People, industries, and the world. Ever since she was a little girl, Rosemarie Truman watched her father change the course of history itself through his drive and dedication, and set her mind to doing the same. In the four short years they had together, he taught her as much as he could—foundational skills that drove her early acceleration. In between teaching physics courses at Harvard University, he would read her the countless books she brought home from the library. As he worked to build the first rocket propulsion engine for NASA, he taught her to read, write, and look things up in the encyclopedia, instructing her to review his scientific papers on heat physics. His final lesson was in how to make a gigantic paper machete volcano that actually erupted.

By five years old, Rosemarie was a thoughtful, inquisitive girl firmly rooted in the belief that God had put her on Earth to maximize her skills to have a positive impact. Embracing the phrase *sursum in aeternum* or *forever upward*, she went on to transform the lives of thousands of people through her various high-powered roles in corporate America. Her work has changed whole industries, disrupting archaic processes and catalyzing growth to seize opportunity and create epic companies of tomorrow. And now, as the founder, CEO, and Chairwoman of The Center for Advancing Innovation (CAI), her impact is going global. “We’re commercializing and maximizing the potential of life-saving inventions by NASA and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is very exciting,” she says. “I’m certainly proud of all the corporate growth breakthrough strategies I’ve orchestrated for companies over the years and the success I’ve been able to achieve for them. But to save peoples’ lives and have the GDP impact I’m having now—it’s a whole new level I never imagined reaching.”

After traveling the world for her previous work at companies like IBM, Rosemarie decided to launch her own consulting firm in 2008, which laid the foundation for the official creation of CAI as a nonprofit organization in 2012. Her first mission was to apply the strategic growth skills she had honed in the private sector to the NIH, a government agency charged with impacting public health. The NIH and its world-class scientists had developed thousands of inventions over the years available for licensing and commercialization, but only a fraction of these inventions become breakthroughs. “With such a small percentage of NIH’s portfolio getting through the commercialization process, there were—and are—some phenomenal commercially-viable inventions that could be capable of saving lives, reducing the burden of illnesses, and diagnosing diseases early,” says Rosemarie.

With that, she worked with the NIH to develop five major recommendations for the agency, laying out a framework for optimizing, accelerating and increasing the volume of technology commercialization. “At a company, you would look at your current portfolio while also systematically identifying net new growth breakthroughs that could make a market,” she explains. “So, naturally, one of the recommendations was to identify which inventions in the NIH portfolio were commercially viable and which could be discarded to save on patent prosecution fees.”

Thanks in part to the trust and open mind of Tom Stackhouse, her main partner at NIH, CAI partnered with the National Cancer Institute to identify fifty great inventions, as well as a number that were ready for discontinuation. The agency then needed to identify a path to commercialization to maximize monetization and reduce the cost and time it took to set up licensing
agreements with private companies. “Big drug companies could afford to acquire inventions from the NIH, but often the inventions were too early stage,” Rosemarie explains. “As well, life sciences startups and mid-sized companies are very nimble, but many couldn’t afford to license these inventions under the traditional model. The majority of companies in the Life Sciences space are small and mid-size companies, so NIH created an exclusive licensing model for only $2,000.”

Rosemarie then shifted her attention to figuring out the most expeditious path to commercialize promising NIH inventions, as well as how to leverage NIH’s startup licensing agreement. She saw that the traditional business plan competition model within the pharmaceutical and device industries could be hyper-extended, so in collaboration with Tom Stackhouse, CAI and NCI decided to turn everything on its head by conceiving of and launching the Breast Cancer Startup Challenge. “It was a challenge where teams came together to compete on the basis of bolting a startup around these de-risked inventions from the NIH portfolio,” she explains. “It had never been done before, so I had no idea if it would actually work, but I knew it was worth trying. We took ten promising inventions and allowed up to ten teams per invention to put forth ideas for commercializing each one, pitching business plans and really unleashing their creativity. The first year running, it was the largest challenge in the world, and we were getting inventions off the shelf that could really impact human health.”

