

The Economic Club of New York

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Executive Vice President
Pfizer

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Webinar

Moderator: Reshma Saujani
Founder, Girls Who Code and Moms First

Introduction

President Barbara Van Allen

Good afternoon and welcome to the 710th meeting of The Economic Club of New York.

I'm Barbara Van Allen, President and CEO of the Club. The Economic Club of New York is recognized as the nation's leading nonpartisan forum for discussions on economic, social, and political issues. We've had more than 1,000 prominent guest speakers appearing before the Club over the last century and have a strong tradition of excellence, which continues up to today.

I want to extend a very warm welcome to students from the NYU Stern School of Business, George Washington University, and the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham, who are joining us virtually today, as well as some members of our largest-ever Class of 2023 Fellows – a select group of diverse, rising, next-gen business thought leaders.

Today, as part of our Author Series, I'm pleased to welcome our special guest, Sally Susman. Her new book, you may have already read, I know it's been out since March, *Breaking Through: Communicating to Open Minds, Move Hearts and Change the World*. Sally is the EVP and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer of Pfizer. She leads engagement with all the external stakeholders overseeing communications, corporate

responsibility, global policy, government relations, patient advocacy and investor relations. She also serves as the Vice Chair of The Pfizer Foundation.

Before joining Pfizer in 2007, Sally held several senior communications and government relation roles at The Estee Lauder Companies and American Express. Earlier in her career, she spent eight years on Capitol Hill focused on international trade issues and was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs in the Clinton Administration.

Currently, she's co-Chair of The International Rescue Committee, one of the world's largest humanitarian aid organizations, and on the board of UL Solutions, a global leader in applied safety science. In 2022, *Forbes* named Sally one of the World's Most Influential Chief Marketing Officers for Pfizer's efforts to combat vaccine misinformation and embrace communication channels.

Today's discussion will be in the form of a fireside chat, and we are delighted to have Club Trustee and Founder of Girls Who Code and Moms First, Reshma Saujani, doing the honors of moderating. As a reminder, the conversation is on the record and we do have media on the line. Time permitting, we'll take audience questions via the chat box. And Reshma, if you're ready, the mike is yours.

Conversation with Sally Susman

RESHMA SAUJANI: It's so great to be here. Thank you, Barbara, and thank you everybody at The Economic Club of New York. This is one of the special positions that I hold and it's been such an honor and a pleasure and a joy to be part of this organization.

And I am so excited to be with my friend, Sally. You know, Sally, I was thinking about this last night. I feel like you've been a part of every iteration of my life. I remember being in your office when I was running for Congress and asking, you know, for your advice and for your support. I remember, sort of our initial first conversations when I was launching Girls Who Code and we had our Girls Who Code programs at Pfizer. I remember our initial conversations as I launched Moms First and getting your thoughts about how do you get companies to start supporting childcare and paid leave.

So it's so great to see you and to see you, we were just talking about this, to see you thriving and putting your book, your baby, out into the world, and just really enjoying the process. I loved this book. As someone who, like thinks I'm a communications and marketing CMO, like I got so much out of it, and I learned so much, and I identified with so much of it. So I just, I'm excited that I can get into it.

Let's start with the first question. So, in your book, *Breaking Through*, you share some insights from your remarkable life and career, both personal and professional. From your experience in coming out to like your experience being at the top of an organization during a pandemic. And you've held several, several senior comms roles at multinational companies. Can you share a little bit about your journey and how you got to this place?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, of course, and I first must thank you, Reshma, for this session together and Barbara and the New York Economic Club. It is an enormous honor and joy for me to be a part of this conversation today. And I feel a bit like I'm preaching to the converted. You are such a breakthrough leader on so many fronts that you could have written the book as well. But I'm so thrilled I did and it's been a wonderful experience.

