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Vivek Dhawan:
Help People Stay Healthy
as Long as They Live

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Help People Stay Healthy as Long as They Live

Story by James R Haft

Vivek Dhawan, the founder, CEO and Chief Coach of Mega We care, is today seen as a visionary entrepreneur in the pharmaceutical, supplement and wellness industry. Recently, he invited the *Elite+* team to his beautiful home on a hilltop in Muak Lek to share his experiences, knowledge and commitment to “Help People Stay Healthy as Long as They Live” by promoting “Good Health by Yourself”, particularly, through the Wellness We care Center just down the hill that he helped to establish.

We began our interview with Vivek telling us something of his background and education. “I was born and grew up in India, moving to different locals around the country every three or four years as my father, who was a chemical engineer, was employed to build new chemical factories. Then, in 1977, he was sent to Thailand to expand business and establish new chemical manufacturing facilities here. I followed a year later and enrolled in Ruamrudee International School where I finished my secondary school studies. As my father was an engineer, it was expected I would become one, too. I then returned to India where I earned a Bachelor’s in Mechanical Engineering at Delhi College of Engineering, now known as Delhi Technological University. Upon graduation, I returned to Thailand, but my heart was set on continuing my studies in the US. Before I could do this though, my father wanted me to marry to be sure I would come back after I completed my course, and so a marriage was arranged with the daughter of another Indian family, close friends of my own, as was the custom. While I knew my wife, Rashi, we weren’t yet in love, which did happen over time. After this, I travelled to Carbondale, Illinois, where I spent the next two years studying for and earning an MBA at Southern Illinois University. Then, I spent some time travelling around America and Europe before returning to Thailand to begin my career.”

So, what was your first job?

Well, you must understand that my father always dreamed of having his own company, something to build and leave to his children. So, in 1986, he formed a joint venture with a Thai Indian family, the Shah, who were involved in trading, but wanted to diversify into manufacturing. They, then, provided the major portion of capital while my father invested what he could and brought his invaluable expertise, becoming the managing director of this enterprise. Among their assets was a small soft gelatin manufacturer with two machines and 10 employees located in Bangphu, Samut Prakarn, and my father asked me if I wanted to work there. I knew nothing about the pharmaceutical industry. Remember, I was a





mechanical engineer and recent MBA graduate, but I went and had a look and thought, Okay. And now, I can honestly say that this was the beginning of my journey to where I am today.

How did this venture evolve?

The company, as I said, was quite small and was losing money. And while I knew something about machinery, there was a lot more we had to consider to produce a top quality product that we could sell. This meant we needed to procure the best materials and ingredients as well as take into consideration the climate here. You see, we weren't competing against local companies, but against foreign, Australian and German manufacturers, the best in the world. At that time, we were supplying one drug manufacturer and distributor here, Berlin Pharmaceutical Industry Co, Ltd, but we needed to provide them with a quality capsule that they could sell to hospitals in Thailand, and this is what we did. At first, we threw out as much as 30% of what we were producing to ensure we only sold them the best standard product. As we got better, we improved in our procurement and production, and

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To enhance our marketing, we invited the Australian TGA (Therapeutic Good Administration) to come to Thailand to inspect us. They taught us a lot of what we needed to do and by following their instructions, we became the first in the region to receive GMP approval, after which we began exporting to Australia. As we earned more, we reinvested, expanding our operations, always focusing on raising our standards and producing the highest quality products.

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started looking at foreign markets. To enhance our marketing, we invited the Australian TGA (Therapeutic Good Administration) to come to Thailand to inspect us. They taught us a lot of what we needed to do and by following their instructions, we became the first in the region to receive GMP approval, after which we began exporting to Australia. As we earned more, we reinvested, expanding our operations, always focusing on raising our standards and producing the highest quality products. For this reason, Medicap is today one of the largest producers of soft gelatin capsules for export and the Thai market and is GMP accredited in Germany as well as ISO 9002 accredited. Rather than waiting for companies to contact us, we began to approach others in line with the slogan we still adhere to today, "We share ideas". We develop new products and then bring them to our customers, telling them this could be a great innovation for you. We are introducing newly registered products and continue to raise the bar for what is available.

How then did Mega Lifesciences PCL and the brand Mega We care come to fruition?

This was the point when I arrived at another crossroads. As we continued to expand our Medicap operations, I began to question whether we should persist as a contracted manufacturer or begin to produce and sell products under our own brand. As a contract company, we were competing against other manufacturers and if they can produce the same product cheaper for the contracting company, we would be out of a job. Thus, we would always be dependent on someone else. I knew I didn't want to be left in this position. At the same time, I was travelling a lot and looking for what could be attractive opportunities. I saw how the vitamin and food supplement sector while developing around the world, in Thailand, it was still quite young, and regulations, what there were, were still quite vague, and there were few companies to compete with.

So, in around 1995, I found a shophouse on Sukhumvit Soi 33, bought out one of our other companies that wasn't doing well and set up Mega Lifesciences to market our own brand of products, Mega We care. At this same time, I saw how long established European trading and distribution



companies in Thailand had established branches in many other countries around the region, and I thought, why can't I do the same thing? First, I opened an office in India. Then, as Myanmar began to reduce restrictions and welcome foreign enterprises, I hired a few people and opened up a branch in Myanmar; then did the same in Vietnam and later Cambodia. After gaining some success marketing our own brand of products, I approached established brands, like Johnson & Johnson, to act as their representative and distributor. I developed software to handle this business and procured warehouses and developed distribution channels in these countries. Today, this accounts for about 49% of our business with 51% still under our own branding, and while we now operate in as many as 33 countries, 70% of our business remains in Indochina outside of Thailand. While we have expanded and established new divisions and related entities, we continue to adhere to one philosophy, "Help People Stay Healthy as Long as They Live", by providing good quality products at the right, affordable price.

