

# LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

## AMA > | Toronto



**Jacquie Ryan**  
Chief Brand & Commercial Officer,  
Canadian Olympic Committee



**Tina Portillo**  
President, American Marketing  
Association Toronto

### Interview with Jacquie Ryan, Chief Brand & Commercial Officer Canadian Olympic Committee (COC)

AMA - Toronto President Tina Portillo recently met with [Jacquie Ryan](#), Chief Brand and Commercial Officer at the Canadian Olympic Committee to discuss her journey as a marketing leader and the importance of mentorship in her career. This year, AMA Toronto, launched [our brand promise](#) - to empower leadership potential, whether as business leaders or as individual marketers. We've kicked off a new series called "Leadership Conversations" to amplify this promise and to showcase a variety of leaders from across our community and AMA-Toronto who will share their knowledge and leadership experiences, which we hope will empower your own leadership potential.

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***Making sure that the job you have you feel purpose and passion - I've never wavered on that.***

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Jacquie Ryan, Chief Brand & Commercial Officer of the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) is driven by her passion for her work, her love of sport and her desire to lift others up. From her beginnings as a ski instructor in Banff, Alberta, to leading a multi-faceted national team to share stories of Canadian

Olympic athletes, Ryan has been consistent in her goal of balancing excellence with humility and leadership with integrity.

In her work with the COC, Ryan has focused on highlighting the passion Canadian athletes bring to the games and their journeys along the way. In her role as Chief Brand and Commercial officer at the COC for just two years now, the majority of that time under the backdrop of the COVID pandemic, Ryan says it sure has been quite the journey!

“What a tremendous opportunity for learning and really just trying to be a leader in the context of how we need to respond and pivot our business,” says Ryan.

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***To receive guidance from someone who is more experienced is just simply invaluable.***

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With a 25 year career in marketing, Jacquie took a non-traditional route through her career garnering and honing her skills through on the job training, a sports and event marketing education, a life-changing internship and agency experience, all of which led her to where she is today.

“I graduated from Western University and didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I went out west and decided I just wanted to ski,”

she says with great humility.

“In teaching skiing, what the opportunity afforded me was to try my hand at every aspect of the ski industry, whether it was ticketing, sales, public relations, media relations, ski coaching, ski training; everything you could possibly think of. And then it opened my eyes to a career in sports marketing, which I had no idea even existed,” Ryan explains.

Back in Toronto, Ryan completed her post-grad diploma in Sports Marketing at George Brown College, followed by an internship at Lang Partnerships that was both enlightening and inspiring.

Following her internship at Lang Partnership, Ryan went on to work at McLaren Momentum, working with many verticals and brands, which was, as she says, an amazing foundation for her career in marketing.

“I’m a brand and sports marketer at heart, and I have always followed my passion. And so when I was at the agency, I got a call about a six-month contract opportunity at RBC to work on the Olympic games.”

The six-month contract turned into twelve amazing years. RBC quickly made her an employee, working in the sponsorship and brand marketing department. Ryan ultimately led the Marketing strategy and campaigns for the highly successful 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the torch relay sponsorship for RBC.

Shortly thereafter, she got a phone call from a recruiter offering an opportunity at Scotiabank as Vice President of Sponsorship and Partnerships. It was a tremendous opportunity, making her decision to leave extremely difficult.

“I’m very loyal, and it was very hard to leave RBC, but I knew it was a great opportunity at Scotiabank. I led a number of initiatives there, but in particular, the sponsorship portfolio, where our biggest success as a team was launching Scotiabank Arena and the role that played for Scotiabank in driving brand awareness, propensity and consideration in the highly competitive banking category.

Once again, however, an amazing opportunity opened up for Ryan at the Canadian Olympic Committee and she was able to realize and act on a lifelong dream.

Ryan is the Chief Brand and Commercial Officer, which means she oversees a few different departments, including the digital, brand, partnerships, athlete marketing, and sport business departments. Having such a diverse portfolio is new territory for her, and she is all in.

### **What is your leadership style?**

“I’ve learned that to be a good leader, you have to lean into being who you are at the core. You’ve got to be excited about ideas and have a vision,” she adds. Where I lead best is when I am promoting ideas

with passion and purpose and motivating those around me.