In terms of my aspirations and my motivations, when I was a kid I wanted to do good in the world. Show me a kid that doesn't, really. And I thought I might be in elected office or perhaps a journalist. These were the most noble careers I could think of. My passions and my work took me first to Capitol Hill. I also, as Barbara mentioned, spent a little time in the Clinton Administration but have made the most of my career in business because I have a theory, it's my operating theory that strong companies, and I've had the pleasure to work in three – American Express, Estee Lauder, Pfizer – three great New

York-headquartered companies, have real platforms for good in society. And it is a part of their mission to reward their shareholders, but to also delight their stakeholders. And so that is why I have made my life in business and spent more than the last 15 years at Pfizer.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So do you think, like throughout time we've had kind of a lot of ebbs and flows in how the world thinks about business. Are they good? Are they evil? Are they bad? Are they okay? Like how have you seen that narrative change? And, you know, what have you kind of learned about – from a messaging perspective – we're going to get into Covid and Pfizer and the vaccine about, you know, big pharma, right, and shifting the narrative there, but what have you seen just generally over the past few decades in our kind of love-hate relationship with business?

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes. Certainly I have seen the pendulum swing back and forth. There is a lot of cynicism and skepticism towards big business, a lot from young people. And I know you talk to young people a lot so maybe one day we'll dive into why that is. But as much as the pendulum swings, I still believe the overall progression is towards business being a force for good. You'll remember a couple of years back the Business Roundtable said it's not just about those shareholders, it's other important stakeholders. And then a lot of companies signed up, including Pfizer, to be a part of their new narrative for companies.

And then there's the woke/anti-woke debate that goes on about how companies should be in the world. And I feel it's very important that companies engage from their values, not from their politics. I don't believe companies are political creatures or institutions, but they do have deep values. Pfizer has four – Courage, Excellence, Equity, and Joy. And they're very much a part of how we work, what we talk about, and where we decide to weigh in on the public debate. So, yes, the pendulum is swinging back and forth, but overall I think this bends towards more active, more engaged companies.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I love the distinction between politics and values, because I think some people have over-corrected, like, oh, we're not talking about anything. And that's not the answer either. It's like, what do you believe in? What do you stand for? How do your employees actually connect to that? So, you know, you've been honing and perfecting your communication skills your whole life, right? And you say that communication is often mistaken as a soft skill when it is a rock-hard competency.

I was thinking about this as I gave the Smith commencement speech and it's gone viral. Four million people have watched it, four million people have watched a 16-minute speech. And, you know, I spent months practicing my delivery, sitting in this bedroom right here, walking back and forth, figuring the intonation of every line, like how it was going to hit. People often think, like when you give a speech or a talk, you write it and then you just deliver it. No. It is a rock-hard competency.

So tell me about that. Like when did you discover this and how have you, as you have prepared leaders, whether it's for an interview or whether it is for a big speech, how have you kind of drilled that in their brains, that this is – you can wink – that this is something that actually takes practice?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, I've studied leaders. I've worked for nine CEOs in my career as well as some Cabinet Secretaries and Senators. And they're all really smart. They're hardworking. They're driven. You know, you don't land in those positions by accident. You get there because you worked hard. But among all of them, a few of them, a precious few of them break through. By that I mean, they are deemed visionary. They make epic paradigm-shifting changes.

And those three that come immediately to my mind are Ken Chenault and his handling after 9/11, Leonard Lauder and the growing of his business from his mom's bathtub to a multi-billion-dollar company, and Albert Bourla, as his leadership brought a vaccine forward in record time. The three of them, along with other people that I cite in the book, they are the ones who knew that communications was as important to their success as finance, manufacturing, you know, any other discipline, and they prioritized it. And so that's why the central argument of my book is what you said, that if you want to change the world and open minds and move hearts, then you need to know that communications is a rock-hard competency and not dismiss it as an afterthought or a

soft skill.

But I do want to say a word about your commencement address because before we started live here, I came on and told you that I think it was the best commencement address of the season. I watched it. It had many of the principles that I advocate for. It was courageous. It was intentional. But the number one thing that you achieved in that is something I call pitch. And pitch is not the elevator pitch. It's not a cold call to a journalist. I try to think about pitch as something much deeper and more profound, more subtle and more nuanced. And it's a tone, it's a quality, it's a connection. And I'm not surprised that you rehearsed for months because all of that rehearsal paid a dividend in the moment with your clarity and your connection. It was just really beautiful. And if anyone hasn't watched it, I really encourage you to do so.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I love that idea of, like tone and pitch. And I do think preparation made me feel comfortable to just feel it, when you're in the moment, right? And it is about knowing your audience and like figuring out how we connect. I want to go back to 2020. Covid turned the world upside down. You write about how you're like in this bodega. All the food is missing. You're terrified. You're talking to your colleague who I think is in China, right? You feel that something bad is happening or about to happen, right? The world, there's disruption, there's chaos. We're in a divisive political environment. There's pretty much no public trust towards our healthcare system.