Rosemarie’s revolutionary idea for crowdsourcing talent from around the world to build startups around promising inventions created a brand new channel for NIH to bring its inventions to market, winning the HHS Secretary’s Pick Innovation Award from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as the 2014 Secretary’s Pick. Also in 2014, CAI won the Technology Transfer Excellence Award from the Federal Laboratory Consortium for its challenge. Rosemarie and her team set to replicate the model’s success through a Neuro Startup Challenge, extending across all of HHS to launch twenty more startups around treatments for neurological diseases like Alzheimer’s, ADHD, Parkinson’s, Schizophrenia, brain cancer, drug abuse, and Batten’s Disease.

“The idea, which I now call the Federal Government Startup Challenge Catalyst, has become a huge accelerator program in which we teach all participants about the business of science and how to create jobs,” Rosemarie explains. “They learn how to create a commercialization plan, develop an intellectual property strategy, navigate FDA pathways, perform a live pitch, build financial models, and more. I get hundreds of thank-you notes from people saying how the program changed the trajectory of their career, even if they didn’t win. Never could I have anticipated the impact we would make on the people we taught and the people who filled the jobs we created.”

Rosemarie is now working on the Space Race Challenge with NASA and the Nanotechnology Startup Challenge in Cancer with the NIH, which has been featured by the White House’s A Strategy for American Innovation, published in October of 2015. That same month, HHS honored her with a Best in Business Plans Award and an Entrepreneurship for Five Years of Excellence in Federal Challenge & Prize Competitions Award.

The cycle of invention commercialization, economic growth, and job creation generate a layered impact—impact that will be magnified in the future as Rosemarie builds the Gazelle Futures venture strategy & commercialization fund. The fund will inject capital into CAI-associated startups to accelerate their R&D and provide the velocity needed to land Series A funding. “The success of our challenges has been incredibly defining because it’s allowed us to change the world,” she says. “Through our challenge platform, one new scientist entrepreneur got an antibody conjugate investment that will change the face of cancer treatment forever. I was presenting these ideas at a conference once, and someone told me I had done the only thing I needed to do in my whole life. There’s so much left to do, but at least I’m on the right track.”

The road to get here, which leads forever upward, has been long yet highly intentional and never meandering. Rosemarie was born in Oklahoma as the fifth of six children, and from those days of childhood, she can still remember everything about her father, right down to the peanut butter popcorn he would make and the way he would cut her peanut butter and jelly sandwiches into triangles for her. “I wasn’t allowed to have soda, but he’d take me to get
orange soda after trips to the library, which I loved,” she recalls. “We’d go to the tasty freeze for ice cream, and he’d use physics tricks to get the silly puddy out of my corduroys. Like all losses through my life, the pain of losing him didn’t hit me until years later.”

Rosemarie’s mother, an incredible woman who passed on her unflagging drive and work ethic to her daughter, made the decision to buy a new home in West Virginia after her father was gone, where she got a job as a teacher. She taught piano and organ lessons after school and got a job in the evenings singing at a night club. She later became Mayor of their town, employing Rosemarie and her siblings to write letters to stop controversial sand mine projects from infiltrating the area. “She’s an absolute saint,” Rosemarie says. “My biggest strength and my biggest weakness is that I’m driven, and I got that from her. She gets stuff done, and she’s a phenomenal artist. There’s a lot of art in strategy, and her influence expresses itself in everything I do.”

Despite her mother’s best efforts, Rosemarie and her siblings grew up markedly poor. As the youngest girl in the family, Rosemarie got all the hand-me-downs—clothes that were patched, safety-pinned, and not cool enough to get her in with the popular crowd at school. Instead of grade-school social hierarchies, the children focused on the things that would change their course through life. Rosemarie’s mother expected all of her children to get straight A’s and play an instrument, creating a one-family band. She assigned them each several rows in the garden, and the kids would compete to see who could grow the best vegetables.

Rosemarie loved gardening and swimming in the river by their house, mastering double back flips off the diving board. She had a few close friends but was never a social butterfly—perhaps because she was so driven to succeed and focused on self improvement. “I’d do anything I could to make money, which I put straight into the bank,” she recalls. “I’d ask people if they needed their yard raked or their weeds pulled.” At age twelve, she started babysitting and even landed a waitressing job she was technically too young for, quickly earning the admiration of her employer for her punctuality and reliability.

