

Leading with Bold Talent

MARCH 15, 2018

Soni Basi brings years of experience infusing organizational cultures with the right mix of talent to drive a company's success

Driving growth by improving the culture of a company is an industry-disrupting exercise—and Soni Basi, now vice president of global talent at Allergan, has a lot of experience doing just that. She has spent the bulk of her career defining the process of connecting culture to corporate success. Over the past seventeen years, she's counseled dozens of corporate leaders on how to improve their bottom line by improving their employee engagement strategies. What she's learned along the way now makes her one of Allergan's most valuable assets.

While studying psychology at the University of Central Florida, Basi was intrigued by the emerging science of industrial psychology, that is, applying psychological principles to business practices. "How people interact is a significant part of how companies function," Basi says. "On a macro level, I wanted to understand how the culture of an enterprise furthers its business goals and, following that, how talent contributes to that metric." She eventually earned a PhD in social psychology with a focus on aligning people with organizational performance from Bowling Green State University.

Basi began her career as a consultant at International Survey Research in Chicago, which is now a part of Willis Towers Watson, and helped many companies—such as manufacturers, large and complex retail banks, and pharmaceutical companies—achieve higher performance through improving the links in their talent processes, culture, and strategy. When some corporations remained mired in old-style methods that failed to embrace the full value of their workforce, she saw an opportunity.

She recognized and witnessed the importance of cultural leadership to corporate success, especially in today's hyper-competitive global marketplace.



(<https://americanhealthcareleader.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Allergan.jpg>).

Soni Basi, Allergan

"Leadership sets the tone of the culture, allowing workers to embrace and adopt it authentically," she says. "Those that were aware of the macro-shifts in the workforce and were able to make even micro-shifts to their culture had notable success. Creating a culture that reflects the business strategy is critical. For example, if you want to compete on innovation, you have to create a culture of risk-taking. This starts with who you attract, how you develop them, how you reward your talent, and the decisions leaders make daily. When you get it right, the whole organization breathes in a way to support the strategy."

After leaving International Survey Research, Basi spent three years as the director of global learning and development for Schering-Plough where, among other projects, she worked to create a corporate university, led cultural integration during two mergers, and was responsible for the behavioral competency model that linked the talent in a thirty-three thousand-employee workforce to the company's total rewards strategy.

She spent the next six years at The Estée Lauder Companies, most recently as vice president of global learning and talent development. During her tenure, she continued her work to standardize and globalize the talent management processes for the company's more than thirty brands and forty-four thousand employees. Working for a company that had a significant millennial population and was on the cutting edge of creativity, digital marketing, and the shifting omnichannel landscape gave Basi an opportunity to introduce programs that appealed to the next generation of the workforce, leading from a digital-first approach and mind-set.

As much as she loved what she was doing, the option to move to Allergan was too intriguing to pass up. The company's forward-leaning, entrepreneurial, and start-up attitude promised her yet another opportunity to knit her talent-development skills into innovative corporate practices—this time, in the biopharmaceutical sector. And she appreciated the corporation's mission to always do the right thing for customers and patients, which has been apparent in how CEO Brent Saunders and other leaders at the company have taken a stand on topics that others have shied away from, such as the social contract with patients. It was unique, she says, to find leaders who were bold and took on the tough issues.

Allergan is one of the world's largest biopharmaceutical companies with more than eighteen thousand employees across seven therapeutic areas. What attracted Basi, however, was its Bold for Life philosophy. Bold for Life empowers employees through four key elements: build bridges, power ideas, act fast, and drive results. Basi was brought in to help the company execute its strategy through its focus on attracting, developing, and engaging its exceptional talent.

Since day one, she's been impressed with its culture and leadership. "Our leaders support our talent across the board, giving teams the authority to make decisions without unnecessary bureaucratic burdens," she says. "The focus on doing the right thing is embodied in our social contract with patients and our CEO's willingness to speak out about important issues, such as the need for a diverse workforce and inappropriate use of medical aesthetic treatments in teenagers."