How do you navigate this environment? And the other thing I want to know is how do you navigate it as a person? Because you're a mom, right? You have someone, you're married to someone you love. You have a family. You have people you love. The world is literally, we do not know if it is the end of the world. And so you also have to navigate your own fear and your own feelings with what you need to do for the world. How do you do that?

SALLY SUSMAN: Great question. I love the way you phrased it, and I will chat about how we responded from a corporate perspective and then how I responded from a personal perspective. But let's just take a moment together here and go back to March of 2020. And I was really scared walking home in New York City and the shelves are thinning out. I can hear the thrum of the refrigerated trucks that were doubling as morgues outside hospitals.

And Albert Bourla, the CEO of Pfizer, my boss, had flown to Greece to give a speech and by the time he landed the conference had shut down for Covid. So he had to turn around and come back to New York. And he wrote on a small piece of paper that we still have here at the company, the three things that he had to do. Take care of our 85,000 employees. Make sure that the steady stream of medicine continued to flow around the world, because terrible diseases, like cancer and Alzheimer's didn't go on holiday during the pandemic. And three, that he would bring a vaccine forward by the

end of the year.

And, you know, it sounded like a crazy idea, but then he did something I've never seen another CEO do for such an epic task. He looked around for a project manager and appointed himself. And that's when I thought, hmm, okay, maybe we are going to do this thing. And he set about very intentionally bringing forward the vaccine. I decided I needed an equally bold intention and that alongside what we were doing with the vaccine, I would try to transform the trust and reputation for a big pharma company, which is why I came here 16 years ago from Estee Lauder. Because I thought this company makes lifesaving medicine, and yet they have a low reputation, you know, down by tobacco and other things that just didn't seem right to me. And I had been banging my head against that challenge for over a decade, making hardly any progress.

But the pandemic meant that the whole world was watching and they needed this vaccine, and I felt it would be tragic if we created a vaccine that no one had the confidence to take. Now, of course, in the end it was more polarized and political than we had wanted it to be, but 85% of this country got vaccinated, and people around the world got vaccinated. And today, Pfizer is a top 10 global brand for the last two years according to *Fortune* magazine.

So there was a scientific transformation, mRNA technology used for the first time that

will mean the world will discover drugs differently. There was a communication transformation for the company. And there was a personal transformation for me, Reshma, because I'd been writing for years. You know, if you ask me how long did it take to write this book, I would say about four decades. I'd been thinking about it. But in the cauldron of the pandemic and all that pressure, it was clarifying. And I wrote the book actually rather quickly during the pandemic. And, you know, it just really was a great experience to be socially distanced and focused and quieter and not traveling and going to business dinners and busy all the time. And the combination of the pressure and the peacefulness of the quiet was very transformative for me as a person.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So, because at this moment, it could have gone the other way. Right? Like it could have gone, we could have had even more distrust towards big pharma. What do you think, why didn't that happen? And the next question I want to ask you is like you invited a film crew to come and document, right, the developing of the vaccine. That was like a nod towards transparency and openness and kind of letting people in. What were the tools and tactics that you were thinking in bringing in trust? Not just strategically like the film, but like just from an ethos perspective too.

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes, I knew we couldn't use any old play book. The tried-and-true methods were not going to be enough, and we took some very bold steps. For example, our clinical trial protocols. These are our intellectual property. They're our scientific secrets on how we produce these things, competitive assets. Together with our

scientists, we decided to put those on our website because we didn't have time to debate these things. Instead of filling a clinical trial in years, the team said they could fill it in months. The boss said fill it in weeks. So we were just having to crush these time frames and taking things that were not worth fighting about and putting them on the website was one way.

