We think big.
We embrace openness.
We serve with passion.
We offer solutions.
We demand excellence.
We love and understand.
We take fun seriously.
Jennifer Dulski leads by helping other people excel.

She’s been doing this for most of her life. She served as coxswain for the men’s crew team in high school and the women’s team at Cornell. She taught school and founded a nonprofit enrichment program to help put talented but underserved youth on the path to college. And when she reflects on her style as an executive, she calls herself first and foremost a coach.

“My job is to get the most out of people who work with me,” says Dulski, president and chief operating officer at Change.org, an online petitioning platform with participants in 196 countries. “I do that by supporting them to do their best.”

Dulski came to Change.org in 2013 to guide the San Francisco-based company’s global growth, enlarging the technology platform, the sales team, and the corporate infrastructure to support a burgeoning online community. The metrics are impressive. “We’re on track to hit 100 million users this year,” she says.

While big numbers are crucial at Change.org, Dulski knows that a crowd acquires its power one person at a time. That’s true when thousands join forces to petition for a cause, and it’s just as true when colleagues collaborate at work.

“The best teams come together when you leverage the strengths and talents of each individual,” she says, “rather than trying to coach everybody to be good at things they’re not good at.”

WHAT’S THE INTERNET?

Dulski’s road toward leadership in the dot.com world started at Summerbridge Pittsburgh, the Breakthrough Collaborative enrichment program she founded, in the early ’90s. The school that housed Summerbridge was wired for access to the Web. Curious, Dulski asked a tech-savvy board member, “What’s this Internet thing and how do I use it?”

Check out this new site called Yahoo, the woman suggested. “She wrote it for me on a Post-it note, literally ‘www.yahoo.com,’” Dulski laughs, “I started using it, and I thought, ‘This is incredible. I have to work here.’”

The Internet’s potential to connect and inform vast numbers of people held a powerful attraction, Dulski says. Summerbridge made a real difference, but that program touched only a few hundred lives a year. She wanted to accomplish more. “I became enamored with the possibility of the Internet as a way to create impact at scale.”

Dulski joined Yahoo in 1999, fresh from the MBA program at Johnson. She rose through the ranks to become group vice president and general manager, local and commerce.

In 2007, Dulski left Yahoo to co-found The Dealmap, a site for consumers seeking local discounts. When Google bought The Dealmap in 2011 and integrated it into Google Offers, Dulski joined Google for a time before moving on to Change.org.

She calls this newest position her dream job. “It provides a way to put my two passions back together — doing good in the world and growing a giant Internet business.”

BETTING ON THE TEAM

Zoe Harte, who served as human resources manager at Yahoo during much of Dulski’s tenure there, recalls how vigorously Dulski coached employees to achieve.

“She placed big bets on the people who worked for her; she probably had more faith in them than they did themselves,” says Harte, now head of HR at oDesk. One favorite tactic was to pull people out of their day-to-day roles to give them cross-functional opportunities, she says.

Dulski places deep trust in the people she hires, says Chandu Thota, Dulski’s co-founder at The Dealmap. “She doesn’t micromanage. She doesn’t tell people what to do. This leads to a lot of creative thinking.”

People sometimes ask Dulski why she doesn’t manage her teams more closely. It’s because individuals learn best from their own mistakes, she says. “If you don’t let them fail, they won’t grow.”

So strongly does she hold to this principle that Change.org has started a tradition called the Festival of Failure. “The idea is that you can’t get anywhere if you don’t try hard enough to fail,” Dulski explains. “When someone has a failure, they have permission to celebrate that moment by declaring, ‘I had a festival of failure! Here’s what I learned, and here’s how we won’t do that again.’”

Like any good coach, though, Dulski also offers guidance.

“She has extremely high expectations for every single person here,” says Amanda Levy, vice president of sales at Change.org. “But she also shows complete dedication to providing the support everyone needs to hit those expectations.”

Dulski makes it safe to come to her with challenges, says Katie Bethell, managing director of North American campaigns at Change.org. Bethell doesn’t report directly to Dulski, but they work together on a company-wide project involving e-mail campaigns, and Dulski is Bethell’s mentor in Change.org’s women’s leadership program.