When Rosemarie was thirteen, her mother remarried, and the family moved to Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Her southern accent drew the ridicule of her classmates, but she still managed to get straight As and an 111 average. She picked up an extensive paper route that kept her busy from 4:30 to 6:00 each morning, but even hard work couldn’t cheer her up. She missed West Virginia, and during her senior year of high school, she moved back into their old house her mother still owned. “That was a really great year,” she reminisces. “I was in Odyssey of the Mind Club with a core group of friends, and we won fifth place in a world competition for our skit showing world peace.”

Rosemarie’s mother mandated that her children all get full-ride scholarships to Ivy League Schools, and Rosemarie landed a full scholarship to Smith College. There, she picked up part-time jobs at the Alumni Association, the Computer Center, and as a waitress to cover her living expenses, allowing her to graduate with only minimal debt. She triple-majored in Math, Econometrics, and Industrial Engineering Research, with minors in Comparative Literature and French—the eclectic combination she believed would put her in the best position to achieve her goals and be successful later in life. She also completed a groundbreaking econometrics thesis showing that 93 percent of the wage gap between males and females is explained by preferences for certain job characteristics.

Rosemarie knew that, for her, there would be no wage gap. “I didn’t have any personal exposure to big business at that time, but I studied the richest companies in the world,” she says. “I had made up my mind that I wasn’t going to be poor, and that the best way to avoid poverty was to figure out exactly what I wanted to do in life. I knew that if I was going to achieve the future career trajectory I had in mind for myself, I’d need to be very targeted and strategic as I graduated from college in 1994 with high honors and also earned the Samuel Bowles Prize which hadn’t been given out for 13 years.”

With that, Rosemarie set her sights on Goldman Sachs and McKinsey Consulting, highly competitive organizations that generally wouldn’t give applicants another thought if they didn’t have an MBA. Undeterred, Rosemarie wrote to every relevant alumni she could find. “This was before the internet, so I had to do the best I could to research their backgrounds and try to make a personal connection through my letters,” she recalls. “I wanted my letters to be interesting to
them, and to address problems they faced everyday from an industry standpoint. I must have written a hundred letters in an effort to show my value proposition above anybody else. They must have thought I was smart or crazy or both.”

Rosemarie also wrote an entire business plan for Goldman designed to save the company $40 million through new methods to reduce errors on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. She noted how the institutional sales traders at 85 Broadway would call up the people on the floor of the Exchange and shout orders through the phone, and how the details were often lost in translation. She conceived of putting touch screen PCs on the floor of the Exchange for the first time, through which trade instructions could be transmitted and accepted. “I said they could hire me for 1 percent of the savings I planned to deliver, or $400,000,” she recounts. “I thought it was a great deal, but when they made me an offer, they forgot a zero.”

Rosemarie was grateful her strategy had worked, and she set up work as the only analyst at the listed stock block desk. With her sign on bonus, she bought her first TV, which she still has today. After two years of grueling workdays that began at 4:30 AM and didn’t end until around 9:00 PM, Rosemarie set to work finding a solution for some database performance issues they were experiencing on the touch screen PCs she had helped deploy. By that time she had taught herself a plethora of programming proficiencies so she could communicate with the IT specialists.

During that time, Rosemarie reached out to Oracle, and after learning of their entrepreneurial culture, she accepted an offer to join their team. At Oracle, she was first tasked with learning the company’s products to the extent that she could teach them. She also analyzed the profit margins and profit leakage opportunities. “I loved working at Oracle,” she says. “I’d put together well-structured proposals which they’d allow me to pursue. Then they asked me to co-lead the implementation of one of my platforms globally, with multiple currencies, languages, organizations, and bookkeeping strategies at play. I was 23 years old at the time, and the implementation proved incredibly complex. But we pulled it off—a victory that would prove key in setting me on a career path geared toward growth strategy and strategy consulting. It was an amazing place to work that empowered me to implement my ideas.”

After Oracle, Rosemarie accepted a position at Ernst & Young, putting together their eBusiness strategy at a time when the dotcom bubble was growing and people hadn’t yet figured out how to design internet platforms. A lead partner soon left to become the CIO at Marsh & McLennan, a global professional services firm, and asked Rosemarie to come along as the Global Strategy Leader. As the youngest VP ever hired at the firm, she created a new exchange platform model for insurance brokerage. Tragically, their offices spanned floor 93 to floor 100 of the North Tower of the World Trade Center, and all Marsh & McLennan employees in the tower on September 11, 2001, lost their lives. Rosemarie, who happened to be in the UK at the time, wasn’t able to internalize the devastating loss of her colleagues until she heard their names read aloud at a service later on.

