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SPECIAL ISSUE WOMEN IN MARKETING

PRINCIPLES OF PROMOTION

Nairi Tashjian Hourdajian
reveals what it takes
to build a brand

**PLUS CHANGING
THE FACE OF BUSINESS
WITH ANNA
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Christine Amirian

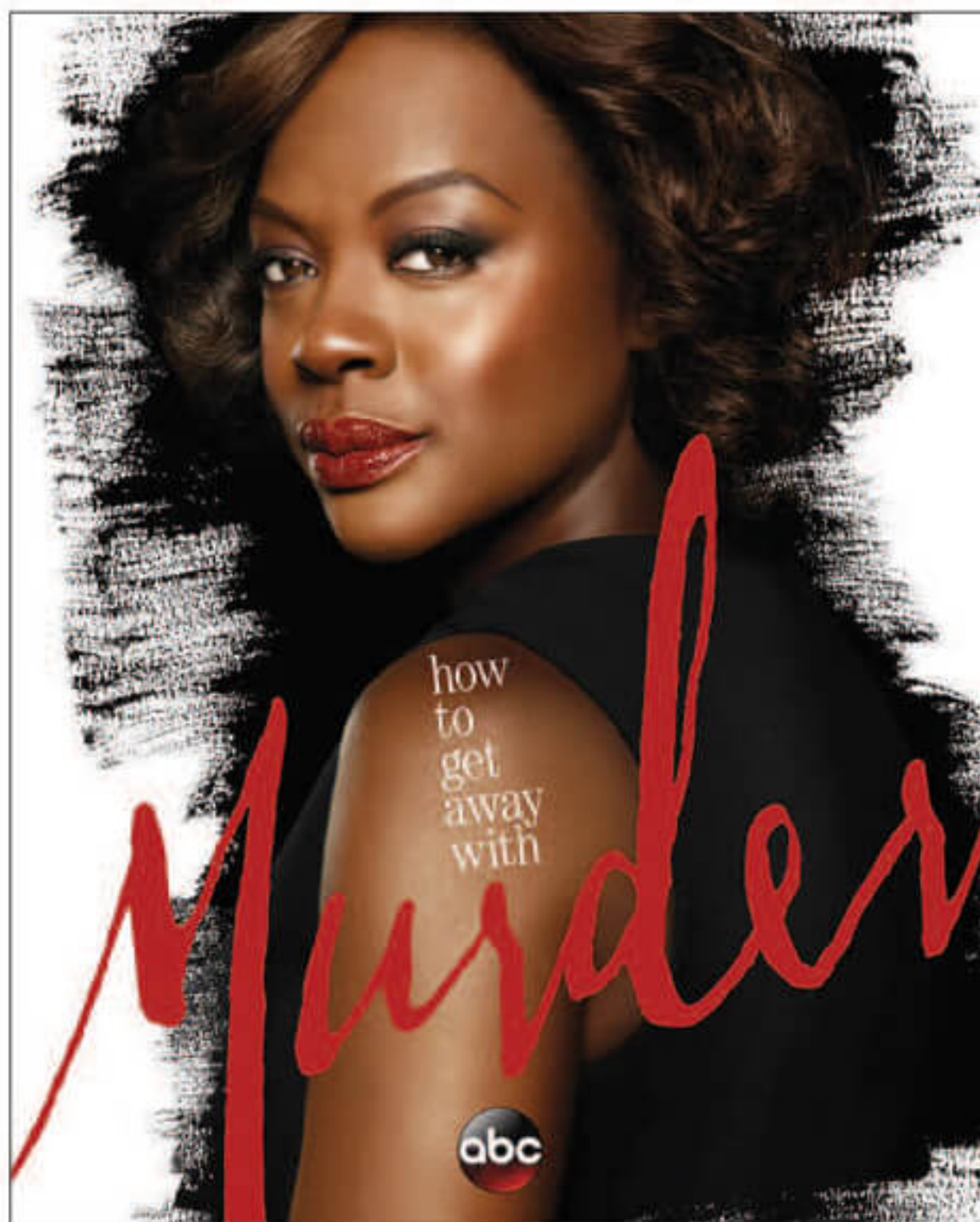
Profession: VP, Client Development and Communications
Company: Disney-ABC Television Group
Location: New York, NY

The advent of television has just celebrated its 85th birthday and, with the rise of digital technology, there has never been a more exciting time to be in the business. Online streaming services, digital video recorders (DVRs), and the proliferation of mobile phones, tablets, iPads, and laptops have changed the television landscape, forcing networks to rethink how to quantify the popularity of their shows and how to reach viewers in more creative ways. This transformational change has only made Christine Amirian's job more enthralling.

