

Seizing the Right Opportunities

An interview with Angela Narag, BBH



Angela Narag manages the Krakow location of the BBH Finance Technology Management (FTM) team responsible for management and oversight of the Finance systems product portfolio. FTM team provides product development and project management leadership, which includes requirements gathering and design analysis, test planning and implementation execution, adherence to BBH SDLC guidelines, and support continued investment in the Finance system infrastructure and controls of Finance products.

Was there a source of inspiration for your decision to pursue a career in financial services?

I view professional development as an evolving process. As a young adult, I could not envision a clear career path due to my diverse interests. I believe that by trying various things, I found the career I was meant to have in financial services at Brown Brothers Harriman. BBH is one of the most reputable and innovative firms in the industry and has provided me with many different opportunities over the years.

What were the key factors that led you to choose a career at BBH?

When I first attended university, I had considered several pursuits, ranging from medicine to the fashion industry. After much trial and error, I earned a Bachelor of Science in International Trade and Marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York with plans to become a buyer for a fashion house. However, at that time, the global economy was on shaky ground in the aftermath of the 911 attacks. A friend recommended BBH and I accepted a job in the Operations area and I have now been here for 17 years. Over that time, opportunities have continued to present themselves, including my current assignment leading a team in Krakow, which evolved from a two-year development assignment program offered by BBH several years ago. Though not a field I had originally intended to pursue, it was an excellent decision.

Looking back at my education and career, what I realize now is that, despite not having a set plan, I was able to recognize a good opportunity where I would have the chance to work hard and be rewarded with professional and personal growth, while being surrounded by good, smart people. Sometimes it is life's "accidents" that end up being our best decisions.

Who has been the role model in your life?

My mother is a wonderful role model who has worked very hard her entire life and instilled in me the value of a strong work ethic. I hope that I provide the same inspiration for my BBH colleagues and others in my life.

As someone who is very focused on hard work and quality, how do you inspire your team to do the same?

Though it's not a conscious decision, I like to believe that I lead by example. Working hard is second nature to me and I believe I have surrounded myself with a team that is receptive to that idea, sees the effort I put in and models that same behavior. I find great satisfaction in a job well done and my hope is that my teammates find that as well.

Is it hard to build a career and remain authentic?

At BBH, employees are encouraged to bring their whole selves to work, so I never feel like I can't be true to who I am. That said, you inevitably grow and develop over the course of a nearly two-decade career. In my leadership role, for example, I have learned to be more vocal, assertive, and confident – not qualities that come naturally to me. I often seek and accept new challenges that take me out of my comfort zone for that reason. Being able to have that self-awareness of where I could be stronger and asking for those assignments that will grow those skills is an important part of the BBH culture.

You have been chosen as one of BBH's Diversity & Inclusion ambassadors. Why do you think that is?

I believe my life experiences as a woman and an immigrant, combined with my professional career as a manager, give me a unique perspective and different vantage point when problem solving. At BBH, we embrace diversity and nurture a culture that believes the best solutions arise by getting different ideas from many sources. Being a champion of that collaborative philosophy in life and in business is second nature to me.

"Emotional intelligence" is something we hear a lot about these days. How do you feel it plays a role in how you manage your team?

There is a certain level of maturity and emotional intelligence one must have to be a good manager. I have an open communication policy with my team and hold regular conversations with them that help us learn from each other. When I do, I try to demonstrate patience, compassion and empathy for the challenges facing the team individually and collectively. I enjoy my role as a mentor and find it deeply gratifying when we work together to solve a problem. As a manager, there is nothing better than setting up my team for success in their work.

You said that you like seeing your team members succeed. How do you define success?

Early in life, I think many people tend to measure success with possessions – houses, cars, clothes, money. As I have matured professionally and personally, I now define success in terms of satisfaction – enjoying my work, knowing that I did my best; and the satisfaction of helping my team achieve their goals.

You have spent 17 years at BBH -- your entire professional career. What has made you stay?

Aside from BBH's reputation in the industry as one of the best at what it does, the Firm has consistently provided me with opportunities to learn and grow in my career. When I expressed an interest in an ex-pat assignment, they were very accommodating and during my time in Krakow, I have continued to broaden my expertise and developed my management skills. For everything from talent acquisition to decision-making, differing backgrounds and perspectives not only matter, but are viewed as critical to the Firm's success. That trend and mindset are important to me.

Do you see any barriers for women who wish to advance to senior leadership levels?

What was once an industry dominated by men is changing. While there is more work to do, at BBH, the number of women in management and senior management roles has never been higher. In my career at BBH, I have always felt that decisions about my career were solely based on merit and ability and never on gender. And opportunities keep presenting themselves. It's really up to us to raise our hands and take them.