



Listening & Leading: How Deb Thomas Broke Barriers & Became Hasbro's CFO

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by Deb Thomas

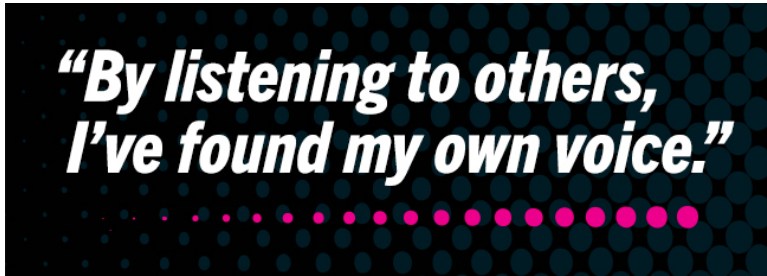
At Hasbro, we know that women can do anything.

They can transform the familiar into the fantastic. They can save [lives](#), the [world](#), and even the [galaxy](#). As artists and activists, directors and developers, they can [bring their imaginations](#) to life.

Clearly, much of the financial sector has missed the memo. In the U.S. and elsewhere, women have long been [underrepresented](#) in the financial leadership of major institutions. Across the top 1,000 American companies, just [12 percent](#) of chief financial officers are women.

I'm proud to be one of them. I'll be even prouder when there are more of us.

For more than a decade, I've been lucky to work with a fantastic team to help lead Hasbro into the future. In the hope that other women—at Hasbro and beyond—will find their own paths into finance, and leadership, I'd like to share some of my story.



Listening to Lead

When I joined Hasbro in 1998, a good number of women held leadership positions. But not on the finance team. I was just the second woman to join in a finance leadership position, and I felt a bit like an outsider.

To move to the front office, I recognized early on that I had to prove my value—so I did something that, in finance, at least, was a little unconventional.

I sought out my colleagues' stories—and I listened.

I listened to ideas my team had never shared before, to my bosses' advice on how to become a better leader, and to my colleagues from different backgrounds who felt unnoticed or underappreciated.

I also listened to the members of our Board of Directors, in particular our Audit Committee. The renowned business leader Claudine Malone chaired that committee, and I listened to her too—her experience as a Black woman in finance, and her dreams for women across the financial industry. She said it was her mission to make sure every business where she served on the Board had a woman CFO. Her leadership showed me that I could leap to the same heights—and with her guidance and support, I went forward with confidence.

Listening to my colleagues—from the boardroom to the conference room—has taught me how to lead. I encourage my team to pursue their best ideas. I reach out to different teams to make sure our State of the Company meetings speak to their interests. And I've invested in colleagues to show how much we care about their future at the Company.

The more I've empowered my teams, the more their performance has improved—and so has my own.

By listening to others, I've found my own voice.

Staying True to Ourselves

But it's not enough just to listen. I've also had to use my voice to champion what matters most.

In my heart, I'm still a small-town person. I grew up in Wakefield, Rhode Island—which at the time had about 50 people per square mile—and never thought I'd become CFO of one of the state's largest companies, a beloved global brand. Since those days in Wakefield, I've traveled all over the world and worked with teams in dozens of countries. But wherever I go, I'm guided by the values I learned at home: equity, fellowship, mutual respect. I stay true to myself by remembering my roots—and bringing my values to work every day.

Whether we're running the numbers or reviewing headcount, my team follows a golden rule: we treat people the way we want to be treated. We've turned our office into a village, where we strive to support each other as professionals, as people, and—for those who have children—as parents.

I've felt that support firsthand. When my daughter was young, she was plagued by ear infections—and I worried about balancing her care with my career. But my Hasbro village made it easy. Whenever I needed to, I brought my daughter to work—and my colleagues welcomed her with open arms and peekaboos. They played with her on her blanket, and as she got older, she began wandering to their cubicles to visit. Now, she's all grown up—but she still feels like part of the Hasbro family.

That's the kind of connection that makes Hasbro so much more than a workplace. And it comes from our shared commitment to our Purpose. We all understand what's really important: the children, fans and families we serve.

Even now, as we work from home, I think about the days when children came into my office in Pawtucket. They saw my emotional-support Snuffleupagus—or one of our Transformers, or My Little Pony—and their faces lit up.

Their joy brings me joy and is one of the ways we live up to our Purpose as a team and as a Company.

Carrying as We Climb

To fulfill that Purpose, my colleagues and I have built a diverse team and given them ladders to success—[no chutes](#).

With Bob Kiely, my greatly valued business partner in human resources, we've set out to hire colleagues who represent our consumers and audiences. That means we welcome candidates of every background and identity—and our commitment starts at the top.

Hasbro has set company-wide goals to make our hiring system as inclusive as possible. In the U.S., we review all our open positions for underrepresentation—and where we find a gap, we work hard to fill it. We always hire the most qualified candidate, and with that foremost in mind, our D&I professionals help us find and engage with diverse talent.

When it comes to the finance team, I build on the strong foundation Hasbro has set. I've set a rule that before we make a hire, we must have considered women and underrepresented groups as part of the search. If our search doesn't find diverse candidates, I ask my team: Where were the candidates we couldn't find? How hard did we try? How long? Then, when conducting job interviews, I make sure each candidate shares our commitment to diversity and inclusion—so when we invite someone to join Hasbro, we can be confident they'll work their hardest to help their colleagues, and the Company, thrive.

Once we recruit talented individuals, we work hard to retain them. We have competitive compensation plans. We offer flexible arrangements to help employees achieve a work-life balance. We give every team member access to unconscious bias training. And when employees need help—when they're dealing with a personal crisis or a professional challenge—we go the extra mile to offer support. Put simply, we show up.

We're also deeply committed to investing in our employees' long-term potential. Several years ago, we offered a promising junior accountant from Peru the opportunity to work in Hong Kong, Mexico, Brazil, and throughout our US offices. Today, thanks in part to those experiences, that accountant has earned her U.S. citizenship, broadened the horizons of her career, and become a leader in the finance organization. We try to prepare all of Hasbro's employees to become our future leaders—so they can succeed, and steer our team forward, generations from now.

By showing respect and providing flexibility, we lift up every person at Hasbro. Together—encouraged and empowered to do our best work—we lift up the Company.

I came to Hasbro more than two decades ago because I wanted to play a part in making the world a better place. I stayed here because the Company has enabled me to do just that. None of the things I've accomplished would have been possible without the support of all the people I'm privileged to call colleagues—in particular, the members of the Board of Directors and our Chairman and CEO, Brian Goldner.

Together we have the power to continue to make the world a better place for all children, fans and families.

Women
BEHIND the BLUEPRINT
with **Deb Thomas'**
3 **GAME CHANGERS**



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