In December 2016 Amirian joined Disney's American Broadcasting Company (ABC) as the vice president of client development and communications. At the ABC headquarters in New York, she heads a team that—among many other projects—studies the evolving habits of American television-watching. "There are so many options now for people to watch on their own schedules. However, even with all the changes in *when* we watch, people still respond to the same thing: quality shows. What I like so much about ABC is how our programming reflects the reality of the complex population in the United States. ABC shows like *Modern Family* with its multi-dimensional gay characters, *Speechless* with a special-needs child, or *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder* with African American women as leads illustrate the progressive bent of the network. I wish we didn't need to applaud inclusivity, but this kind of diversity on television is unfortunately still rare."

While Amirian is relatively new to the media industry, she is far from a novice in the marketing world. With over 30 years of experience to her name, Amirian has built and executed marketing strategies for some of the world's top companies, including Kraft, Samsung and Panasonic. Over her career, she has worked on worldwide marketing partnerships for blockbusters like *Avatar* and *Jurassic World*, launched Panasonic television and camera brands in the United States; and oversaw the rise of the US Samsung brand rank from #17 to #7 in four years.

"Marketing is for the intellectually curious above all," says Amirian. "It's a matter of wanting to understand people and what makes them act. Figuring out what will make a person buy a five-dollar cup of coffee over a one-dollar cup of coffee that they



admit is just as good is the kind of mystery that marketing helps to solve. You never know what is going to happen next."

Working with international companies has taken the New York native around the world and back again—from the Czech Republic to Lebanon, from Japan to Ven-

workers were ecstatic to find out that I was Armenian. They gave me a very special kind of warm welcome that I don't think I would have gotten otherwise."

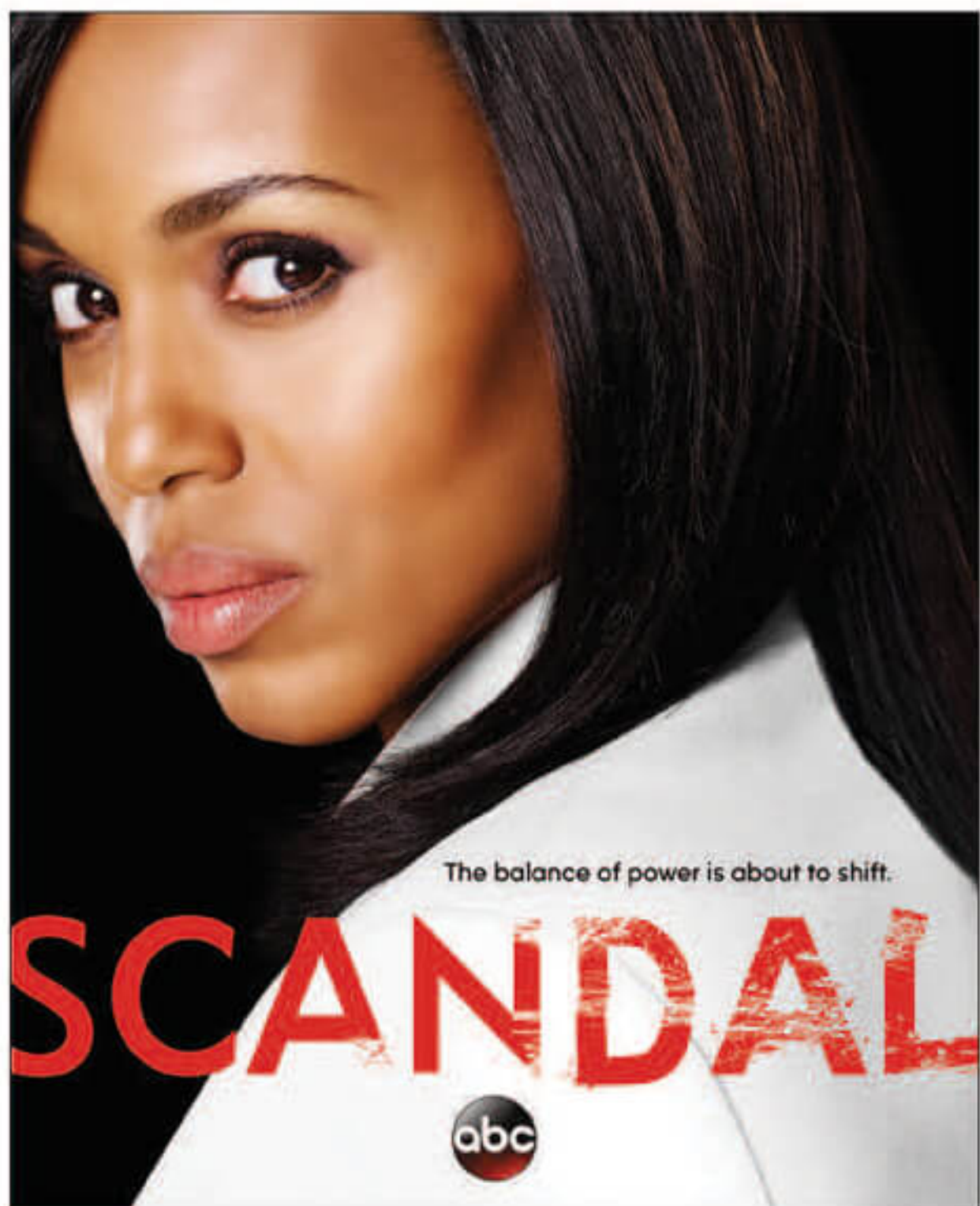
While Christine was working at Kraft, she had the chance to take an assignment based in Vienna, but working primarily