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***Believe in people, provide an opportunity, stand back and watch them flourish. It’s the biggest gift and responsibility as a leader.***

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Ryan says what she is most interested in is inspiring and motivating people. She is quick to acknowledge that she often starts with an idea and even spends a lot of time promoting the idea with her team and colleagues, but adds that the best ideas and campaigns are really built with diverse thoughts, diverse perspectives, and diverse people.

“It’s not my style to come up with an idea and ask someone to go make it happen. I communicate an idea and then ask someone to make it better. That is most definitely my leadership style,” says the veteran marketer.

Though she says it’s great to have a vision, Ryan is inspired about coaching people along the journey, encouraging them to own the journey. She stresses that leaders are advisors and guides, and the best outcomes come from motivating others to achieve their very best.

“Regardless of who I’m leading, I definitely help with a vision and then hand it over; it’s amazing what they turn it into. It’s always better than what I originally conceived, every single time,” she adds with a smile.

Ryan believes that her job is to lead and inspire and give her team the tools and support they need to succeed. Having been working in marketing for a long time has taught her and allowed her to stay focused.

“You just have to believe in people, provide opportunity, stand back and watch them flourish. It is the biggest gift and responsibility as a leader. I think one grows into that kind of leader,” Ryan says.

### **What is your advice for up and coming leaders and how has mentorship played a role in your career?**

“Be kind, be vulnerable, be curious.”

Having had strong mentors and being a mentor herself, Ryan has sage advice for newer marketers in the business. In her experience, opportunity looks a lot like hard work. Not a believer in shortcuts, Ryan knows that hard work will be noticed and says the right people are always watching.

The right people watching can often turn into mentors, an experience that Ryan had personally, early on in her career.

“As a mentor I would say to mentees - this is your opportunity. The mentor is there to provide you with feedback and thoughts based on their experience and share all the tools of the trade that they’ve learned. Come prepared, take advantage of that time, it’s your agenda.”

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***Anybody who shows interest in your career - just let them in.***

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Recognizing the value of both formal and informal mentors, Ryan advises mentees to be open to anybody who shows any interest in their career; to just let them in. She also stresses that mentors don’t have to be well into their career to be a mentor. As she knows from experience, there is always someone who would love to learn from your career journey.

Ryan shares one of her first mentorship experiences while at Scotiabank. New to the executive role, she recognized she needed some help to understand the culture. She spent close to eight weeks early on the job looking around at some very senior executives that inspired her and with whom she felt aligned with from a purpose and values perspective.

She found one executive and sought him out. She admits it was

hard to do at first, and it meant allowing herself to be vulnerable, especially after just arriving on the job and thinking she needed to prove herself as the VP.

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***Come prepared, have an agenda, be open, be humble, be vulnerable and curious - this is your opportunity. Be really clear about what your goal is.***

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“I didn't know the culture and there was a lot to learn. I was really a bit nervous to ask, but I was so inspired by him, and I thought it really doesn't hurt to pick up the phone and see what he says. And, he said, Jacquie, whatever you need. I'm here for you. It ended up being a very rewarding relationship, that at times was even reciprocal.

Wise words and solid leadership advice from Jacquie Ryan that truly exemplifies AMA Toronto's brand promise to empower leadership potential. My thanks to Jacquie Ryan for being so open with her experiences as both a mentor and mentee, and for affirming the principles of leadership we all strive for.



Jacquie Ryan, Chief Brand and Commercial Officer, oversees digital, brand, and marketing partnerships at the Canadian Olympic Committee. Previously she was Vice President, Sponsorship and Partnerships at Scotiabank where she was responsible for the \$800 million Scotiabank Arena naming rights deal

the award-winning hockey marketing programs. Previous to this Jacquie was Head, Olympic Marketing at RBC. Jacquie has been recognized on the Top 100 People of Power in Hockey by the Hockey News, one of the most Influential Women in Hockey by the Toronto Star, the Most Influential People in Canadian Sport by Yahoo! and is a Board member at Michael Garron Hospital Foundation.