



Creating Immediate Impact

McKinsey's **Megan Greenfield** solves complex problems to drive positive change

As a partner at global consulting firm McKinsey & Company, Megan Greenfield (PhD '09) searches for solutions to some of the world's most challenging business and social problems, from improving healthcare to advancing equity in the workplace.

"What I love about being able to work on the hardest problems is that you really feel like you can make a big difference," she says, "and you can make it fast."

That's what drew Greenfield out of the Northwestern lab, where as a chemical and biological engineering graduate student she conducted research in biomaterials and tissue engineering. Although she appreciated the University's collaborative, interdisciplinary approach, she found the prospect of helping people in real time more appealing than the slower process of academic research.

"I love research, but it takes forever to have an impact," she says. "As a consultant, I can do things that impact people immediately."

Since joining McKinsey in 2010, Greenfield has used her biotech expertise to help healthcare clients, including large health systems and life sciences companies, create strategies, tools, and organizational structures to drive growth and efficiency. Most recently, she has expanded beyond healthcare to address the economic effects of COVID-19.

CREATING A NEW MODEL

Greenfield helped design one of the first state-level COVID-19 economic recovery plans in the United States. It's a framework that has been adopted by many states, cities, and organizations nationwide.

As businesses began to close in March 2020, Greenfield's team considered ways to reopen the economy well before the full extent of the pandemic was even known. With no existing model to study, the team had to create one.

"Our objective was to figure out how to reopen as quickly and safely as possible so that we didn't crush the economy," she says. "We assessed each industry, looking at its economic importance, ability to shift activities to remote settings, and specific health risks in order to think through the right sequence for how to reopen and what protections should be put in place to keep employees and customers safe."

Her team identified a range of safety precautions to help leaders think through the options on what protections to put in place, pulling ideas from previous pandemics as well as the emerging experience in China and Italy, which were a few months ahead of the United States in facing COVID-19. "We didn't come up with policy—we never do," she explains. "We helped structure how to think about the different dimensions of the situation, so that government and community leaders could decide what to do. It was a fascinating, very interdisciplinary project."

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DRIVING ENDURING CHANGE

The variety of projects and the constant learning are what Greenfield enjoys most about her role at McKinsey. “I work with a wide range of companies on a wide range of problems with a wide range of different people, so it’s always something new,” she says.

Inspired by her employer’s purpose to create positive, enduring change in the world, Greenfield advances the company’s diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. She is involved with Women in the Workplace, an annual research study by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, and helps institutions develop strategies to improve recruiting, promotion, and retention of diverse talent. She leads the Massachusetts High Technology Council’s Women in Leadership Initiative, which involved hosting numerous executive roundtables and writing several white papers. This year, she is conducting research into how employers can address health inequities among their employees and is designing a global program to help multinational companies address gender inequality.

She is also a visible leader within McKinsey, co-leading the firm’s Greater Boston Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity team and Women’s initiative. Last year, she helped launch McKinsey’s Greater Boston Allyship Network, which piloted the firm’s first anti-racism training.

Greenfield has been driving change since her time at Northwestern Engineering, where she co-founded the McCormick Graduate Leadership Council in 2006 with Binoy Shah (PhD ’09) to promote a sense of community among McCormick graduate students. Greenfield also served as president of Northwestern’s Graduate Student Association, where she helped improve students’ health insurance benefits.

SOLVING PROBLEMS AND GETTING STAKEHOLDERS ON BOARD

Taking on a complex issue like health insurance as a student isn’t that far from the work she does today, Greenfield says. She applies the same problem-solving skills she learned at Northwestern to all her projects.

“Engineering in particular is about first figuring out what the problem is, then how to solve it, and finally how to get people on board to drive change,” she says. “That’s basically what I do every day.”

Her efforts earned her an appointment to the World Economic Forum’s Forum of Young Global Leaders in 2021, a recognition bestowed on around 100 promising artists, business leaders, public servants, technologists, and social entrepreneurs each year. She joins a five-year program that will challenge her to shape a more inclusive and sustainable future.

“It’s a very special group of people with fascinating backgrounds and experience,” she says. “It’s an honor that I get to be part of it.”

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