Elba Cruz – Site Director, Haleon, Puerto Rico



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Elba Cruz, Site Director at Haleon Puerto Rico, shares how the Guayama facility has become a critical manufacturing hub for Haleon's global operations, driven by a skilled local workforce, robust technical capabilities, and strong community pride in Puerto Rican manufacturing. Despite challenges like energy costs and talent retention, Cruz highlights the site's strategic importance, its focus on operational excellence and innovation, and her personal commitment to creating sustainable growth and opportunities for future generations on the island.

Could you introduce yourself to our readers and outline Haleon Puerto Rico's strategic position within the company's global operations?

My career spans over 25 years in pharmaceutical manufacturing, beginning as an intern and progressing through diverse roles across multiple functional areas. As an industrial engineer, I initially worked within my educational speciality before expanding into various pharmaceutical industry positions—from supervisor to process engineer, manager, and ultimately site director.

My experience encompasses operations both in Puerto Rico and the mainland United States, providing comprehensive exposure to different operational environments and regulatory frameworks. These diverse experiences have strengthened my leadership capabilities and strategic perspective, preparing me for the complexities of managing large-scale manufacturing operations.

The pharmaceutical industry continues evolving regarding gender representation in senior leadership roles. While we have made progress, women leading facilities of this scale remain

relatively uncommon. I view this as both a responsibility and an opportunity to demonstrate effective leadership whilst mentoring the next generation of industry professionals.

It is in this context that I am especially proud to lead Haleon's Puerto Rico operations and contribute to its continued success. Our facility is situated in Guayama, in the southern region of the island, where we have maintained a robust manufacturing presence for over 35 years. This site has evolved through successive ownership under Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, Pfizer, GSK, and now Haleon, each iteration strengthening our operational capabilities and market position.

We serve as the principal manufacturing hub for a widely used over-the-counter pain relief medication, with our products distributed throughout the United States and beyond. Additionally, we support the largest volume of nutritional supplements and dietary products within Haleon's portfolio. From a strategic perspective, our facility represents one of the most important and mission-critical sites within Haleon's global manufacturing network. The Puerto Rico operation contributes significantly to our North American revenues, underscoring its fundamental importance to our regional commercial success.

What distinguishes your facility in terms of production capabilities, product portfolio, and operational scale within Haleon's global footprint?

Our site possesses one of the largest manufacturing capacities within Haleon's global network, which enables us to serve as a cornerstone of the company's production strategy. Our comprehensive product portfolio encompasses some of the industry's most recognisable consumer healthcare brands, spanning pain relief, digestive health, multivitamins, and immune support. This diversified manufacturing capability allows us to leverage economies of scale whilst maintaining the operational flexibility necessary to respond to dynamic market demands across multiple therapeutic categories.

From your perspective, what enduring strategic advantages make Puerto Rico a critical location for Haleon's global manufacturing operations?

Puerto Rico offers compelling strategic advantages that continue to reinforce our competitive position. Firstly, we benefit from exceptional human capital. The island has cultivated a sophisticated pharmaceutical manufacturing ecosystem over several decades, which has enabled us to develop deep technical capabilities and operational expertise. We possess a highly skilled

workforce that excels in complex manufacturing and regulatory compliance environments.

From an economic standpoint, Puerto Rico provides significant advantages through federal incentives and tax benefits that create favourable cost structures compared to mainland United States operations and other international markets. These two factors—our exceptional talent base and advantageous economic framework—represent the primary competitive drivers that sustain our strategic position.#

What does “Made in Puerto Rico” signify for you personally and for the Haleon brand?

“Made in Puerto Rico” represents a strategic brand positioning that we actively leverage, even though our products carry “Made in USA” labelling for regulatory compliance. We implement comprehensive promotional strategies that celebrate the Puerto Rican manufacturing heritage whilst building pride amongst our workforce and the broader community.

This approach serves multiple strategic purposes: it reinforces employee engagement and local community support, whilst simultaneously enhancing our brand recognition amongst Puerto Rican consumers both domestically and in diaspora communities. We view this as an effective strategy for market differentiation and brand loyalty development.