Another is the thing that you mentioned, which is I decided to embed a documentary film crew from *National Geographic* because they have scientific cred and the *Wall Street Journal* alongside us. Because I knew that if and when we succeeded, we would need all of this narrative. And frankly, if we had failed, the world would have bigger problems than a bad news cycle for Pfizer. You know, sort of took an unprecedented risk.

RESHMA SAUJANI: You literally had a reporter embedded inside with like, wow...

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes, a film crew and reporters that were talking to us all the time. We had to keep our labs and our manufacturing plants aseptic clean. The other people they spoke to remotely, like the rest of us. But they were all in it with us. The movie exists today on YouTube. It's called Mission Possible. And we found out on a Sunday that the vaccine worked, and on a Monday, the next day, the *Wall Street Journal* dropped five full pages. The headline was, "Pfizer's Vaccine, Crazy Deadlines and a Pushy CEO."

And, you know, I might have chosen a different word from “pushy.” I think tenacious, committed, driven, could have been equally accurate. But they got it, and that storytelling, that independent storytelling was very important.

And I just want to say one more thing about building confidence for the vaccine, because I thought that having data, and I had a lot of data, clinical trial data, real world evidence coming from Israel and other places, and experts. I had lots of experts, our chief scientists, the access to health officials around the world. I thought that would be compelling. But what really made the difference was not that. It was emotional storytelling. You know, the grandma in the senior center who got to see her grandkids, the young adult who got to go back on campus because they were vaccinated. And the most influential speakers were not the politicians or the celebrities, but the teacher, the preacher, the neighbor lady, the barber, the son, the daughter. So it was a big learning experience for me and, you know, I am grateful for having had the chance to learn these lessons.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I mean, have we ever in the history had as much vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, you know, in other, like 40 years ago with the chicken pox or measles? Was there something, is social media or, again, you talk about this at the end of the book, is that you want, you’re dismayed by the erosion of civility in our society today. What is it about this, our culture, our country, this moment that made the mistrust

even more intense than maybe other periods of time in our country's history?

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes, it's a wonderful question and one that I'm not sure I have the total answer to. You know, I've read and heard that for a long time, the country, the world experienced long-term periods of peace and economic prosperity. That's not the case today. I know from my capacity at the International Rescue Committee that there are more displaced people moving around the world. There are 54 civil wars happening as we speak, and there's a rush of nationalism, and all kinds of things that I think add to the tension and add to the difficult environment.

I recently saw in the Edelman Trust Barometer, people were asked the question, if someone was on the ground hurt and they needed help, would you reach out and help them if you thought you'd disagree with them on political or social issues? Thirty percent of people said yes, which means an astonishing 70% of the people said no, they would not help another human who had fallen and hurt because they think they have a different view.

So that's why in the final chapter, as you say, I talk about the pursuit of harmony, that we don't need to agree with one another. We need to disagree agreeably. We need not to win every argument and maintain the possibility in our minds that maybe, just maybe, I'm not right. And have a harmonious blend of sounds. It's an idea that Adam Grant

pushes and I quote him because I think he does it very beautifully.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes. And it's true. I mean I think that the rising suicide rates, we're lonely because we've lost connection. And we've lost connection to also people who are not, don't believe in exactly the same things. I mean I thought it was fascinating, I read somewhere that this was the first time that we've had, like a pandemic or an epidemic where people didn't move closer to God and moved actually further away.

SALLY SUSMAN: That is very interesting. I think we will study the social impacts of the pandemic for a long time to come. I was in a conversation earlier today about getting back to the office. I'm in Hudson Yards. We're three days a week in the office, but there's a lot of debate and discussion about that.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes, well, I have lots of feelings about that, which we don't have to talk about right now. You know, you highlight some of the principles that enabled you to break through. Right? Connect, move people forward. What would you say is the most important one out of all of them?

SALLY SUSMAN: This is the hardest question.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I'm making you pick between your babies basically.

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes, you're making me pick between my babies...

RESHMA SAUJANI: You can pick more than one if you want.

