



WOMEN IN NATURALS: LEADERSHIP HER WAY

By Karen Howard,
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The panel:



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When we speak of the natural health and products industry, it is often referred to as a mission-driven industry that seeks to improve the underlying health status of the country's men, women and children. It is an industry with a rich history that was birthed long before the organic standard was created, and it has thrived to embrace the health of the planet and truly regenerative practices. Some of the earliest pioneers were women.

Braggs Amino Acids was founded in 1912, and Paul Bragg's daughter, Patricia, served as CEO of the company for more than 60 years. Margaret and Philip Isley launched Natural Grocers in 1955 with \$200. Sandy Gooch was a teacher when she became gravely ill from a food additive in diet soda. Her illness led to a collaborative research initiative with her father and the determination that it was the food supply chain, short on nutrients and long on contaminants, that was making her sick. She quit her teaching job and invested all her savings to open the first Mrs. Gooch's in West Los Angeles in 1977. Her standards and product audits became known as "Goochable." While I cannot identify who

the first female executive in the dietary supplement space was, these are three women who paved the way for the amazing corporate executives featured in this article.

Decades later, the dietary supplement industry is now valued at more than \$58 billion. And the industry's non-financial value? It has maintained surprising consistency when it comes to a commitment to health and wellness. Quality, integrity, transparency, and now regenerative, are banner standards for the most reputable and successful companies in the industry. Supply chain integrity, including testing methodologies, ingredient identity and environmental stewardship are being carefully tended to by the quality companies in our industry. Our featured women leaders are stewards of those values in their companies. Yet, decades after the industry's feisty, homegrown and often female led beginnings, there is still a dearth of women at the top of these companies. This, despite the fact that 78 percent of all women take dietary supplements.

What does it take to be a successful woman in charge and inside our industry today? In interviews with seven incredibly passionate, financially successful and highly respected female leaders, I learned much about the power of our industry to attract talented humans that are affecting true change. In this article, they share their stories and the lessons learned to ensure continued success and professional growth for the women in our industry. It is clear their perspectives and ability to successfully monetize their passion is what will propel this industry and its effort to transform personal health status, and potentially health policy, for millions more people around the planet.

The Journeys

These women reflect the world we live in. They are tech experts, investment bankers, scientists, product developers, marketers, and one is a practitioner. Many are mothers, all are entrepreneurs. Several were born in the U.S., while others are from other countries. They cannot be defined with a series of checkboxes. That said, they are consistent in their expression of the work as deeply personal, and they are passionate about the work itself. I assert the combination of these expressions are profoundly impacting public health and the health of our industry.

Annie Eng founded HP Ingredients Corporation 20 years ago. Prior to founding HP, she was named the youngest Top-10 producer and new account openers for 10 consecutive years at Gruntal & Co., one of the oldest independent investment banking houses in the U.S. She is also an ordained

minister, spiritual teacher, songwriter and musician.

Marlene Hurtado-Siegal is president of Ecuadorian Rainforest. The mother of three children (and, she added, 40 employees) emigrated to the U.S. 25 years ago to "chase the American dream," with a deep commitment to raising her children to lead health-conscious lives.

Natasha Dhayagude, CEO and co-founder of Chinova Bioworks is a woman minority from the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) world. Dhayagude was named Startup Canada's Young Entrepreneur of the Year in 2017, and Entrepreneur of the Year in 2019 for co-founding Chinova. She found her passion for the clean-label movement as a consumer, and now serves consumers and brands seeking healthy and sustainable ingredient solutions.



I found it fascinating that in almost every case, the journey into the dietary supplement space, while it may have taken many years, most often was a two-step journey. Leslie Gallo, president of Artemis International, fortuitously met Artemis founder Jan Mills after she moved to New York. She was "looking for more" having completed a successful run leading operations for an Apple-based technology company. She took a leap of faith 18 years ago, and they remain CEO and president to this day. "I never felt like I would have to transition to a different company in order to keep learning, growing and taking on new challenges," stated Gallo. "I think working at a company with a female founder helped in that regard."

