds, no revisions – we went from brief to vis ID in one meeting, and she's been an invaluable partner ever since. She makes the sun shine and brings the rainbows.

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

I set a vision, but I'm always interrogating it, and I believe in experts. I seek a lot of feedback and input from people who know their craft. The logo I liked for Playable was not as strong as the logo I ultimately chose. I trusted the seasoned designers I asked to weigh in, and I went with their recommendation. Same with Palmless actually. I asked an expert typographer to review different options and he helped steer me towards a different choice than what I was instinctively drawn to.

Working in advertising for nearly two decades trained me well for understanding different roles and strengths and making room for them all to blend, mindful that it doesn't just become a committee but that each person is representing and acting on their relative strengths. Roles are so important.

Ironically, a start-up mindset is the opposite of that, where people are regularly stretching beyond their roles. But deferring to relative expertise has also been a helpful mentality in developing Palmless, both for internal collaboration and external partnerships.

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

Being able to feel the clothes I've made, seeing kids wearing them and loving them, having parents call me up asking me about the clothes my kid was wearing in school



and where could they buy them – that’s been enormously rewarding. I’ve loved being able to involve and co-create with my kids along the way and seeing the pride in their faces when they tell their friends about what we’ve made together.

But honestly? Palmless is tied with that feeling and we are only just getting started. Palmless™ is so rewarding because it has the potential to drive real, meaningful change at scale. I’m looking forward to the day in the future when I pick up a jar of Nutella and see the Made with Palmless™ mark – signifying that we’ve made a dent in deforestation, biodiversity loss, and abusive labor practices.

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?

Diversity is not a nice to have or a goal – it is essential to business and creativity, at all levels of an organization. I try to listen more than I talk.

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?

Family, work, and Playable are definitely all in tension. Time is finite, and the demands of each are infinite. For me it’s important to know with unwavering clarity which is #1 -- to say that often, choose it loudly and visibly, and to try to stick with that prioritization 80% of the time.

Being present for my kids and husband are the most important thing to me, and I make sure those needs are met first. That has meant saying no to my boss, a slower timeline for Playable, and often not “leaning in.” I’m proud of those choices.



I definitely don't always get the balance right. Especially when I'm not getting it right, I try to have an open dialogue with my kids about it and explain to them clearly that they are my priority and the best part of my day. I want them to see the nuance and trade-offs but never to be confused that they are #1. They do give me feedback when the balance starts to shift and feel off, and that's a helpful moment to reset.

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

Ugh, I have a pretty junky media diet. I get a lot of my news from social media. And from my mom – avid reader, meticulous curator.

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?

Slow down. Don't respond. Shut off. Take your time to form thoughts and sit with information. There's never any real hurry, in the way you perceive it. There's always time for a pause. – Denise Zurilgen, Playable Creative Director