Tech for Good: Using AI to Relieve Chief Household Officers' Cognitive Load

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In today's workforce, there is a divisiveness around whether AI will benefit or harm jobs. Will it improve productivity? Or will it replace human beings?

What if it did both? And for the greater good?

Enter Sheila Lirio Marcelo. In 2006, Marcelo founded Care.com, an online platform that helps families find care for children, senior family members and more. The entrepreneur is coming through again, leveraging generative AI for families in need of caregiving assistance.

Ohai.ai, a human assistant app, is designed to reduce the cognitive load for the "chief household officer," who is tasked with coordinating everyday life. The premise of the app was designed with multiple family constructs in mind—nuclear families, divorced families, and even families without children but in need of assistance to juggle it all.

Marcelo sat down with ADWEEK to share more about the inspiration that led her to start Care, the "social responsibilities" of a marketer, and the why behind Ohai's mission to help solve today's mental overload with a personal assistant accessible to all.

Her words have been edited for length and clarity.

The chief household officer

[My husband and I] were both raised Filipino. My husband was raised by a single mom, so he saw the strength of a working mom as a role model. My parents were equal partners as entrepreneurs—the Philippines has one of the narrowest gender gaps and has a lot of female leaders. I think that had a lot to do with our belief in equal partnership.

But we definitely felt the pressure around planning play dates. For example, he would often say, "Maybe you should call the other mom to plan the play date instead of me" because of stereotypes and expectations back then.

He and I shared [duties] in our early days caregiving for our kids that allowed me more space to care for my parents, and then as I progressed and started Care.com. We built it together, but then he took a primary role for the caregiving of our kids as they got older. We've always had an incredible partnership around that. I came to be the breadwinner eventually, but the family organizer for both of us. This is why I call [the role] the "chief household officer." I may not necessarily be doing all the tasks, but I was the primary coordinator of the things that needed to be accomplished in our household.

Oxfam put out a report that women still spend, on average, 4.5 hours of unpaid labor at home, while men spend 2.8 hours. So there's still a delta, and it's a challenge.

The construct of families continues to evolve, and people play different roles now. But what hasn't changed is that every

family has a chief household officer, and there is someone stressing about the coordination [and] the burden of everyday life. That is a lot. There's app overload, activity overload, people coordination overload because it takes a village to raise a family. So, there's still a major gap, whatever the construct, and that's really who we're serving at the end of the day: someone who is juggling everyday life coordination with their household, or for a broader household and multiple people.

Families are asking for [help]. They've got to coordinate, and here's something very useful that creates peace of mind for families that have to just administratively coordinate things without getting emotional between two households that may be co-parenting [but perhaps] not in the smoothest relationship. O (the name of the virtual assistant) can facilitate what needs to happen in between.

Mantras of an entrepreneur

One of my mantras is "authentic boldness." As an entrepreneur, you'll never answer the question of fulfilling your vision or dream unless you take the plunge. And certainly, you have to have that DNA. But the second thing is, I tend to ground myself in data. So yes, I'm taking the plunge, but with a thesis in mind.

We always have a thesis. It was very similar to Care.com—when we first launched, we never envisioned that we were going to launch housekeeping within the first year of Care. But because the users were really asking for it, we launched it pretty early. We had again, our thesis, and our thesis also for Care.com was that senior care was going to be in demand right away. We were proven wrong— it took 10 years for that to really take off.

What we've learned now is really to listen to users and focus. What's beautiful about building a service and a product of a

personal assistant using generative AI is you can get to the data of what families need and what they're looking for.

Using tech for good

Behind every tech are human beings. 90% of the tasks completed right now on Ohai are [done by] AI, but we have human assistants behind the scenes to ensure a great user experience. And then we have the AI sometimes shadow the human assistants as they're training the AI to complete a task. But then again, that's also just 10% of the time.

So, we are really AI-native tech first. But we always believe that the human assistants have a very important role to play: to ensure there's a great user experience. It allows us to focus and listen in on the users as we continue to leverage the AI for efficiency, get things done, free up time and, again, reduce the cognitive load.

Reducing the cognitive load and stress gives [consumers] more choices to pursue things. This will help the economy by really unleashing productivity—not necessarily to do more, but to be smarter in what people do.

And the thing about Care is it touched so many lives and it was in so many homes. The total addressable market of Ohai is actually larger because for Care; not everybody outsources care, [but] every home has to coordinate everyday life.

The social responsibility of a marketer

It's super important to me as a leader in tech that we build a two-sided marketplace. We were trying to make sure that there was efficiency for families to get access to care, but we also

thought ahead for what was important for caregivers.

We were one of the first platforms that was going to be the largest around the gig economy, and we knew that. So, getting [employees] access to health care, Social Security, and being properly paid, and making sure that every job wasn't below minimum wage on Care.com. We always thought ahead about our social responsibility.

For Ohai, the big advocacy is to ensure that everyone has access to AI. It's accessible. It is a price point that allows people to have a personal assistant. Many people have never had an assistant at any level at a company, other than executives.

Growth without equality is not real growth, because embedded in marketing is also a message for social good, and that's where equality comes in for me. We have a social responsibility around that. And so, it's two-pronged. It's a fun job. It's a big job, but it's also a big responsibility. I've been a marketer. I've grown consumer brands. Part of that means there's a responsibility to ensure that there's equal access to opportunities of advancing economic benefits for all.

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