

IN 2020, NBCUNIVERSAL REORGANIZED ITS TELEVISION and streaming to create a more unified strategy across its platforms. A keystone of its new structure was naming Susan Rovner as Chairman, Entertainment Content, NBCUniversal Television and Streaming, where she leads creative strategy for original entertainment content across NBCU's broadcast, cable and streaming platforms. Those include NBC, Bravo, E!, Oxygen, Syfy, Universal Kids, USA and Peacock.

At the same time that Rovner was appointed, Frances Berwick was named NBCUniversal's Chairman of Entertainment Networks. Together, these moves signaled a deliberate emphasis on gender equality in leadership. As *Forbes* noted, "for the first time in NBC's nearly 100-year history, two women are at the network's helm."

We spoke with Rovner about her work overseeing content teams, which has included the Emmy-nominated "The Kelly Clarkson Show," the hit teen dramas, "Riverdale" and "Supergirl," and many others. Prior to joining NBCU, Rovner was President of Warner Bros. Television where, for more than

NBCUniversal's
SUSAN ROVNER
talks with
Brunswick's
MORGAN SNYDER
about building
diversity in
content and
leadership.

used against women—and it has been used against me in the past. I have never heard the word "ambitious" used against a man.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with being ambitious. What could be negative about wanting to succeed in your profession? I think it is important that women take back this word and own it. I am absolutely ambitious. I have always worked incredibly hard to succeed, and I'm proud of it. Advocate for yourself by letting your intentions and ambitions be known but always put in the work to get there.

Does your appointment to this position, as one of the two women in charge of content at NBC, feel historic to you? Does that distinction, in your mind, come with any obligation?

Having two women leading not only NBC but all of NBCUniversal's platforms is something I am incredibly proud of. It is definitely historic and important. I hope this glass ceiling is forever broken and the door is now open for many more women in the future. The obligation I feel is to be great at my job, but that has nothing to do with being the first woman in it.

The STORYTELLER

20 years, she was instrumental in the company's expansion into on-demand and streaming services, among other responsibilities. Before WBTV, Rovner was Executive Director, Movies for Television, at ABC.

In our interview, she talked about the role of equality and diversity in leadership and storytelling, the shows that she oversaw that meant the most to her, and about the desire "to learn something new every day" that defines her approach to the role of Chairman.

You've talked in interviews about the importance of making one's ambitions known. How can that be done without coming across as entitled? How do you think people can best advocate for themselves in the workforce?

There is nothing entitled with letting people know what your ultimate ambitions are. Entitled would be not putting in the work to get there—expecting that your ambitions will simply happen because you have voiced them. I often hear the word "ambitious"

Being great at my job is why I was hired and what my responsibility is to the company and to myself.

What excites you about the future of entertainment and television, and what concerns you?

With so many platforms and outlets for entertainment, we are able to tell so many distinct and different stories. It is an incredible creative moment in entertainment and television. That said, it means that each individual show is fighting to get viewers and to stand out in a very competitive environment. The biggest challenge is to tell audiences that our shows exist. We are all fighting for eyeballs and audiences. It is most painful when a fantastic show can't find the audience simply because of so many other choices offered to viewers.

What is one thing you still would like to learn on the job and how do you plan to do this?

I truly learn something new every day. Sometimes it is about the business. Sometimes it is in the creative process. Sometimes it is about dealing with



colleagues and navigating different situations. The moment I stop learning, it will be time to move on. Learning is part of the fun and challenge. It makes each day more interesting and allows me to continue to evolve.

Are shows like children, in that you love them all the same? Or are there one or two that mean the most to you, and if so which one and why?

I have a broad range of tastes. The truth is I love most television. I equally love watching “Watchmen,” “Big Bang Theory” and the “Housewives”! That said, yes, there are shows that mean more to me than others. The show “You” has a very long history and almost died a few times. I was so passionate about it and refused to let it go. After being developed and passed on at Showtime, and airing for a season at Lifetime and being canceled, I was able to convince Netflix to take it, where it has become a huge hit. I am very proud of that. I also am very proud of “Supergirl,” which was the first female-lead superhero show on TV since “Wonder Woman” in the 1970s. Two others

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MORGAN SNYDER is an intern at Brunswick’s Washington, DC office. She is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

I would mention are “Riverdale” and “Pushing Daisies.” I had been wanting to work with the writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa forever but he was never available. When I finally got a meeting with him, I knew his passion was Archie Comics where he was the Chief Creative Officer. I met him at the door of my office and said, “I know you want to do ‘Riverdale’; we are doing it! And it is going to be a huge hit and air on CW for many years to come!” Happy to say I was right! “Pushing Daisies” was one of the most unique ideas I have ever been a part of. That show was before its time. I simply love it and always will!

As a public figure, you have platforms and audiences that others do not have. What do you believe your role is in the world to create change?

I think as storytellers, it is imperative to tell everyone’s story. It is imperative that everything we do is inclusive and diverse—from our content, to our workforce, to embracing different point of views. Everyone has a story to tell and I am very lucky to say it is my job to help them tell it. ♦