SALLY SUSMAN: I'll take two. The first is intentionality. You know, I mentioned Albert's intention, my intention. But now that we're passed the emergency phase of the pandemic, I'm trying to hold onto that intentionality. So, for example, before I speak with my parents, I say to myself, Sally, be patient. Before I speak to my young adult daughter, I say, Sally, don't be judgmental, listen. Before our conversation today, I took a moment to pause and to prepare and to think about what did I want to leave your listeners with as a set of insights and feelings. And I feel, because of multitasking and multiple pressures, people are not intentional in their communications. They just power through them. So that's one.

We've talked about pitch, which is another favorite of mine, as is harmony. But the other is the courage to be candid. And in the book I tell my coming-out story here. It was 40 years ago, which is like 100 years in gay life. I think now, especially some of the younger students that are listening, they might think ho-hum, who cares? But back in the mid, early 80s, we were in the middle of an AIDS epidemic. Most gay people were still living in the closet or on the margins. And, you know, coming out to my family and hearing their fears for whether I would have a spouse, a child, a career, their

understandable parental anxiety at the time, transformed into a life plan for me. And I'm grateful for the candor of that moment to parse what was truly important.

And if my total life plan at that moment became, if I have only three things, those were the three things I want. And as you kindly mentioned, I have a wonderful wife of 35 years, a beautiful, brilliant 29-year-old daughter, and work I'm really proud of. But it requires candor. And this is why I'm always saying to people, please, if you have an apology that you need to extend but you're afraid the hurt is too deep, make the apology. If you have a love letter in your draft file that you're afraid to send because you fear rejection, send it. Because these things are truly what make for breakthroughs.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes. I love that. I love your point about intentionality. Because I think far too often with communications, sometimes we just do it to just do it and get it done with, you know, over with. And maybe that's because sometimes people are afraid. They say, like public speaking is like worse than snakes, the thing people are most afraid of. And, you know, I find that way, I think especially for women, even when you're on the stage, we rush it through because you almost want to get it over with rather than taking a moment before to say, what's my intention? What do I want to communicate? What do I want people to be left with? And then, how do I take my time? You know, because I think when you declare your intention, you're not trying to be, you're not trying to speed through it.

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, that's embedded, yes, that's embedded in pitch, is cadence. And sometimes I laugh because I think I'm a slow talker, but slow talk is a sign of confidence. It's a sign of, as you say, not nervously rushing through it. I thought your pacing in the commencement address was powerful.

And the worst thing you can do is memorize. And I used to have a guy who was in the office next to me and, poor thing, I heard him memorizing speech after speech after speech. And that's almost vacating the moment if, you know, you have to hit the memorization button. The most important thing is to know your subject, know what it is you want to talk about. As I said, if you are intentional, you don't need to memorize. Memorize is a hard no for great communications.

RESHMA SAUJANI: And something that took me so long to learn, but in some ways it's counterintuitive because we want to be perfect, right? How do you, in this moment of cancel culture, how does candor fit into that?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, I was going to say it's about being brave, not perfect, which is a phrase that you coined. And we need to be able to be forgiving of one another. It goes back to the harmony message. You know, as Ryan Stevenson says, we are not the worst thing we ever did. And each of us makes mistakes, lots of mistakes. My book is full of my mistakes. And, you know, we just cannot allow our culture to cancel people for

things that they may say in a moment. And so I push back on it, I fight the urge to edit myself into nothingness and to speak real thoughts to real people and go bravely forward.

I mean I think your examination of bravery in our world as opposed to perfection, because if you would go into your room and perfect every speech you make, you would not be at risk of cancel culture, but nor would you have impact. And so, you know, I just think it's incumbent upon all of us, anyone who has a scintilla of power, to push back on cancel culture.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So I want to talk about vulnerability. I am doing a lot of spiritual work with a monk right now. I've been studying _____. And, you know, he talks a lot about, we've been talking a lot about, like the importance of vulnerability. And that if you don't, if you can't connect with your own suffering, you can't connect with others. And part of the reason why we're so apathetic with one another, your statistic about why you won't actually pick someone up who has a different political belief if they fall on the street is because we're not connected to their suffering, because we're not connected to our own. And to be connected to your own requires vulnerability. How did you do that in your current, especially as a woman, as a gay woman, right, oftentimes in environments that are mostly heteronormative and male? Like how did you allow yourself to be vulnerable?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, it took time. You know, I recently turned 60 and this is an exciting time in my life where I feel I can be vulnerable, and I can share my mistakes liberally. I showed the book to my mom before I turned it into my publisher and she said, oh, Sally, you know, you wrote a memoir, not a business book. There's a lot of me in there and there's a lot of me making mistakes.