“I know she’ll tell me what she really thinks, and when there’s a problem, she’ll challenge me to fix it,” says Bethell. Even when Dulski

Pictured: Jennifer Dulski ’93, MBA ’99, president and chief operating officer at Change.org
offers a critique, she empowers. "If I have a crazy idea, she will find the nicest and most productive way to tell me that it’s crazy and give me an avenue for finding a better solution."

Another coaching strategy Dulski employs is to focus on what makes each team member unique. When she arrived at Change.org, one of her first concerns was to form one-on-one relationships.

“I have a philosophy that great companies are built by great people,” she says. “I always try to get to know the individuals on the team — what motivates them, what their natural talents are, what areas they’re struggling in, and where are the places I can help them to be more successful.”

One tool that tells her what makes people tick is the “motivational pie chart.” Team members use the chart to define the incentives they care about most, whether equity, money, greater responsibility, public thank-yous, or other rewards.

“When you get these from five or ten people, they’re all different,” says Dan Visnick, senior marketing manager at Google Shopping, who reported to Dulski in several roles at Yahoo and The Dealmap. Dulski tunes in to the diversity among the people she leads, he says. “She tailors her style to the individual.”

In addition, the charts show that certain motivations are universal — for example, the desire to understand how one’s work promotes the company’s broader mission. She uses those aspirations as well. “You lean into those things that are consistent across people,” Dulski says. “And then you stretch people out to the edges of the things they’re each good at.”

**BE NEIGHBORLY**

While she makes the most of diverse skills and interests, Dulski also sets great store by communal values. At The Dealmap, she led an effort to define a sort of “Ten Commandments” to guide the company’s activities, Thota says. “‘Be neighborly’ was number one. ‘Move fast’ was number two. ‘Go an extra mile’ was number three.” Employees at The Dealmap checked everything they did against that list, to make sure the company always honored its principles.

Soon after she joined Change.org, Dulski led a similar effort to articulate a set of company values. The group drew up seven: “We think big.” “We embrace openness.” “We serve with passion.” “We demand excellence.” “We offer solutions.” “We love and understand.” “We take fun seriously.”

When it came time to introduce the list, instead of just announcing the results, Dulski asked people to stand up and explain how different members of the organization exemplified each of the values, says Levy. “We had the entire company inspired by these individuals who are living the values and thus showing us the importance of living and breathing them every day.”

**Why “.org”?**

Despite its name, Change.org is not a nonprofit organization. It’s a certified benefit (B) corporation, a class of companies that may make a profit while also working to benefit society and the environment. Change.org provides an open platform where any individual or group can launch a petition free of charge. It also carries sponsored petitions, created by advertisers — mostly nonprofits — and presents those causes to people who are likely to take an interest, based on their past activity on the site.

One of the toughest aspects of coaching the Change.org team is the fact that its members reside in 18 offices around the world. “We work really hard to be a truly global company, rather than an American company with global offices,” Dulski says. It’s important to understand how each region’s culture affects the way people work together, she says. Collaborating across time zones and languages is challenging as well.

To reduce the sense of distance, Change.org holds an annual, all-company retreat. “There’s a lot of work, and there’s also a lot of play,” Dulski says. “We do musical theater and talent shows in the evening, and that helps build the bonds among global colleagues.”

Dulski didn’t invent the retreat. But she embraced the tradition with the same verve she brings to every new challenge, says Bethell. “She got up and sang with the CEO in front of the entire company. She just jumped all the way in.”

One of the happiest rewards Dulski gains from her coaching is the frequent chance to celebrate victories that users achieve on Change.org. Each day, some ten or 20 petitions convince the powers that be to take action — installing a traffic light on a busy corner, for instance, or freeing an innocent man from prison, or welcoming gay youth into the Boy Scouts.

“You come into work, and no matter what challenges you might be facing, hundreds of thousands of people around the world are winning something that day because of your platform,” Dulski says. “You realize a direct connection to the fact that your work is worthwhile.”