Hometown: Bloomfield Township, Michigan
Education: Bachelor’s degree in public policy studies from Duke University; master’s degree in business administration from the Sloan Program
Career: Schlichting is the CEO of Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan’s second largest health system. Before she came to Detroit, she held leadership positions in several other health systems across the country, including serving as president of the Eastern Region of Catholic Health Initiatives and CEO of Riverside Methodist Hospitals.

Two experiences in Nancy Schlichting’s childhood piqued her interest in hospitals. When she was five years old, she was a patient at Akron Children’s Hospital, and there was an entire day when she did not get to see her parents. And later, when she was 11, her mother was seriously ill and hospitalized for a month, and Schlichting was never allowed to visit her.

“Both of those experiences were pretty negative, but they illustrate policies hospitals had at the time,” she said. “They always troubled me, and I think this is what prompted my interest in the way hospitals work.”

Schlichting initially wanted to be a doctor but learned that it wasn’t for her after spending some time working in an emergency room as an undergraduate. “I passed out every time I was there!” she said.

That’s when she got the idea to work on the administrative side. After finishing her undergraduate degree, Schlichting worked for a year at Duke Hospital and then decided to attend graduate school. She chose the Sloan program, she said, because of its strong grounding in the business aspects of health administration and its broad perspective.

“Roger Battistella [the program’s director at the time] always made us feel like we were looking at the big picture,” she said.

“It wasn’t just about running a hospital—it was about quality and access and everything else that goes along with it. I still keep that in mind today.”

Schlichting said the Sloan Program also provided her with invaluable practical experience through an internship at Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York.

“It was only my second week on the job, and I was given an opportunity to be the administrator on call,” Schlichting said. “The duty required making decisions about any problems that arose—from a leaky pipe to legal issues with patients. “That was absolutely the launching point of my career,” she said. “It really gave me the confidence to make decisions and be a leader.”

Today, she leads a $3.7 billion nonprofit health system with an awareness of all of the lessons of her past—from her childhood experiences to her education in the Sloan Program.

“The connections I’ve made through Sloan and the friendships I’ve formed are extraordinary,” she said. “It’s really been a gift in my life.”

“I was always impressed with how personal the program was. When I was being recruited, I received phone calls and they made me feel like a real person, not like a number. Over the years, they’ve been great at reaching out and making me still feel like part of the program.”