



Get to Know Brenda Wu, President & CEO, Topix Pharmaceuticals

**B**renda Wu earned her stellar reputation in the skincare and beauty sector with diverse experiences across four brands—SkinCeuticals, Giorgio Armani Beauty, Lancome, and Kiehl’s—while at L’Oreal.

In late 2018, Ms. Wu joined Topix Pharmaceuticals as President and CEO. Ms. Wu has a dual role in her new venture, also serving as President and CEO of DERMA E, a natural eco-ethical skincare brand that Topix acquired in 2018.

These days, she is overseeing overall strategy, all aspects of revenue and profit growth, including R&D, new product development, sales and marketing, operations and strategic corporate development for these two diverse and innovative companies. Additionally, the group acquired the spa brand ClarityRx earlier this year.

Wendy Lewis talked with her about how she got to where she is today.

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

**Brenda:** I am very fortunate that my parents have always been strong mentors to me. My father is a practicing physician and has always led through an example of hard work, dedication to his patients, being present and engaged no matter what stressors lurked, and being exceptionally humble and seeking to live a life of learning. My mother is a registered nurse and shows great care in every interaction with her patients and family. I’ve always been inspired by their example and have sought to embody a strong work ethic, caring for patients and consumers first, being present despite life’s inevitable challenges, and

# WOMEN IN AESTHETICS

BY WENDY LEWIS

having a voracious appetite for continuous learning and improvement.

I had many mentors in my 13 years at L’Oreal. One who stands out is Mike Larrain, the former CEO of PCA Skin, who took an active interest in coaching me to develop my strengths and had the courage to help me identify and build up areas in which I had opportunities. I learned from his example about the power of empathy and connection.

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

**Brenda:** I have always been drawn to aesthetic fields, whether it was partnering with my design team as a merchant at Banana Republic or working with creative teams at Kiehl’s, Lancome, and Giorgio Armani Beauty. I was inspired by the simultaneously exceptionally aesthetically creative and very meticulous approach of Mr. Giorgio Armani himself.

I first worked in the medical aesthetics field when I led SkinCeuticals. I am excited to work even more closely with the medical community as CEO & President of Topix. I am energized by the opportunity to provide highly efficacious formulas that deliver real skin health and beauty benefits to patients and that also uniquely support our medical partners’ brand and practice growth goals.

**WL: WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE RISING STARS?**

**Brenda:** My advice is the same as to any other rising professional: always focus on driving tangible results for patients or consumers and company.

Women make up the majority of consumers for the beauty, skincare, and medical aesthetic markets, yet women are still in the minority in leadership roles in these industries. The reasons for this are complex and deeply rooted, although I see and try to shepherd changes in policies and societal attitudes that will help enable women for success. I would

advise women seeking advancement to ask how they can best maximize their firsthand knowledge of and passion for beauty products and services. These industries are dynamic and fast growing, but crowded with options. The ability to translate not just data, but also personal insights into delivering tangibly better results for patients and consumers is a very powerful and differentiated enabler.

**WL: HOW WOULD YOUR COLLEAGUES DESCRIBE YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?**

**Brenda:** I have always sought to embody a style that is inspirational and empowering, with clear, consistent communication, and to lead by example. Leading through inspiration and motivation is more effective in the long run and more natural to me than leading by fear, politicking, or micromanagement. I have always sought to empower my teams, to overtly link their success to my success, and consistently try to be one step ahead in seeing obstacles to come and removing these obstacles for my teams. Communication is key; it is easy for intent and meaning to get lost, so I seek to consistently communicate in a variety of ways—in person, through images, and in thorough but consistent and concise words.

**WL: NAME A QUOTE OR QUOTES THAT BEST DESCRIBE YOUR PHILOSOPHY.**

**Brenda:** I have always been so inspired by the words of Maya Angelou. As a marketing director at Kiehl’s, I campaigned to have Maya Angelou work with us as she embodied both internal and external beauty. While she lived a life with great challenges, she maintained an air of optimism and wisdom.

One of my favorite quotes of hers is, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.” I think those wise words are applicable to our industry and to life more broadly. ■