

Career Insight From Prophet Senior Partner Scott Davis

By William Arruda

This article is part of a series of interviews with top marketing executives who offer you insights to help further your career: You will learn what makes these executives successful and what they value most in those who work for them.

The following is based on a transcript of a conversation between William Arruda, MarketingProfs Senior Contributor, and Scott Davis, Senior Partner at branding consultancy Prophet. Davis is also the author of two widely acclaimed books on branding, *Brand Asset Management* and—*with Michael Dunn, Prophet President and CEO—Building the Brand-Driven Business*. This transcript has been edited for clarity and readability. The interview is also available in audio on the MarketingProfs site for Annual Premium members.

William Arruda: Tell us about the journey you took over 15 years to become a Senior Partner at Prophet.

Scott Davis: I always knew I was going to be in marketing. I grew up in a family with origins in marketing and sales, and I knew that was my destiny. I also knew that to be credible in any field, I would have to learn from the best. So that's why working at Procter & Gamble early in my career provided the key foundation for learning basic marketing skills. Then I went to Kellogg in 1989 to get my MBA in marketing. Earning my degree, coupled with my previous experience, was fundamental to my success.

I could have gone back into industry, but I went down the consulting path because it was important

to me to get as diverse an array of experiences as possible—looking at a number of different problems across different categories and industries, with different leaders would continue to add to my arsenal.

I had assumed around year 10 that I would make a choice: go back into industry with all that good knowledge or stay on the consulting track. And around 1994, I started to discover the topic of brand. It was really under-leveraged in the field—it wasn't talked about a lot and was misunderstood. So it was back in 1994 that I started on the journey through a very simple dialogue with 10 executives and the state of brand within their respective companies.

I parlayed that into a study which led into a series of articles, and then from there led into keynoting several conferences. That started to open up the door to various projects around the topic of brand in the mid to late '90s. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy—understanding the topic and writing and speaking about it. I was fortunate to meet many brand leaders and had the opportunity to work on multiple high-profile brand cases that provided the fodder for my first book, *Brand Asset Management*. The book explores what brand really means within an organization, and how it's truly an asset—next to your people, it's the most important asset that you have.

Next, I co-authored another book, called *Building the Brand-Driven Business*. It discusses how every single

employee needs to understand the brand promise as well as understand their role in bringing it to life if it is to have any external credibility.

So it started early on with a focus knowing I wanted to be in marketing, but also knowing I wanted to have a niche that I could call my own—one that was interesting to me, was untapped, and that eventually I could build credibility in.

WA: How can marketers decide how best to grow their career?

SD: For me, it was the idea of having diversity across categories, industries, and executives. Those who work at Procter & Gamble for a number of years actually get that, because there's a lot of movement within the organization and a lot of exposure to some of the best marketing lines in the world. But I knew that for where I wanted to go, consumer packaged goods was going to be a little too limiting for me. I needed to get exposure to other industries such as services, B2B, and industrial sectors.

Consultants who can tap into line experience are very credible in front of clients, because they can tap into their own experience. For a client to hear that you sat in their chair at one point and you wore their shoes at one point and had a P&L at one point gives you a lot of credibility and a lot of room to have broader, more strategic discussions.

The question you have to ask is, "Do you want to learn about other industries through consulting exclusively, or do you want to have that combo of real practical experience first?" It's an individual choice; the climb

to credibility is a little steeper if you are a lifelong consultant.

WA: What makes you give a résumé more than a 10-second look?

SD: At Prophet we are looking for a combination of a few things. First, it's again this idea of operating experience and understanding the types of roles that somebody has played in other companies before—and, more importantly, the responsibilities and the decisions that they were in charge of making at the end of the day. I have to understand what they were accountable for.

Next, do they have a combination of line experience and consulting experience? We don't always have the luxury of providing a six-month training program prior to a consultant's first project. Oftentimes, new candidates—especially for smaller boutique firms like ours—have to be ready to jump on a project almost on day one. So the other area we are looking for is client/project readiness and how well we think this person will show up on day one of an assignment.

WA: What can a candidate do during an interview to impress you?

SD: First of all, I look for a personal connection, or six degrees of separation. Candidates should definitely use their contacts, because when somebody in your organization has worked closely with a candidate, that always helps.

Second, I want to know how much candidates have studied our firm. I can't tell you the number of