

# TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Following a strong family work ethic Dr Sylvia Ramirez is a business woman with determination and an example of how hard work really does pay off. Having spent most of her career working for non-profit organisations we were keen to find out what makes this business woman tick. Here she talks to us about her career path, how she has been inspired by her family and the advice she'd give to young entrepreneurs.

Words > Joanne Jeyes

**D**r Sylvia Ramirez grew up amongst doctors so it was no surprise that she felt a calling into the medical profession. Originally from the Philippines her grandparents set up and owned a hospital and her father and aunts and uncles were all part of the medical world too. Dr Ramirez cites her dad as 'her hero' and the reason she fell in love with medicine.

After first earning a degree in medicine and public health as well as dermatology, Ramirez went on to study business, before opening Cutis Medical Laser clinics.

## Who were your inspirations?

I was inspired by my family's ethics of hard work and integrity, I looked up to my father as my hero. As a trauma surgeon and Dean of a medical school in the Philippines, he taught me the importance of having an education and career which instilled in me a sense of confidence.

## Tell us about your career path and how it changed?

After finishing my education I worked as a medical researcher at NUS and then left to work within a non-profit consultancy job in the US. Whilst there I chaired major projects for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – which aimed to improve quality of life for patients suffering from chronic illnesses. I also served as project director for a number of health policy projects in the States. Despite the fact that lack of funds certainly made research tough I wanted to

make a difference in peoples lives. I then became a regional trainer for Cutera Inc after training in aesthetic medicine and completing a dermatology degree. I was also a principal investigator for an international study in 19 countries looking at improving practice patterns in providing chronic disease care.

Now, I serve as Medical Director for Asia Pacific of one of the largest dialysis companies in the world with a role of improving quality of care in centres across 5 countries - Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, India and China. And of course, I am Medical and Scientific Director of Cutis.

## What challenges have you faced within your particular industry?

When we started out here in Singapore my husband and I had only recently settled, so we did not have a strong support network, and had to start from the ground up. The start-up capital was a further obstacle. The capital outlay needed to purchase expensive laser machines meant that neither of us could quit our full-time jobs and, as a result, we were working long hours to keep the clinic going.

I continued to work as a consultant for a pharmaceutical company and I regularly contributed scientific articles to peer-reviewed journals and wrote medical literature.

## What do you enjoy most about your job now?

I love the fact that I get to meet many people from different parts of the world, something I hadn't had the opportunity to do previously. More importantly, I get to see the difference I make in people's lives. While treating people, I have the opportunity to interact with them, learn more about them and help them with their problems. I feel that I've grown a lot more by taking care of people, and this is really the arena in which I am comfortable.

## What advice would you offer entrepreneurs?

My advice for entrepreneurs is not to listen to conventional advice that you've got to give up your job to focus fully on starting your business. I found this piece of advice to be very impractical and I advise entrepreneurs not to do so until their

business takes flight. No doubt it'll be relatively tough in the beginning, but you should only give up your job when your business is stable. Otherwise, you'll have nothing to fall back on.

Also, the key to successful business doesn't solely lie on your educational background. You don't necessarily need an MBA to be successful in business. You need the support of the people that care for you and someone to turn to for encouragement when things get tough.

So, if you have a great idea for a business venture and you have people around you to offer support when you need it, then don't let anything to stop you from setting up your business - just go for it. The rewards of being an entrepreneur far outweigh the challenges.

## What are your tips for keeping a business running smoothly and effectively?

We always focus on our core principles of safety, results, and value.

Our overriding philosophy is that patient-centred outcomes are the priority. The patient is at the centre of the treatment plan, and we are very committed to delivering the best that we can do. We believe that this emphasis on patient care has helped us gain integrity and credibility in a highly competitive market.

The best source of new customers are happy customers who refer their friends to use our services. We are very focused on providing excellent service that ensures high customer satisfaction which in turn helps us as we rely on word of mouth to generate new customers.

## How do you feel running a business for profit is different to working for non profit?

I am not so much concerned with the for profit and non profit aspect when being involved in an organisation. In both instances, the key for me is to improve the experience and outcome for patients - whether these are dialysis or aesthetic patients. It is also important to know which aspects are better done by other professionals, which is why I am much less involved in the financial aspect of our business.



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