Puerto Rico has historically been a premier manufacturing destination, though some companies have departed, whilst the medtech sector continues expanding. What initiatives are necessary to restore Puerto Rico as a primary destination for global manufacturing investment?

We face well-documented structural challenges that require immediate strategic attention. The most critical issue is our energy infrastructure and associated costs. Currently, there is insufficient clarity regarding comprehensive solutions for our energy challenges. We continue to receive fragmented information about utility restructuring and deficit management, but we lack a coherent, actionable strategic plan.

Without addressing these fundamental infrastructure issues, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain pharmaceutical sector growth on the island. Energy reliability and cost competitiveness are essential prerequisites for attracting new manufacturing investment and supporting existing operations’ expansion plans.

How has Haleon addressed energy security challenges?

Given our operational requirements and the broader energy challenges you mentioned, we have implemented comprehensive energy resilience strategies. Beyond the regional energy concerns, we must also account for Caribbean hurricane risks, which create additional operational vulnerabilities.

We have established independent power generation capabilities, including our own generation facilities and solar farm infrastructure. This redundant energy system ensures operational continuity during emergencies or major weather events. Such investments are essential for maintaining the uninterrupted manufacturing operations that our global supply chain depends upon.

Regarding human capital, while Puerto Rico possesses exceptional talent, many professionals migrate to the mainland. How is Haleon addressing this talent retention challenge?

This represents a shared industry challenge that requires a proactive strategic response. Historically, limited local opportunities drove talented graduates to seek careers on the mainland. However, as our operations expand, we are creating new pathways for career development and professional growth.

Our current expansion phase presents an opportune moment to attract both emerging talent from our educational pipeline and experienced professionals seeking to return to the island. We are actively collaborating with educational institutions and professional organisations to build robust talent acquisition and retention programmes.

What opportunities exist for transferring best practices and innovative approaches from Puerto Rico to Haleon’s global operations?

We have successfully developed and exported numerous operational excellence initiatives across our global network. Particularly, we have concentrated on Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma methodologies, implementing continuous improvement frameworks that have delivered significant operational efficiencies.

Our focus encompasses manufacturing line efficiency optimisation, packaging line simplification, and documentation streamlining. Most importantly, we have successfully engaged our workforce in generating innovative solutions and process improvements. These initiatives are shared through our monthly global best practices forums, enabling knowledge transfer and replication across other facilities worldwide.

What are Haleon Puerto Rico's primary goals and aspirations for the next five years?

Our vision is to establish ourselves as Haleon's global centre of excellence for manufacturing operations. We continue with our transformation journey to achieve world-class process efficiency, maintain competitive cost structures, and cultivate the industry's most talented workforce whilst ensuring the highest safety standards.

We have developed a comprehensive five-year strategic framework encompassing several key domains. Our people-first approach prioritises talent development and capability building. Our operational excellence pillar focuses on transforming critical capabilities across technology, equipment, processes, and human capital. Through this integrated approach, we are confident in achieving our vision of manufacturing excellence.

From a personal perspective, what motivates your daily leadership approach?

My primary motivation centres on the 800+ employees and their families who depend on our success. I bear responsibility for their livelihoods and professional development. Each day, I focus on building sustainable operations that will provide opportunities for future generations.

I want my daughter to have the opportunity to build her career here. I want successive generations to find meaningful, challenging work in Puerto Rico. This long-term perspective drives my commitment to operational excellence and strategic growth.

What would be your final message for our global readers?

Puerto Rico currently presents exceptional opportunities despite acknowledged challenges. We are strategically positioned to attract manufacturing investments. While tariff considerations present complexities regarding raw material sourcing, they simultaneously create competitive advantages

for domestic manufacturing capabilities.

We possess exceptional talent, robust industrial infrastructure, and strategic frameworks that can support product transfers and company growth initiatives. The fundamentals for sustained growth and competitiveness remain strong.

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