Iliette Frontera – VP Operations, Boston Scientific Puerto Rico

You have to be extremely agile and you always need to be ready to grow

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Iliette Frontera, VP Operations of Boston Scientific in Puerto Rico, shares the significance of the Dorado site within the group's global supply chain, her four priorities to ensure sustainable growth, lessons learned from Hurricane Maria, and the importance of gender equality.

Boston Scientific has been manufacturing in Puerto Rico since 1989 and celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. Could you start by introducing your manufacturing footprint on the island?

We are currently sitting in our manufacturing facility, a 182,000 square foot building in Dorado, in a land of 24 acres, with about 69,000 square feet dedicated to manufacturing with a line of sight to further expansion that will enable us to grow in the future. We run a 24/7 operation, though not all our manufacturing lines run at that schedule.

We have over 1,000 employees, many of whom are senior associates. We take a lot of pride in our gender ratio across all departments, even in executive positions. As a matter of fact, the number of female managers exceeds that of male ones.

The business of Boston Scientific Corporation (BSC) is divided into seven divisions and Dorado Manufacturing supports two of them: Cardiac Rhythm Management (CRM) and Neuromodulation

(NMD). For both, we produce 100% of the leads distributed worldwide. Leads are cables connected to pacemakers or defibrillators used to deliver cardiac therapy for conditions such as bradycardia, heart failure, and sudden cardiac arrest (tachycardia). For NMD they are used to deliver therapy for conditions such as chronic pain via a subcutaneous implant and deep brain stimulation to treat symptoms ranging from essential tremors to Parkinson's disease. Leads on the cardiac rhythm side are considered a combination product as they have a drug component.

Boston Scientific is growing rapidly with an 8 percent growth rate in 2018. How has production output evolved to sustain this growth?

You have to be extremely agile and you always need to be ready to grow. There are four big elements that embody our "value proposition".

The first one is *talent*. We are largely involved in attracting, engaging and developing our talent to sustain our pipeline and growth. At any moment, we have 30 new people ready to join us. Interestingly, we have a team of product builders at our sites in Georgia and California currently supporting acquisitions and rapid growth even though these sites are not directly manufacturing rhythm management or neuromodulation products. That is a testament to the calibre of our talent. We also work directly with academia to ensure the success of the next generation of talent.

The second element is *technology and capabilities.* We invest in key technologies such as lasers to strengthen our core capabilities, while exploring new applications and future technologies on the same space. We also support transfer of products, such as the most recent transfer of the neuromodulation products and the transfer of a new product called S-ICD electrode, part of the *S–ICD* System, the world's first and only subcutaneous implantable defibrillator that provides protection from sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) while leaving the heart and vasculature untouched. New products are being co-developed with other R&D organizations across the world.

The third element is *space and infrastructure*. We need sustainable operations with the infrastructure to grow and plan new activities.

The fourth element is *return on investment*. We have to remain competitive and ensure making business in Puerto Rico is attractive and there is a return on investment

In relation to your fourth element, during the Puerto Rico Renaissance Convention & Annual Assembly 2019 organized by the PRMA, Susan Lisa, Vice President of Investor Relations Boston Scientific, gave a talk entitled "A Reality Check: Indicators to Remain Competitive in a Global Manufacturing Landscape". In your opinion, what is needed for Puerto Rico to remain competitive?

We need to continue delivering new products while sustaining the quality of work. Puerto Rico's history of working in a regulatory environment ensures an intrinsic GMP cultural element. When considering other emerging markets, the lack of experience and skilled workforce may lead to knowledge gaps.

We also need to sustain the talent pipeline and evolve to the company's needs. In response to this, we work alongside academic curriculums to ensure the integration of new skills including software and automation.

We also need to hope for a trustworthy and stable government environment. The Puerto Rican government has invested on laws and incentives that help sustain the success of the country and those should continue ensuring solid economic development on the island.

Boston Scientific manufactures products across 13 global sites in the US, Malaysia, Costa Rica, Ireland, and Puerto Rico. How do you rate Puerto Rico's importance within the group's global supply chain?