Nicole Brown, chief innovation officer at Open Book Extracts, an ingredient manufacturer, product development house and supplier of CBD, also came to us from the tech sector. As Brown noted, there is little difference between being a woman in tech and a woman in cannabis. Less than 40

percent of professionals in the cannabis industry are women. In Brown's words, "We can craft an industry that shifts and dissolves prohibitive social constructs. We can bake gender, fairness, inclusion, responsibility, innovation and sustainability into its core. Let's lead with the idea that biodiversity is healthy."

Brown's comments beg a question. The workplace can be tricky to navigate. When you think of success in the corporate world, it often summons up an old story of a man's rise from the mailroom to the boardroom. Are women leaders different? Do we place enough priority on professional development and promoting women, and perhaps men, up the management ladder? Or, like several of these successful leaders who made the jump to this industry, is it just easier to start your own company?

I turned to Tracey Seipel, ND, president and CEO of Seipel Group with headquarters in Australia for her impressions. Seipel is a naturopath, medical herbalist, clinical nutritionist and diabetes educator. She draws from that expertise in her work as a product formulator and specialist in the healthy aging area. She has won numerous awards for her bladder formulations (The perfect example of a businesswoman with deeply personal and compassionate motives, in this case to support women, as well as children and men, who suffer from poor bladder control).

In Seipel's case, moving from a small corporation where she was well supported to starting her own company was less of a choice and more of an internal drive. As Seipel said, "I knew I had something I wanted to achieve and was not willing to rely on others for the opportunity to realize that achievement. I would not say that it was easier to start my own company, but I do think it was essential in order to fulfill my vision. As a toddler, my grandmother's friends nicknamed me 'The Boss.' I expect they recognized my entrepreneurial drive long before I did." Seipel's entrepreneurial motivations were a common theme for many of our interviewees.

Here are two more entrepreneurial lessons. Hurtado-Siegal knew her quest for the American Dream would be difficult, and that she was entering a man's world. "Regardless, I was taught to take on any opportunity and that the experience, good or bad, was something to be learned from."

Gallo, who was new to the industry, benefited greatly from the confidence and knowledge shared by her partner and mentor, Mills, who also made it clear that while the goal of a business is always to succeed, it is also okay to fail occasionally, because through failure, we learn.



Climbing the Corporate Ladder One Run at a Time

So how might jumping into the entrepreneurial pool differ from that climb up the corporate ladder? Sandra Lee, CEO of NJ Labs shared her perspective. "Moving up the ladder requires patience. It can be cut-throat. The most difficult lesson I learned as I climbed the management ladder was that

Mentorship Advice From the Top

Tracey Seipel, ND

1. Dream big and believe in your abilities.
2. Grow along the journey and don't let challenges stop you but learn from them.
3. Be generous with others.

Nicole Brown

1. Be flexible so that you can move fast and embrace change.
2. Support others.
3. Celebrate the small wins.

Marlene Hurtado-Siegal

1. It's going to be difficult.
2. It's going to take time, a lot of time.
3. You will have moments of failure. Learn from them.

Annie Eng

1. Believe in yourself and your own potential.
2. Have a goal, make a plan to achieve it, and act on it.
3. Always balance your career pursuits with other pursuits, such as spiritual and health, as well as community.

Leslie Gallo

1. Learn through failure.
2. Ask for what you want! Men ask all the time without hesitation.

Sandra Lee

1. Setting boundaries is essential.
2. Mistakes are required for growth.
3. Consistency is key.
4. Make your words have weight.

the journey was not necessarily personal. And, perhaps as a result, honesty and integrity can be undervalued in an industry where men are used to being at the top. For NJ Labs, these values are essential, given that the public trust in testing is the last step in defense for the safety of everyone."

Lee's rise at NJ Labs required her to fight to have a voice. The hours could be inhumane, and she had to overcome issues of privilege while breaking the stereotypes of being young, a single mother, and a woman of color. "Back when I joined NJ Labs," said Lee, "I reported directly to a woman who I learned a great deal from. While incredibly bright, she struggled to balance her business acumen with the right amount of nurturing. I learned that without this balance, staff felt unsure of their future and the company was being pulled in different directions. My experience moving up that ladder enabled me to see beyond the crumbling foundation and re-build our potential."

