

Dr. Sambursky discusses his experience balancing roles as an entrepreneur, surgeon, and business leader while emphasizing the importance of patient care and team empowerment.



# ROB SAMBURSKY

MD

COMPANY: Verséa Health/Verséa Ophthalmics

CLINICAL PRACTICE: Coastal Eye Institute, Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch, Sarasota, and Sun City Center, Florida

CLAIM TO FAME: A generational ophthalmologist who's founded and led multiple companies



“Bringing an idea to fruition and success is based on four things. One is *know-how*. You need to be good at something. The second is *know-who*. You need to have good contacts. Then, there's *luck and timing*, which you have less control over.”

**CRST:** You have been practicing ophthalmology for more than 20 years, and you have founded and led several companies. These include RPS Diagnostics (now Lumos Diagnostics) and Visus Therapeutics, and you served as CEO of both RPS and Lumos. Why did you choose ophthalmology, and why did you start your own businesses?

**Rob Sambursky, MD:** My grandfather, father, and brother are all ophthalmologists, so I've been exposed to the field since an early age. I always knew I wanted to be a doctor, and ophthalmology is one of the few fields that blend acute care, long-term patient interactions, and advanced surgical techniques with exposure to innovative technologies. Not only can ophthalmologists restore vision, but we can also improve it.

I have had an entrepreneurial spirit for as long as I can remember. When I was a medical intern, I was exposed to a new platform technology used by wiping inanimate surfaces. I realized it could be modified to become a tear-based medical device that could have an impact on the eye care space and provide point-of-care testing for infectious and inflammatory diseases.

**CRST:** Are there influences on the business side in your family? How did you learn to be an entrepreneur?

**Dr. Sambursky:** A lot of that stems from an ability to put myself out there. My father encouraged me to take risks and try new things. When it came to RPS, which is a business we founded together, I leveraged what I learned while obtaining a medical science degree before entering medical school. I also convinced my father and brother to provide the initial equity required. I contributed early contacts and the science background to help make the company successful, but I couldn't have done it without my brother and father's support and contributions.

**CRST:** What are some of the challenges you have faced in balancing your responsibilities as an entrepreneur and a surgeon?

**Dr. Sambursky:** The hardest thing for me is timing. It is important to provide a burgeoning business with responsiveness and support. I have to consider how to do that while having a whole

separate career with patient scheduling and surgical schedules to maintain.

**CRST: What will you not compromise on when it comes to striking that balance?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** One is patient care. It is important for me to be attentive and provide the best care I can to my patients. It is also easy for my work as a physician and business leader to bleed into my family life. I do my best not to let that occur.

**CRST: You recently joined Verséa Health as president to lead its expansion, Verséa Ophthalmics, into the ophthalmology market. How has this role compared to your experience as a founder and CEO?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** With RPS, I spent more time in the preclinical stage. I had more involvement with investors, trying to ensure adequate funding and working on the R&D side so that we could prove that we had a product, take it through clinical evaluations, and eventually guide it through the regulatory process.

I joined Verséa at a point when there was already regulatory-approved diagnostic and biologic products that could be brought together under one roof. I was therefore able to focus on commercialization and building out a team. I also have all the scars and experience from the first time, so I am better prepared to get things right.

**CRST: What makes a good leader?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** A good leader gives

vision to a company, leads by example, understands the importance of the team and how to empower its members, and is willing to learn along the way.

**CRST: How do you apply the leadership skills you gained from your entrepreneurial experiences to the OR?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** Whether it's a patient visit or a customer encounter, it comes down to their overall experience. It's important to take time to understand what the individual needs, set expectations, and pay attention to the details along the way. Every member of the team and everyone who encounters the product or patient has an important role in the process. It's not just about the experience with the CEO or the surgeon.

**CRST: Who is your biggest role model?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** I feel fortunate to have been exposed to many great people, but I would like to highlight a couple of people who brought something unique to light that I admire and hope to emulate. One is my late father. He was an extremely well-trained and charismatic ophthalmologist who was dedicated to helping people—so much so that he went to back to his native Brazil every year to perform free surgeries. He was committed to advancing quality of life in a developing country.

The other is Buddy Koffman, who died recently. He was an accomplished businessman from Binghamton, New York, and the first investor in RPS. I saw how he interacted with people

and treated them equitably and with respect, regardless of their role or title. I always admired the way he thanked every hostess and server and went out of his way to tell people what a good job they were doing. I've tried to make that a part of who I am.

**CRST: What advice do you have for someone nearing the middle of their career who has a big idea but doesn't know quite what to do with it?**

**Dr. Sambursky:** Bringing an idea to fruition and success is based on four things. One is *know-how*. You need to be good at something. The second is *know-who*. You need to have good contacts. Then, there's *luck* and *timing*, which you have less control over.

I've learned everything always costs more and takes longer than anticipated. If there's a way to network and find someone who's familiar with what you're trying to accomplish and take advantage of their contacts and learn from their experiences, it can help expedite the process and may reduce the hardships that you have to go through. ■

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