

Melissa Kanchanapoomi Levin, MD



Redefining “It All”

Having it all at once is a myth, Dr. Levin says. Nonetheless, women feel inadequate because they can't accomplish this unattainable goal. “I opened my practice at a relatively early stage in my career, but I also made a personal decision to not have children at this time,” she shares. “I also learned to not do things I don't love, which means outsourcing. We can't do everything.” Her sage advice to other female dermatologists? “Let your career unfold and when you decide to have children or struggle with the demands of motherhood, acknowledge that this will be an interruption and something will have to give.”

>> Manhattan-based dermatologist Melissa Kanchanapoomi Levin, MD opened *Entière Dermatology*, relatively early in her career, which involved hard choices and calculated risks. As an Asian American, female business owner, Dr. Levin also had stereotypes to overcome and learned much in the process.

“Everyone, regardless of gender, age, and ethnicity, face biases,” she says. “My advice to a fellow extroverted and loud Asian American woman is to use your strengths in productive ways by knowing what your goals are, advocating for yourself, and negotiating.”

Dr. Levin is featured in the upcoming second season of *Modern Aesthetics*® magazine's video series, *Ground Up*.

Why is dermatology attractive to women?

Dr. Levin: Many factors go into choosing a specialty and it's completely individualized, whether you are a man or a woman. I gravitated towards procedural specialties, but I also loved being a diagnostician and having long-term relationships with my patients. My mother encouraged dermatology after knowing my interest in skin for multiple reasons—the multi-faceted aspect of dermatology (procedural, general medical, dermatopathology, pediatrics, and surgical), the ability to construct a work-life balance, and the aesthetics side. Many women have child-rearing responsibilities; there is more ability to construct a work-life

balance with certain medical specialties, particularly dermatology.

Women like to confide in other women. The overwhelming majority of patients undergoing aesthetics procedures remains women. Aging can be a vulnerable experience. Our ability, as women, to relate to and understand a woman's experience and perspective of aging and beauty is uniquely female.

How did your family support you?

Dr. Levin: My parents are both physicians and started their own practice 30 years ago. While medicine has drastically changed, they understand the pressures, responsibilities, and joys of being physicians and business owners. My family has been incredibly supportive not only of my decision to be a physician but especially a practice owner. I think the most valuable support they give is something that seems very basic—listening and offering guidance and perspective. I have a unique balance between my parents and husband. My husband is in finance and previously was in management consulting and the military.

What lessons have you learned as a female business owner?

Dr. Levin: Find your peer group and share your experiences. I've developed close relationships with other dermatologist business owners; we share our struggles, successes, advice, and clinical and management questions with each other

regularly. Sometimes private practice can be lonely; being open and supportive with colleagues makes a difference.

Multi-task, but compartmentalize. As a physician business owner, you wear so many hats at once, but developing the practice of compartmentalizing clinical, management, human resources, staffing, inventory, financial, legal, research, and media responsibilities is necessary.

Look at your numbers. This is something my husband instilled in me early on. As physicians, we naturally focus primarily on clinical responsibilities. It is what we took an oath on and it's our career. Once you sign on to become a business owner, you have two roles. It's necessary and important to look at the financial status and health of your business on a regular basis.

Managing your team takes practice. Creating a strong team dynamic in a small practice takes constant work. I look at it like relationships. You need to regularly invest, check in, and nurture. Invest in your staff. Understand what motivates them and create clear short- and long-term goals for each individual staff and the team as a whole.

Did you have mentors along the way? What did they teach you?

Dr. Levin: Of course! I wouldn't be anything without my mentors. One of the biggest lessons I learned is the importance of developing emotional resilience. Emotions are needed for survival, so we respond to danger. In this modern age, at work, we don't face physical threats but rather constant cognitive threats with verbal and non-verbal attacks. Physician business owners must reflect on their emotional reactions and how to use them constructively for themselves, patients, and the team. ■

Read more from Dr. Levin online at PracticalDermatology.com.