Lee's experience left me with a deep impression of the many ways women in the workforce can be isolated from opportunity, and essentially stopped from advancing. And yet, Lee's perspective as a woman demonstrates the need to continue to find the way for young women in corporate America. As Lee offered, "Change is the only constant in this world, therefore how we lead our teams should also change and improve. There is never an easy road. True leadership requires sacrifices and the ability to be selfless, at least to a degree. A company never grows unless the leader is willing to set aside their needs and support the rest of the company. We become the rock and foundation that everyone relies upon."

Strategies for Success:

Mentors

As Lee reminded me, "there are no books on how to be a female executive." I suspect none of them have the time to write the book, so I took this opportunity to learn what kinds of strategies these successful women are using, starting with mentorship. Like books written by women leaders, mentors can be a bit in short supply. That said, each of these talented women had wonderful offerings to share, some from their mentors (many of whom are men), others as mentors themselves. Amazingly there was no overlap in their mentoring offerings, with the exception of understanding that mistakes are just opportunities to grow, setting the stage for a full chapter in the upcoming and still unwritten book.

It should not come as a complete surprise that not everyone has access to mentors. It does not come as a surprise to me that this has not hampered the progress of these

women. Dhayagude was quite open about the fact that in the manufacturing industry there were no mentors for her. As a result, she has made it her personal mission to empower other women within her field to rise up and take on leadership roles. Dhayagude has successfully done that within Chinova and through their intentionally designed partnerships with other female-led companies. She understands that her position as a young and successful entrepreneur is part of the larger narrative around discrimination, visible in dealings with investors, clients and experts in the industry who tend to be male. Dhayagude is driven to change that. She has made it her personal mission to "elevate the status of other women and pave the way to reach a more empowered and balanced industry." Dhayagude lives by those words. Chinova's team is 90 percent women in STEM.

When people speak of their mentoring experiences, they reveal a big piece of who they are and want to be in the world. Seipel's most supportive mentor experience was from the traditional path. Hers was a man who began to work with her immediately after graduation. Seipel's experience of being respected and trusted enabled her own self-discovery as her mentor demonstrated how he overcame obstacles. Seipel says his objective was "to lead the way so that I could stand on his shoulders."

While Brown noted a recurrent theme that this industry is like no other she has worked in, the interpretation of that takes many facets. For Brown, it is about the "Wild West" of the CBD regulatory and legal landscape, requiring a unique survival list of practices. Hurtado-Siegal, Eng, Gallo and Lee offer amazing ways to consider how the work can support the ability to both survive and thrive. I will add that Gallo's wise words resonated deeply for me, "Ask for what you want! Men do, all the time, without hesitation." She added, "It's time for women to get much more comfortable saying what they want for themselves and expect from their company." Eng's list also focused on personal goals, with an interesting revelation for me. The use of language as a leadership tool is a common and highly effective strategy used by our leaders.

Language

I will not belabor the fact that men and women are different. I only suggest that the use of a particular language in the workplace as part of the strategic plan, and as a design for communication among teams, might be one of the most powerful tools I see these women using. Enabling consensus and ensuring progress, is less of a process for these women than it is a way of being. It appears



It's only natural, and that's the way we plan on keeping it.

~ Annie Eng, Founder, HPI
Picking Ripe Bergamot In
Italy's Calabria Region

Naturally... when we started in 2001, our founder, Annie Eng, set out to create a company that would not only deliver herbal science for health products that people all over the world could rely upon, but also support the indigenous peoples who provide the raw botanical materials for our ingredients. Annie is the pioneer responsible for bringing Tongkat Ali to the North American dietary supplement industry.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, HP Ingredients – a certified Woman-Owned Company – can now proudly declare itself a vertically based supplier of citrus ingredients – Bergamonte® and CitrusSlim® for a diversity of natural health products. **HP Ingredients** just became a significant shareholder for Herbal & Antioxidant Derivatives (H&AD) of Calabria, Italy, and is responsible for worldwide sales and marketing. H&AD is the leader in manufacturing a patented bergamot polyphenolic extract that is supported by solid research and evidence-based human clinicals.

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Proven Clinical Results... At **HP Ingredients** we work closely with patent-awarded international scientists to provide ongoing clinical research that supports our ingenious formulations and patented ingredients. These botanicals are then used to create some of the most effective nutraceuticals on the market today.