One that comes to mind is when I gave a speech and I got some press inquiry from two reporters and they seemed very, very interested in my speech. And I just started blabbering about, oh, thank you, and sort of didn't do the basic due diligence I would have done for anyone I was working for at the time. I was working at the Lauder Companies for the company and the family of whom I was very protective. But of myself, I wasn't so protective. And frankly, I was surprised anyone had an interest in me.

When they asked their final question in their interview about my brilliant speech and my amazing career, they asked what happened at the end? And towards the end, I was wearing very fashionable, narrow-toed, pointy-toed shoes and I was struck down with a very bad leg cramp and had to hobble from the stage. The coverage which appeared on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* the next day wasn't about the speech. It was about my toe cramp and hobbling off the stage. And I was so ashamed, I mean it was my job to do good press, and I couldn't even do good press for myself. And I was very

fortunate that Leonard Lauder was very gracious in the moment, but I learned big lessons about preparation, about asking questions and understanding the media doesn't necessarily work for me, and the need to have thick skin when being in the media.

But the main thing was I shared that vulnerable moment. I could have ditched that story and never mentioned it again. But I talk about it because I believe when we talk about our mistakes, we don't become weak, we become strong. And people are more open to learn from you if they know you have a common human experience as they do.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes, that's right. And they want to see your humanity, you know, I think we want to see ourselves and others. It's why people like it when, I mean I'll notice something about me. If I have a perfect picture of myself and I post it, I'll get one like. But they like the messiness, the honesty, the realness, because they want to find common ground.

We talked a little bit about how the last chapter, the erosion of society. Like okay, so now in going through the pandemic, are you more hopeful that we can ever find common ground or at least a better way to disagree? Or is it all done?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, I'm a Mid-Westerner, okay...

RESHMA SAUJANI: So you're pretty hopeful I guess.

SALLY SUSMAN: Yes, I'm very hopeful and I'm an optimist in my spirit. It also comes from working around scientists. I'm not a scientist, but I have the great joy to work with scientists who always are questioning the status quo and investing their entire lives in a better future. So, you know, I am an optimist. I find ways to be optimistic to I'm going to put my dollar down that we're going to move towards a better future.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I think so too. I'm always very hopeful of this next generation. I mean I had the craziest debate with my eight-year-old the other day. And I'm like their ability to really communicate with candor, forget about it. It's pretty remarkable. And so that's why I think pushing back against these cultural influences like cancel culture, which actually then doesn't allow people to really practice their point of view or to talk to people who they may disagree with for fear of, like alienation from their friends, is dangerous because you want this, this very smart generation that understands how to communicate, to actually hone that skill as a rock-hard competency.

So what do you think is the next major area for challenge or opportunity that's going to require us to break through? Is it AI?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, it's related to AI. And that is, I think we are either in or on the

precipice of another pandemic, the pandemic of disinformation. Yes, AI, you know, I'm approaching it with that optimistic spirit we just discussed and thinking that it will do many good things, especially in healthcare. I think it can really continue, the technology, and AI in particular, will transform the future of healthcare and drug discovery, and we're leaning into it, investing into it here at the company. But for the work that I do, Reshma, the storytelling, the need for truth, creative content, originality, I'm a little worried. And I would love to work with others to prioritize an intentional effort to make sure that we don't let disinformation spin out of control.

RESHMA SAUJANI: What do you think we can do? I mean, like how do you, do we need more arbiters of fact, or what is the solution to that?

