

Yolanda Courtney Lyle '01 Chief of Staff to the CEO of Pfizer. **Pay it Forward** She is a member of the Jackie Robinson Foundation's (JRF) Northeast Scholar Advisory Committee, and an alumna of JRF. **Healthy Respect** In 2017, the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association honored her with a Luminary Award.



The Right Place at the Right Time

Pfizer VP meets the moment with corporate smarts.

BY MAURA KING SCULLY

> “BC Law was the only school I applied to,” recalls Yolanda Courtney Lyle ’01, vice president of executive operations and NYHQ site lead for pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. “It had a strong reputation for excellence, and I was eager to return home to Boston.”

Lyle, a Brookline native, excelled in high school, but the expense of a private college seemed out of reach. Fortunately, a scholarship from the Jackie Robinson Foundation, together with a Boston College Tip O’Neill Scholarship, paved her way to entering Boston College as a sociology major and set the stage for an exciting career in corporate

America. After graduating, she spent four years working, including a year volunteering with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, a network of national service programs, in an effort to give back and positively impact the community.

After graduating law school, Lyle practiced law for three years at Nutter in Boston, and then moved to New York City. Leveraging her experience as a clinical study coordinator at Brigham & Women’s Hospital, she joined Pfizer in 2004 as an attorney sup-

porting their global research and development operations.

At Pfizer, Lyle has learned a lot about what it takes to navigate and sustain a successful career in corporate America, emphasizing the importance of being agile, flexible, and receptive to making transitions. “Early on in my career, I had a tendency to resist change,” recalls Lyle. “I was comfortable in my role. I was good at what I did, and I saw no reason to rock the boat. However, it ultimately occurred to me that if I continued to decline new opportunities, there

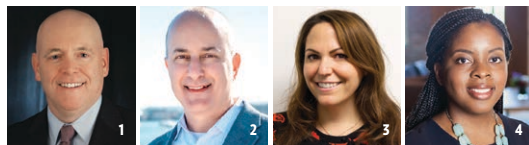
would come a day when people would stop asking.”

With that in mind, in 2010, Lyle joined Pfizer’s compliance division. It was a period of transition and growth for compliance at Pfizer which, as Lyle saw it, presented great opportunity—and she was right. She went on to lead a team responsible for ensuring the overall effectiveness of Pfizer’s compliance program through the development and implementation of comprehensive risk management strategies for the company’s research and development, medical, and manufacturing operations.

In June of this year, she was appointed to her current position as Chief of Staff to the CEO. “When I left BC Law, I never could have imagined that my career would lead me to this point. I’m thrilled to join the Office of the CEO, and am excited for the important work ahead,” she says.

“I’ve always been proud of what we at do at Pfizer. But now, as we work to develop a Covid-19 vaccine and identify therapies to treat this deadly virus,” she explains, “I’m more inspired and more grateful than ever to work for an organization so committed to public health and to being a part of the solution to combat this evolving crisis.”

Lyle, who is a member of the Executive Leadership Council, a network of the nation’s most influential African American executives, is often asked for career advice. Drawing from her own experiences, she says: “What I’ve learned over time is not to underestimate the importance of taking risks. Growth often happens when we step outside of our comfort zone.”



Paths to Success

Alumni find career satisfaction in diverse places.

1. Hugh McCrory '86

Life Skills As senior vice president/chief counsel for MetLife Investment Management, he advises a global investment management team that specializes in fixed income, real estate, agriculture, and private equity investments. **One for All** “We strive to build a culture that is very supportive and collaborative, within our team and with our outside firms.” **Diversify** For those who want to transition from firms to in-house, he recommends covering the bases. “There can be pressure to specialize early, but do what you can to expand your range. And, step forward for special projects—your willingness will be viewed positively, and you’ll broaden your experience. Pro bono can be a great way

to do that, too—you’ll likely get additional training and you’ll be giving back.”

2. Aaron Toffler '92

Earth Day Every Day As director of policy for Boston Harbor Now, he’s helping shape the region’s response to climate change to ensure that the Boston waterfront is accessible, equitable, and resilient. **Well Schooled** Previously, he was a faculty member at Lasell University, where he directed the Environmental Studies Program and served as dean of the School of Communication and the Arts. **Walk the Land** “As a third-year law student, I was lucky to be able to teach environmental law to Boston College undergraduates as part of Professor Zyg Plater’s first cohort of law student teachers.

From that moment, I was hooked on teaching. I have been fortunate to be able to combine my passions for most of my career.”

3. Angela Arroyo '09

Food for Thought She spent eight years as a legal officer with the World Food Programme in Rome. “I was able to do rigorous legal work, including litigation within a context that was literally working to make the world a better place.” **Global Adaptations** In 2018, she moved on to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a legal specialist. Based in New York, she serves in the human resources/employment law section, providing guidance to staff in 177 countries. **The Big Picture** “When giving advice, it’s necessary to take into consideration the national context, whether it be a pandemic or civil war, a natural disaster, or merely the cultural

differences that shape the context of that office.”

4. Carla Reeves '10

Labor of Love As a senior associate at Goulston & Storrs in Boston, she focuses primarily on employment litigation and counseling. “My employment law practice is dynamic and engaging, and most of the matters I handle involve issues and fact patterns that are fascinating. No two days are the same.” **Giving Back** She’s a board member for the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association, a member of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association, and volunteers with the Women’s Bar Foundation’s Family Law Project for Domestic Abuse Survivors. **Advice** “Develop a network of mentors and sponsors, and work to foster meaningful relationships with them. As you advance in your career, pay it forward.” —MKS

MEET A MARVEL IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

Michael “Saph” Sapherstein '97 There’s no villain in sight, but that doesn’t mean Sapherstein is letting his guard down. As assistant chief counsel of Marvel Entertainment, Sapherstein is defending and advancing the explosive universe of digital super heroes. “Marvel video games and digital comic books, in particular, are growing exponentially. It’s incredibly exciting to wrestle with the legal issues involved,” he says.

Marrying his interests in law and technology was Sapherstein’s goal even before he enrolled at BC Law, where he co-founded the *Intellectual Property and Technology Forum*, a still-thriving interactive web-based law journal.

After law school, he worked at an

IP/tech-focused boutique law firm and then quickly moved in-house to a dot-com start-up. In 2001, he joined Major League Baseball Advanced Media as its second in-house counsel. “The Commissioner of Baseball convinced the MLB Club owners to consolidate their interactive and internet rights into one company,” he explains. “It proved to be a multi-billion-dollar success story.”

Looking for his own seventh-inning stretch, Sapherstein went to work for Marvel Entertainment in 2008. “I saw that Marvel had just hired its first head of digital, and I convinced him to hire me as Marvel’s first lawyer dedicated to digital,” recalls Sapherstein, who notes that just a year after he was hired, Marvel was acquired by the Walt Disney Company.

Sapherstein is a natural in a world of adventurers. “The law will never catch up to the pace of development in the digital space. There’s no uniform set of ‘digital’ laws; rather, a patchwork of laws that apply to issues such as data privacy, IP rights, and kid-targeted content,” he explains. “It’s always exciting.” —MKS