To do this, wherever we operate, whether it be in

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Wherever we operate, whether it be in Asia, Africa or Europe, we have always maintained the same high quality... We offer the best product to provide maximum benefits. We also don't sell just pharmaceuticals, but also a wide range of what we call complimentary medicine, herbal remedies and supplements so people can try these before turning to drugs if they want... And, like I said, all are products are designed to help people stay healthy so then can enjoy their lives as long as they live.

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Asia, Africa or Europe, we have always maintained the same high quality even before governments were setting similar standards. We offer the best product to provide maximum benefits. We also don't sell just pharmaceuticals, but also a wide range of what we call complimentary medicine, herbal remedies and supplements so people can try these before turning to drugs if they want. Then, our third product line is what they call in the West over-the-counter pain relief medicine or I call self-medication for minor ailments. And, like I said, all are products are designed to help people stay healthy so they can enjoy their lives as long as they live.

You also describe your company as a wellness provider, or practitioner; can you tell us about this and the social enterprise, Wellness We care Center, that you established with Dr Sant Chaiyodsilp, MD?

You must first understand that I am a curious individual; I am always looking around, reading and investigating things that catch my attention and interest me. About 10 years ago, I began to research



how lifestyle modification could improve one's health. One reason was because I developed heart disease and needed to undergo coronary angioplasty and have a stent inserted into my artery to remove blockage that was hampering my circulation. While this condition was partially genetic as I inherited this from my father as he had from his father. I learned; however, genetics is only 20% of the cause; the remaining 80% is dependent on lifestyle. In my reading, I came across the writing of Dr Dean Ornish in the US and his study on how lifestyle modification, which included a lot of exercise, and adopting a plant-based, whole food, low-fat diet can open up arteries and decrease heart pain. And because of this and other research, I was inspired to make the necessary changes and begin a new journey into plant-based diet and lifestyle modification as I learned this doesn't just prevent but can reverse chronic diseases.

As I continued to read and research, in addition to developing a business model to produce related types of products, I also thought about opening a wellness centre to teach and promote this philosophy.

I then asked an agency I was working with if they knew of anyone in Thailand who was also interested in this, and they told me about Dr Sant and his blog where he was writing and promoting plant-based diet and lifestyle modification. Here was a highly respected cardiac surgeon who, when he began to suffer from cardiac disease, did not want to undergo surgery and began to search for alternatives. When we met, I saw that we had come to many of the same conclusions, and we then decided to join together to open up the Wellness We care Center, where we could teach people how to stop and reverse diseases they were suffering from as well as prevent ever suffering from inherited genetic conditions. In addition to adopting a plant-based diet, we teach and provide those who come with the opportunity to exercise, to walk and then walk longer, to ride a bike and over time, ride it further. We also offer Ayurvedic and homeopathic diagnoses, prescriptions and treatments. All is aimed at teaching people how to achieve good health by themselves and enjoy this as long as they live.

This is also what we encourage at Mega We care. We offer a program like one offered at the centre

called “Good Health by Yourself”. We also bring our employees here to learn and experience more. If people feel healthy, they will be happier; they will enjoy coming to work. Life will feel more fun, and if they are happy, they will perform better; so, it’s good for business. If they are healthy and happy, they’re family won’t need to worry and will be better off. Furthermore, the government won’t need to spend as much on health issues. So, everyone wins.

As I saw on your name card, in addition to being the founder and CEO of Mega We care, you also call yourself Chief Coach, can you please explain what this entails?

I guess I should begin by saying that many bosses like to set up a strict hierarchy, controlling things from the top down. I myself, like I said just before, don’t think this way. I first and foremost want to provide a comfortable working environment where people can enjoy themselves and excel, achieve and surpass their potential. This means giving them mutual respect. It means listening to them and trusting in them. It means giving them opportunities

to try new things, even if this sometimes leads to failure. Because we can learn from this and use this new knowledge and experience to move forward. We haven’t succeeded in all our endeavours, no company has. You just don’t hear about the failures. But my philosophy is to always look ahead to the future, not dwell on mistakes, learn from them to improve one’s performance.

My job then, as Chief Coach, is to guide and support our people as best I can. For example, at the start, when I assigned people to set up a branch in Vietnam and later in Myanmar, I looked for someone I felt had the skills and potential and then let them do their thing. Not everyone is right for the same position, just like in an orchestra and football team. As their leader, it’s my job to manage our people so together we achieve much more than what is expected. To build the organisation we have grown to become, I could not have accomplished this alone. It was a unified effort after finding the right persons for the right positions.

Mutual respect, support and enjoyment are at the core of our corporate culture. And while I am the chief





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coach, our top level management serve as head coaches, the next level down as partners and then associates, all with the aim of giving their people the opportunity and support needed to excel.

I, myself, also do not believe in competing with others. I think it's better to challenge oneself and motivate each person to better themselves and go beyond expectations. This is the way we think at Mega We care. Our concern is our people. It might be described as a love affair. We want the best for those we care about. This can then be expanded to include not just our management and employees but our customers as well. We want them all to be healthy and happy. This is why we produce the products we do and why we have opened the Wellness We care Center and why we are promoting and working to help people stay healthy as long as they live through events, like the Asian Plant-based Nutrition Healthcare Conference we hosted in Bangkok this past January and the online programs and courses we are offering. I have been very fortunate. I love what I do. It isn't in anyway a burden, and this is what I want to share with anyone and everyone who is interested.