



Gaylene Anderson

Director, Global Transactions & Contracts
Management

Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

When opportunity (literally) knocks, answer the door

Gaylene Anderson's successful career in technology transfer began with a knock on her front door.

As a young mother living in Hawaii, Anderson was exploring full-time career options that leveraged her biology degree, graduate school in public health, and experience in medical marketing, sales, and business development. She just happened to live

"IT WAS HERE THAT I REALLY HONED MY NEGOTIATION SKILLS AND HAD TO WORK FAST DOING A LOT OF DEALS. I HAD A GREAT TIME DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PIONEERS IN THE POTATO, WHEAT, SUGAR BEET, AND BEEF INDUSTRY."

next door to the Director of the Tech Transfer Office at the University of Hawaii, who stepped up to mentor her in a new licensing career.

"He said to me, 'you'd be great. You have the right background, and I'll teach you everything you need to know,'" says Anderson. "And the rest is history."

After seven years with increasingly more responsibility, Anderson wanted to expand her licensing knowledge at another

institution with strong agricultural programs (rounding out her life science experience). The University of Idaho offered an opportunity to grow in the plant licensing field and manage a unique alliance program between Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. At this time, the agriculture business was like the Wild West; new licensing programs were being developed for novel seed varieties, and growers all over the country were being introduced to new ways of doing business. "It was here that I really honed my negotiation skills and had to work fast doing a lot of deals," says Anderson. "I had a great time developing relationships with pioneers in the potato, wheat, sugar beet, and beef industry." She also picked up an MBA along the way.

Four years later her mentor called again. Now at the University of Notre Dame and director of the technology transfer office, he was creating a first-of-its-kind alliance and commercialization program connecting an academic institution with a big hospital unrelated to the university—the Cleveland Clinic. This new program combined Anderson's current licensing experience with her previous business development role at a large hospital. Anderson visited, was "wowed and impressed," and made the move. As the senior innovations officer for the program, she traveled between the two institutions, helping startup companies while looking for traditional licensing deals and high-level research opportunities.

One of the deals she struck was with pharmaceutical developer Boehringer Ingelheim (BI). She stayed in touch with them "because you always hope you're going to do more deals with a good partner," she explains. But when BI asked her to come

work for them, she didn't immediately believe she was the right match; her background was in biology, not chemistry. The recruiter persisted. "We have 50,000 people with that background. I need somebody who knows what you know about universities and how to get deals done."

At the time, Anderson was the only member of BI's business development and licensing team who came from a background in academia; the others began as scientists or worked for other pharmaceutical companies. However, her diverse

"You never know; the person on the other side of the table might want to hire you later, or you might want to hire them someday."

background has proven useful at BI. "It's helpful to talk to academic colleagues around the world and give them advice on how they should think about industry-academic contracts or relationships," she says.

The idea that industry "works you to death," is a myth, asserts Anderson. She enjoys the team culture at BI and access to legal expertise to support her work. She also enjoys gaining a deep knowledge of one industry and learning the business of drug development. Her paid time off is comparable to the academic world, and there is a lot of flexibility in how she works. Even before the pandemic, Anderson was free to work from home. "The attitude is, 'we don't care how you get your job done, you just have to get it done,'" she says.


Industry, says Anderson, has more respect for academia than many people realize; 35 to 50% of BI's R&D pipeline is anchored in external engagement, so successful partnerships are valued. "I was surprised when I first came to pharma, sitting in meetings and listening to the scientists and the attorneys talk about academia. It was with so much respect and care because they wanted to make sure that their partners were happy, and everything was going okay."

Anderson's advice to academics considering a future move to industry:

- **Network, network, network.** Attend conferences, get to know people, and be ready to give something back. "When you do a good job, things circle back," says Anderson.
- **Treat every professional interaction like a job interview.** "You never know; the person on the other side of the table might want to hire you later, or you might want to hire them someday."
- **Fill in experience gaps.** A candidate with a PhD, MBA, and experience at NIH might not qualify for Anderson's position. They would also need to a strong deal sheet to show actual negotiation skills. Be strategic and get the experience you need.

Even after seven years at the University of Hawaii and her progress to senior technology licensing officer, Anderson says she would not have been ready for the job she has now. "It took me five years to realize how much I didn't know," she says.

"Sometimes people want to rush this, but it's hard stuff. You can't overstep the experience in growing your network, building a deal, seeing different scenarios, and getting to work on different types of teams and different types of technologies."

As a happy turnabout, Anderson recently helped hire her mentor to work with her at BI. He was ready for a change, has family lived near BI's U.S. headquarters, and he heard Anderson speak highly about the company. "Four years ago when I left the Cleveland Clinic, my mentor said, 'next time, I'll come work for you.' The business of licensing and executing technology collaborations is all about relationships. My 20-year story proves it." 



Anderson with the life-size Wonder Woman cut-out in her office.