

The Most Influential Women in Direct Selling

by Beth Douglass Silcox



Dr. Oi-Lin Chen President and CEO, Sunrider International

Leadership is not just for the extroverted. A shy introvert can learn how to step out from the crowd and be noticed for friendly, professional and patient behavior as well as preparation and communication skills that help form the kinds of relationships necessary for effective leadership.



Role models make the growth into leadership easier, and that's a designation Dr. Oi-Lin Chen gladly assumes for the women at Sunrider International. "You do it first then lead them. Find out the problems and help them, cheer them and recognize them, and then hold hands together to face the challenges," she says.

Back in 1982, Dr. Chen seemed an unlikely leader to those working to form Sunrider. She was in her early 30s, young and a female foreigner with no business management experience. "At the time, I told them, 'I am a medical doctor, and I'm in training to be a leader. I'm really detail-oriented, and I like to serve people. I think I can do it well,'" she remembers.

And Dr. Chen was correct. More than 30 years later, she's learned, "If I fail it doesn't mean that I fail forever. I believe in standing up and facing the challenges. We only fail sometimes because we don't have enough confidence or we don't have enough courage for ourselves. It doesn't mean that women have less talent."

The once introverted leader, with a brain that processes and analyzes at lightning speed, still struggles with things like effective communication and the social responsibilities of her job as President and CEO. She says, "After years of experience, I listen to people and their complaints or comments or suggestions, and I learn. I take a deep breath and think about it before I talk to people. I try to make sure everyone understands, so I try to talk slowly and not talk too much."

When it comes to mentorship, she says, “I cannot say everybody is perfect or gives 100 percent, but if you try your best this is a very good thing for everybody.” This is the attitude she carries forward when reaching out to women in the corporate offices at Sunrider. She uses her own experiences to help women who aspire to executive careers and advises them: “Have good knowledge, go to college, and get a good degree. You don’t have to be so fashionable, but you need to be professional—not too elegant. Remain friendly and humble. Follow the work step-by-step, do well and ask questions.”

Dr. Chen goes on to say, “The thing with any organization, especially nowadays, is to find talent. If I can find somebody good, no matter if they are a man or a woman, different race or different age, it’s all the same to me.”

In fact, Sunrider’s strategic plan for 2014 includes a salesforce recruitment focus. “It’s very important to recruit and attract people to come in. We plan to really focus on recruiting new people, to bring them in and promote them and give our opportunity to more people, especially here in the United States,” she says.

Organizational improvements are also slated for 2014. With operations in some 50 countries, Dr. Chen understands greater use of technology will increase efficiency and recruitment, optimize operations and training, and save the company money. Developing IT may involve strengthening Sunrider’s staff or the use of outside consultants so that a growing Sunrider salesforce is better trained for the future.

“Direct selling really emphasizes the personal touch—to get to know them and be in warm and close contact. It’s very important, and that’s why we plan to travel around the United States this year and bring our new systems and technologies into our company and the field,” Dr. Chen says.

Dr. Oi-Lin Chen on personal development...

“I have to learn from others. If we are stuck in the office, sometimes we don’t know the outside world that well. So I call my friends and my partners regularly and ask them questions about new promotions or what kinds of challenges they are facing. I learn from them. I gather it all together, and this becomes my experience so I can teach other people.”

Sunrider International

Sunrider International was founded in 1982 by Dr. Tei-Fu Chen. His vision was to develop, manufacture, distribute and market the finest health and beauty products through a strong business opportunity that would help people around the world achieve success and financial independence.

Today, Sunrider manufactures more than 400 health and beauty products, including a newly launched weight-management program called Vitalite® and is a diversified global company distributing products in nearly 50 countries and regions.

The company calls Torrance, Calif., home but has offices and manufacturing facilities in multiple countries. Beyond direct selling, Sunrider has franchises, company stores and even luxury hotels.

Through diverse philanthropic efforts in education, health, the arts and environmental causes, Sunrider International is committed to making the world a better place and making a lasting difference in people’s lives.

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