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, I think the solution is a work in progress. Arbiters of fact, for sure. We also need governments around the world to have the capabilities to appropriately regulate it. You know, I'm not saying it should be hyper-regulated, but if people are giving out disinformation about health, about education, if some of this information is hurtful to children or other vulnerable people, it needs to be explored and protected. And going back kind of to where we started, I think companies, especially the tech companies, have a big role to play in this, and they need to step up to the moment.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes, I agree, and I think institutions of higher education. So going on AI, and a little bit about this question is, what is the evolution of communication skills

in the future? And how is generative AI going to change this? I mean you now, as you read about it, people think that, again social media managers, speech writers, junior level comms folks, right? It's like if you're a 19-year-old or an 18-year-old and you have to write a speech and you're just going into ChatGPT and saying write me a speech on imposter syndrome, you're not, what is happening? Are you learning? Are they going to be better communicators because they have that? Do you know what I mean?

SALLY SUSMAN: So, I mean, I think a lot about this, and I believe that brilliant communications is learned through apprenticeship. Many people have a communications degree these days. It wasn't around when I was in school. But also many of the people in my department, they're politicians, philosophers, poets, pharmacists, activists. It's not like, you know, your CFO better have a finance degree, and your general counsel better have a legal degree and your personal doctor better have a medical degree. But communications is a much more composite skill set and experience set. And I'm in the phase of my career where I'm enjoying a lot – apprenticing people in the company and in the community – and I was frustrated during the pandemic that that shut down on me, which is, I think, why poured my heart into the book. It's sort of an apprenticeship in communications.

In terms of, you know, generative AI, I'm going to ask it some questions too. I want to know if it can write my annual report because if it writes the company's annual report, I

will save countless hours and significant funds. I'm not quite sure that it's going to be able to do that. And the larger picture for how do we train people and how do they come into the field, I do believe that younger people, more digitally-forward people, will help us to understand the channels. Whether it's TikTok or Twitter, they will help us understand the channel. But at the end of the day, it's all about content. Your content must be provoking, original, inspiring, makes you laugh, makes you cry, makes you think. And I'm still going to, again, I'm putting another dollar down on humans for that.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I am too. Two more questions. So what do you want aspiring leaders to take away from *Breaking Through*?

SALLY SUSMAN: I really hope that leaders at any level, you know, it's not just for the C-Suite, it's anybody who wants to lead some kind of a change or raise a cause or make a point, that they will appreciate that communications is a rock-hard competency as essential to their success as any other tool in their toolbox. And then give them the keys to unlock how they can build that competency and strengthen that muscle through the ten principles.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes. It's true. I mean I think it's like, the idea of being able to message something. And we're doing that at Moms First right now about paid leave and childcare. You know, how have we been messaging childcare previously in a way that

hasn't incentivized leaders, policymakers, business people to actually make changes on something that is so kind of fundamental. I see Barbara. One last question. What's next, Sally? And then Barbara can take it away.

SALLY SUSMAN: Well, on the professional front, we are making a big foray into cancer. If Covid was the first moon shot, our work in oncology is the second moon shot. And personally, I'm going to remain devoted to advocating for the principles in my book because, as you say, I'm having a great time doing it.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Well, keep shining and keep inspiring us and keep building our rock-hard competency in comm. So thank you.

SALLY SUSMAN: Thank you.

PRESIDENT BARBARA VAN ALLEN: Well, thank you both for this conversation. And it was just a fascinating one. So thank you again for sharing time out of your busy schedules.

I just want to share with our members and guests that June is shaping up to be another great month. We have Marc Rowan, the Chief Executive Officer of Apollo Global Management, joining us next week, Tuesday, June 6th, for a Signature Luncheon. And

Andrew Ross Sorkin, the Co-Anchor of CNBC's Squawk Box, will be moderating that conversation. On the 26th, we have a webinar with Karen Karniol-Tambour, the Co-Chief Investment Officer at Bridgewater, as you can see there. And then we have another Member Peer Exchange Event coming up in July, July 12th, focused on "Is it Time for School Choice in New York?" And that will be hosted by Club Member Steven Looney, again on July 12th. We are still filling in more events so stay tuned to our website.

And as we always do, I want to thank members of our Centennial Society for joining us today as their contributions continue to provide the financial backbone of support for our programming at the Club. Thank you to all that attended. Thank you again, Sally and Reshma. And I hope everyone has a great rest of the day.