

WOMEN IN AESTHETICS BY WENDY LEWIS



Get to know Cynthia Rager, President & COO of Vision Medical, Inc./SmartGraft®

Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, Cynthia Rager's rise to become the co-owner of a high-tech breakthrough brand was, some might say, a *fait accompli*. She was raised to be an independent thinker and was never one to sit back and relax. With a few successful spa and medspa ventures under her belt, coupled with a passion for product development, venturing into the medical device sector seems like a natural fit.

Wendy Lewis talked with Cynthia to learn about her unique path to be at the helm of SmartGraft, a global hair restoration technology platform, and her plans for the future.

WL: WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR MENTORS THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

Cynthia: My career has taken an interesting path of experiences, each of which I feel helped to lay a strong foundation for where I am today. I utilized strong networking with peers for insights, ranging from other women in medical aesthetics to physician friends and business owners. When I started out in the 1980s, peer female business owners and practitioners were hard to find. Even then, we were not given the same respect nor afforded the same opportunities as our male counterparts. I relied on family members for

support and resources. My parents were entrepreneurs, so I learned self-motivation, a strong work ethic, and picked up the art of multi-tasking and assessed risk-taking at an early age. I am one of seven children, and we were well represented in many areas: physicians and nurses, accountants and attorneys, and a PhD in economics. We all offered support and mentoring to each other.

WL: HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START IN THE AESTHETICS FIELD?

Cynthia: I started from the ground up in Florida by opening my first spa in 1986. I was a licensed aesthetician and started working with physicians and surgeons on postoperative care. I had previously been working with cosmetics and skincare in the role of an Image Consultant, and I found that I had a passion for developing products. After I sold my first business, I became a partner in a practice with a young plastic surgeon who was just starting out. Together we built a successful clinical aesthetics practice. I continued my foray into product development, going back to university to bolster my knowledge of chemistry for the formulation component. I subsequently opened a medspa that combined anti-aging medicine with aesthetics in 1996, and we grew to have two physician directors, a Nurse Practitioner, seven aestheticians, and a team of massage therapists.

A few years later, I purchased property and started another venture in green manufacturing of skincare and cosmetics, which was then in its infancy. I later sold both companies, and took a partner position with Vision Medical while the company was just starting in R&D. With SmartGraft, I have been able to put my medical aesthetics, product development, and manufacturing experience to good use.

I also enjoy working with our physician partners to grow their own hair restoration practices, because I understand their challenges.

WL: WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE RISING STARS IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Cynthia: Aesthetics is an industry with rapid global development, and it is a field where women can advance. Create your own opportunities and back them up with education, strong leadership skills, and up-to-date research. I like to use the term "pivot," meaning be flexible and don't be afraid to step off your path. In the digital age we are in, not reaching out for mentoring help makes no sense. Women have to help each other to succeed.

WL: HOW WOULD YOUR COLLEAGUES DESCRIBE YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?

Cynthia: I think they would say that I always try to find the best path forward no matter how dense the jungle, and that I help foster growth and productivity. I have a great team and trust their judgment, so I allow them to be empowered and take some risks. I believe in creating an inclusive team environment with open lines of communication, so everyone has a seat at the table. This strategy has worked for me to develop bonds of loyalty throughout my career. One of my senior managers says that I steer the ship as well as row the boat with them, and I consider that to be a compliment!

WL: NAME A QUOTE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PHILOSOPHY.

Cynthia: "The things that excite you are not random. They are connected to your purpose. Follow them."
 "Act as IF (then figure it out)."
 "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." ■