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as a verbal expression of core values that are consistently reflected in their responses to business questions. I have put some of their unique language in quotes below.

Hurtado-Siegal's "experience as a mother" is something she uses in the workplace, and she exemplifies that by creating an environment that "inspires" her staff. In Seipel's international company it is about a "holistic and healthy lifestyle" where there is funding for sports and education, and there is "flexibility" for staff with elderly parents or young children. "Flexibility" is a recurrent theme, along with "nurturing" all employees. Eng encourages lively discussions about "health, family and relationships without judgment." For her, "abundant, positive energy and bonds of reassurance and support" fortifies her company's success. Brown is "passionate" about the cannabis industry hiring more women for their "natural empathy," advising me that Live Science reported females scored significantly higher in terms of empathy based on a study of 47,000 people. More natural empathy equals more value to the team, and more success. Open Book Extracts pays attention to this soft skill in its recruiting.

No doubt there will always be problems in the workplace, and consensus is not always achievable. The use of communication, especially in this more healthy and heartfelt manner may be a cornerstone to the success of these companies. And when there are problems, consider Lee's strategy, "I found that problem solving was most effective when we removed the person from the situation to find the deepest root cause. Problems have layers and when that layer keeps cropping up, there is likely to be an underlying issue that has not been addressed."

What's Next?

Despite all this progress, we know there is more to be done. According to Brown, researchers at Zenger/Folkman found in 2012, and again in 2019, that women score as well or better than men across a broad spectrum of leadership characteristics that measure effectiveness. The conclusion? "Women make highly effective leaders," a fact reinforced in a Goldman and Sachs 2020 report showing that the larger the percentage of women

"Adding a top-down approach by increasing the number of women at the executive level would not only cultivate a more diverse workforce, it would empower women to voice their opinions."

— **Natasha Dhayagude,**
Chinova Bioworks

in management, the better the financial performance of companies. Canada had the foresight to mandate representation, which Dhayagude says has resulted in more women transitioning from entry to mid-level positions. "Adding a top-down approach by increasing the number of women at the executive level would not only cultivate a more diverse workforce," said Dhayagude, "it would empower women to voice their opinions."

Yet, without more women in power we will struggle to address succession planning, salary discrepancy or effective mentoring. As Gallo stated, "We need women leaders

now to focus on mentoring and elevating women to their full potential. After all, men have been promoting men into positions of power without any questions."

Several of our leaders said they believe formal organizations need to be formed for women entrepreneurs, and Seipel suggests these could include a cross-functional mentoring program for junior and senior women to share, perhaps scholarships, and certainly seminars, using female case studies.

"I am delighted to report these conversations are underway, and that we will be sharing all of these viewpoints and engaging stakeholders." As Seipel wisely concluded, "We need to teach women that their voice is valuable and valued. It needs to be acceptable for women to be assertive and listened to in the workplace."

Legacy

I asked our leaders what they hoped for their legacy. The answers were rich, honest and heartfelt. They are legacies that are already changing the industry and the lives of women, and men, not to mention the consumers these women serve. I have created a summary statement of their dreams for you to try on. Feel free to get the alterations required to ensure a good fit.

I hope to leave a legacy that I led from my heart, caring for my employees' dreams, helping to make life better for everyone, and that I never forgot the humbleness of beginning. That I led unafraid of questions or the answers, willing to take risks. That I surrounded myself with the people who could teach me the skills and perspectives I do not know. I hope I enabled the people that I led to find success by leading them to the door they were meant to open. And most of all, I hope I inspired each of them to achieve more than they could have ever dreamed. **NIE**

Extra! Extra!

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about the panelists.



Karen Howard CEO/Executive Director Organic & Natural Health Association, Washington, D.C.

I started my career as a young, bright-eyed committee staffer on Capitol Hill who was in the right place at the right time. My amazing experience on the Hill led me to 15 years of lobbying and consulting in the health care industry. All of the women I worked for toiled to achieve in a male-dominated, often badly behaved, environment. My generation did its level best to support one another professionally and personally. After 9-11, I found my way to what I have always referred to as "real" health care. Alternative medicine, dietary supplements, holistic health approaches, and organic food, have become my world for the past 20 years, eight of which I have served as the CEO and executive director of the Organic & Natural Health Association.

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