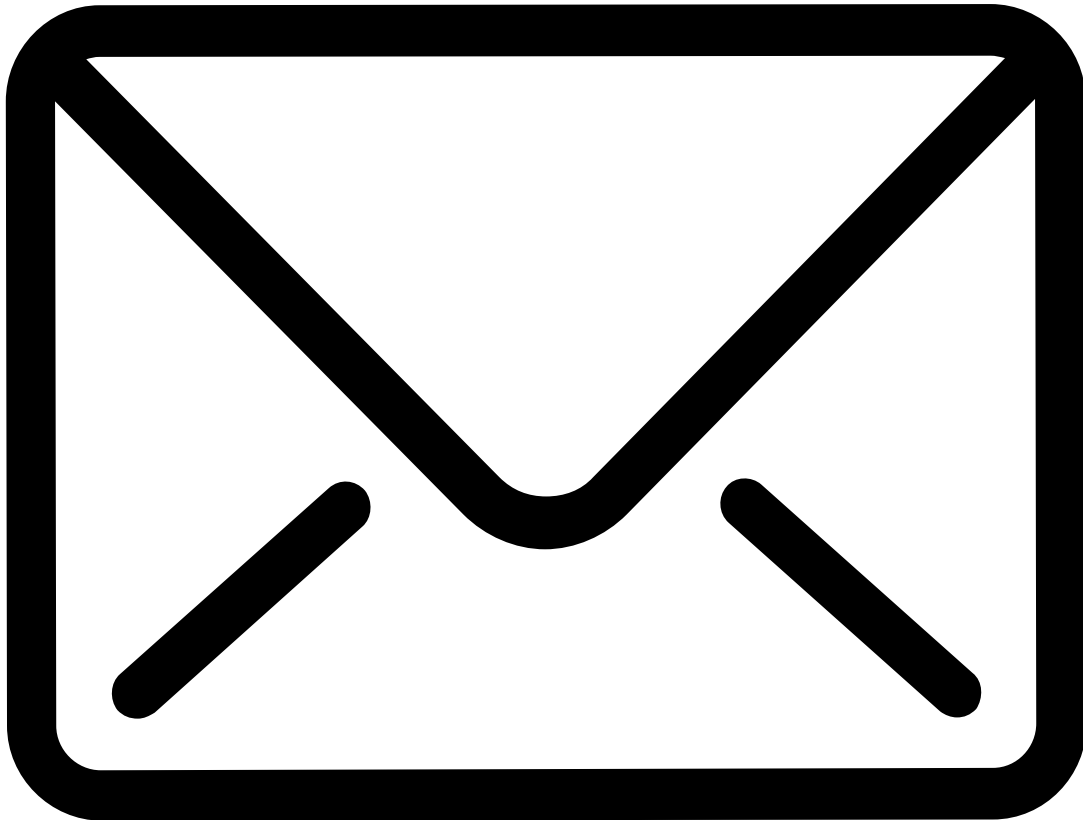
And that tone set at the top has trickled through the company. "The talent that we seek at Allergan is equally bold, courageous, entrepreneurial, and committed to doing the right thing," Basi says. (<https://americanhealthcareleader.com/>)

"Additionally, the company is focused on tomorrow by supporting initiatives empowering young minds to turn to science and medicine, such as our commitment to women in STEM programs. Our talent processes—from hiring, developing, and engaging—are being updated to reflect our Bold for Life culture. This makes it an even more exciting time to work at Allergan, and personally, I think I have the best job at the company."

More than anything, Basi enjoys hearing how her work influences the lives of her coworkers and the patients the company serves. "I love knowing that my work has made a difference in people's lives," she says. "That it makes a difference is the truly rewarding part of doing great things at Allergan."

Photo: Jeff Weiner

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