There are 15 core sites, including key distribution centres but in reality, our current manufacturing network is over 30 sites due to acquisitions made in the last two years. Among those sites, the Dorado site plays a key role in Boston Scientific as it is the only BSC location that manufactures leads for BSC's CRM and NMD businesses; we are considered the centre of excellence for the production of leads. We, therefore, support a big part of the revenue stream within these businesses.

One of the main risks for manufacturers in Puerto Rico is that the island is located on the hurricane alley. What lessons have you learned from Hurricane Maria?

We recognize natural phenomena's such as hurricanes will always be a threat. The island suffered devastating damage during Hurricane Maria. Because of the commitment of our workforce and the

site readiness and business continuity plans, the Dorado site was up and running to a certain extent in less than a week. However, if the country's infrastructure is demolished and the power is off, we as an island could fail to deliver. From Hurricane Maria, we learn the importance of approaching disasters as a collective entity, not only as a company, to ensure continuous services and product supply could materialize.

We did additional improvements and fine-tuning to business continuity elements after Hurricane Maria, and during the recent close call with Hurricane Dorian, our business continuity plan ran flawlessly.

Speaking about Maria, John (Jack) L. Sullivan, CSO of Boston Scientific, said that "our job is to keep the company safe, and that means providing for our people". How have taken care of your employees and their families?

I saw the commitment from Boston Scientific both live and from abroad. We truly lived our carding value. When Hurricane Maria struck, I was actually in Minnesota. I remember the company's corporate jet flew in twice per day, even when the airport was closed, bringing necessities ranging from water to baby formula. These pilots are now like family to us.

Boston Scientific opened a laundry service, temporary childcare services area and even a hair salon. We wanted families to feel like the Dorado site was their extended home. We also provided generators, fuel for cars, and medication for employees with chronic illnesses or diabetes. We also offered the option of non-taxable funds to employees to reconstruct their homes.

For the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria, a video was put together to share with everyone at Boston Scientific around the world to show how the site and our employees are doing and how we are stronger together. For us, employees come first.

Boston Scientific has set itself goals to increase diversity at the level of management and executives and has been recognized by Forbes and Bloomberg for its inclusion policies. For instance, Bloomberg recognized Boston Scientific for its inclusion in the Gender Equality Index in 2019. What would be your advice for young female engineers wishing to attain leadership roles in life science manufacturing?

It can be done. I encourage women to pursue STEM-related careers, whether in R&D, engineering, or manufacturing.

Women often feel the need to be reinforced; our brains are wired to second-guess ourselves. However, I encourage women to trust their gut and pursue opportunities even when they do not feel 100 percent ready. We all need to take opportunities such as scope increases, special assignments and projects even if it does not involve a change in the job title, because they will support our growth and enable future roles or opportunities.

Some might argue that companies are just trying to hit a number when it comes to diversity, but in reality, we are aiming for a competitive advantage in having a diverse workforce. You cannot succeed without the diversity of thought, experiences, and perspective that a diverse group can bring to the table.

How do you reach out to the community?

One of the venues we use to reach out to our community is through our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). We have five of them in the Dorado site including PRIDE (LGTB Community), Women's Network, HOLA (Hispanic Leadership), YPN (Young Professional network), and LEAD (Allies for disabilities). They all work closely with the STEM team in advancing science and engineering fields. ERGs coordinate efforts with the community and our employees and sponsor events such as sharing stories of success from a personal and professional standpoint, helping elderly homes and women's shelter, university programs, and social responsibility such as beach clean-up.

Everyone in BSC is empowered to be an ambassador. We often send our own employees as ambassadors to engage with students in university fairs and events coordinated within the industry in Puerto Rico. We aim to excite talent about the potential growth of the company, as well as their own.

More rewarding some of our employees are also our patients. When they talk about the company, they are a prime example of how their work helps save lives including their own.

What are your motivations as VP of operations in Boston Scientific?

As a VP of operations, I want to make sure we are leveraging our capabilities to enable the growth of Boston Scientific and of Puerto Rico. I want to continue supporting our world-class organization.

I absolutely love what I do. One of my personal mottos is: *do it with passion or don't at all*. You learn something new, you check and adjust and just keep going.

I need to "walk the talk" because there is always somebody looking and I am aware that there is a ripple effect to what a leader does ("A whisper at the top is a shout at the bottom") and I want to make sure I inspire and unleash my team's potential.

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