

Leadership Lessons during Lockdown

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STUDY DESCRIPTION

Sextech, femtech, women's health—regardless of the descriptor—is challenging. The barriers have been well-documented—challenges with fundraising for women-owned businesses, specific obstacles for fundraising for women's sexual health businesses, especially those focused on pleasure and satisfaction, and lack of access to media channels.

But despite the hurdles or maybe because of the hurdles, the progress that has been accomplished feels even sweeter. In Rachel's book, *orgasmic leadership: Profiting from the coming surge in women's sexual health and wellness*, she interviewed over 3 dozen academics, HCPs, and entrepreneurs, about the trials, tribulations, travesties, and triumphs experienced in building businesses in new and challenging categories. The leaders who choose female sexual health demonstrate a number of unique and special qualities that drive them, motivate them and catalyze their successes. They bring experience in other categories, drive, intellect, creative problem-solving, resilience, and endurance among others. Many have translated personal pain and problems into unique solutions and ultimately businesses. Some had searing painful experiences of struggling with menopause, or fertility. Others overcame lack of understanding or limited or no education about their own bodies and sexual enjoyment.

In the context of those challenges and successes, ups and downs of business, the entire world has been hit with COVID-19. Working from home, sheltered in place, closure of gyms, stores, malls, hotels, airports, parks, illness all of these conditions create even more challenging circumstances for all businesses in general, and for women's health specifically. Once it became clear that lockdown was creating a new reality, Rachel Braun Scherl wanted to learn about how some of these business warriors were responding personally and professionally during this period.

Since the beginning of April 2020, Rachel has conducted interviews with over 40 leaders (and counting) in the space as part of a learning and education series titled, "Quotes from Quarantine". The participants include entrepreneurs, sexual health educators, investors, event planners, and podcast hosts. Their products and

services include pleasure products, tracking apps, workshops, options for sexual health disease prevention, and makers of menstrual health products, among others. Leaders of important companies in the space were included. Some of them are names that have become familiar and others are still aggressively building awareness.

Aunt flo, Bloomlife, Dame, Electra health, Femtech collective, Support the girls, O-school, Proov, rosy, Unbound, Watkins-conti, Women of wearables.

What characterizes these leaders—regardless of their particular focus in the space—is their optimism in the face of obstacles, high hopes in the face of hysteria. While not untouched by the ravages of the pandemic on businesses, funding, families, hospitals and communities, they are looking for and finding opportunities to retrench and reinvent. As a group, leaders in femtech, sextech and women's health are turning lemons into lemonade. Take the menstrual health product company who has taken the opportunity during COVID-19 to use their manufacturing know-how to make safety equipment for front line workers. Or the leader of a female pleasure company who has capitalized on her relationships and understanding of supply chain to match those who need supplies with those who have them. Or the sexual health educator who overnight was able to migrate her in person, tactile, interactive sessions to meaningful online sessions. They spend hours a day answering questions via e-mail, text, phone—any way customers want and need to reach out. And as one might imagine, not all of the questions are about the products or services they provide. Some need a friendly voice, an understanding ear and a human connection.

Undaunted, the community of female sexual health leaders, problem-solvers and thinkers continue to launch new products, unveil new programs or chest rate new events and move the conversation forward. It is clear that these unprecedented times will require extraordinary leaders. And the executives and thought leaders in the space continue to demonstrate that they will survive, thrive, adjust and adapt—continuing to provide valuable products and solutions for women's sexual and reproductive health.

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