Rosemarie returned to Washington, and after a brief stint launching eBusiness and IT strategy plans at Booz Allen Hamilton, she accepted an Associate Partner position at IBM. There, she set to work monetizing the company’s patent portfolio and advancing the work of its Emerging Business Opportunity Group by creating a new-and-improved model for identifying and nurturing growth breakthroughs. When her model generated an additional $16 billion in three years, IBM’s Executive VP of Innovation, Nick Donofrio, knew they needed to bring the strategy to market worldwide. With that vision, she conceived of and created IBM’s Innovation & R&D Strategy Practice, where she worked on a global scale with companies like Exxon Mobil, Chevron, PepsiCo, Nokia, and Microsoft to identify and drive growth breakthroughs. “We analyzed everyone in the space and said, what are they doing that’s working and not working?” she recounts. “We found that you really need to inject an enormous amount of rigor in your due diligence process and the incubation process to try to identify and drive growth breakthroughs.”

Rosemarie and her team developed revolutionary diagnostic tools that created new revenue streams for the company, systematizing those tools over a six-month period. They coupled this with an aggressive growth strategy that restructured several areas within IBM, including the emerging business opportunity area, so that IBM would consistently select growth breakthroughs and nurture them. Rosemarie
worked with the billion dollar sales team to orchestrate a number of multi-billion dollar deals, and her groundbreaking work earned her IBM’s prestigious Golden Circle Award—an honor reserved for the top .09% of IBM employees. Rosemarie had an outstanding run at IBM and would still be there today if not for receiving an offer she couldn’t refuse in 2007 from PRTM, a 600-person boutique strategy consulting firm. She came onboard as an equity partner and the Global Leader for their Innovation Strategy Practice, where she led notable projects that included driving billions in top line revenue growth for Nokia. She hadn’t yet achieved the level of impact she had always envisioned for herself, however, and decided to leave to start her own firm.

“I had a noncompete, so I had to reinvent myself,” she says. “Around that time, my sister Gina came up with a novel cancer invention. I told her she had to commercialize it, but she reminded me she was a lab manager and didn’t have a commercial bone in her body. I told her I would help her figure it out, so I set up a 30-minute meeting with the Head of NIH’s Technology Transfer Group. I knew the federal government had one of the largest patent portfolios in the world, and that NIH had the largest life sciences inventory with many de-risked inventions representing millions of dollars’ worth of investments that had enormous commercialization potential.”

Rosemarie’s work through CAI has helped over 1,200 people land jobs that would change the trajectory of their careers and launch 33 startups in the past two years alone. But her commitment to the success of others doesn’t stop there. In 2015, she took on the role of Director of the DC Metro Area Chapter of the Founders Institute (FI), the largest international entrepreneur training and startup launch program there is. FI is committed to building sustainable startup ecosystems that will create one million new jobs worldwide. “The program is ideally suited to my leadership style, which follows an apprenticeship model,” she explains. “I believe you don’t just tell someone to do something—you have to be working with them side-by-side in the trenches so they can learn how it’s done. People who’ve worked for me will tell you they never worked harder, and they never learned more. So much of leadership is about teaching.”

Rosemarie also continues to run the Take Me Home Foundation, a charity for battered women and children in West Virginia like the broken families she encountered as a child growing up there. “I remember kids in my class who would slip food into their pockets at lunchtime because it was the only meal they’d have that day,” she says. “It’s very important to me that I’m at least doing what I can for some of those children down there who don’t have good family lives.”

In advising young people entering the working world today, Rosemarie stresses the importance of being strategically focused on what you want. Rather than sending resumes to a thousand people, she suggests taking the time to think about how you’ll distinguish yourself, and how you’ll position yourself to fill a given role. “Take the time to ask yourself what you want to do and how you can put yourself at the front of the line to do it,” she says. “Think about who your competition is. You may not be the strongest candidate on the planet for an opening, but you can position yourself so you’re the only person offering a solution like yours because nobody else thought about it that way. Through life, I’ve always been opportunistic and driven to seize the day. I’m always thinking about how I can improve myself and maximize the talents God gave me. The only way to get there is to aim forever upward, bettering the world as you better yourself.”

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