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ezeuela—and has given her a chance to see how Armenians are perceived in different corners of the globe. "Being Armenian abroad has always been a huge benefit. The Middle East, in particular, was a breeze culturally. There were so many commonalities! I remember in Beirut, in particular, my co-

with an Istanbul-based Turkish team. "I remember being torn about taking the assignment, but I kept hearing my grandmother's voice in my head, telling me not to compromise my career and let the past dictate my future. I ended up taking the post and I'm very glad I did, because it gave me

modern family



the chance to get to know some Turkish colleagues very well. I hadn't spent any time with Turkish people growing up, so this was really the first time I had a chance to get to know the people and culture as they are today. There was a bit of tension at first, but honestly, the person who was kindest to me while I was in Vienna was a Turkish co-worker. We shared a desk and an office and I found that we had very similar values. It was definitely a learning experience. I was surprised to see that so much was familiar. He used to hang up the phone with a 'bayde, bye,' just like I had heard at home. And when I went to Istanbul on business, the restaurants were like stepping into my grandmother's kitchen."

Long before she had launched her high-powered career and began jet-setting around the world, she was a camper at AGBU Camp Nubar, spending her summers swimming in Lake Arax, battling it out in Color War and building friendships that she still treasures today. "My sister and I started going to Camp Nubar in 1973. I loved my time there and I feel it helped round out my Armenian identity. It sounds corny, but I felt very much at home there

and some of my closest friends to this day are my fellow campers."

Amirian's role at Camp Nubar grew with her. Over the years, she was a camper, a counselor-in-training, and finally a junior counselor the summer before she left to study economics at Columbia University. "There have been moments, though, where skills I learned at camp come rushing back. One time while my husband and I were traveling through Thailand, our car malfunctioned and we needed water to cool down the brakes. I saw a roadside well, sprang into action and starting pumping water like I had learned at camp so many years before. I definitely shocked my husband, who had always thought of me as a city slicker!"

This past summer, Amirian and her husband, Joe Halajian, decided to send their 11-year-old daughter Arpineh to AGBU Camp Nubar to have the same experience that Amirian had enjoyed as a child and young adult. "Camp is a great way to learn to get along with people in close quarters and in a new environment. You become close with people who share your heritage, but who are not exactly like you. When I

The balance of power is about to shift.

SCANDAL



"ABC shows like *Modern Family*, *Speechless*, *Scandal*, or *How to Get Away with Murder* illustrate the progressive bent of the network," says Amirian.

was growing up in a bilingual home, it definitely taught me compassion. Everyone in our extended family spoke multiple languages and many spoke with accented English. I remember my father telling me: 'Just remember, anyone speaking to you in an accent probably knows one more language than you do.' Now, as a result of that foundation, I find that it is much easier to flex between cultures. I can empathize with the difficulties of navigating between languages and cultures and try to bridge that gap whenever and however I can."

This philosophy lies at the heart of Amirian's secret to success in her career. "People—no matter where in the world you are—respect, remember and want to work with those who are kind to them. Whether in marketing or any other industry, a little kindness will get you far."