ENTREPRENEURS MAKING AN IMPACT

Healthy Thinking
VIKRAM KUMAR BS’99

Vikram Kumar calls himself a thought leader, and the constant concern on his mind is health care. After graduating from Columbia Engineering with a BS in operations research—and a handful of entrepreneurship classes from Columbia Business School under his belt—Kummar attended Harvard Medical School, combining and cultivating his interests in engineering, medicine, and health. Over the past decade, he has launched four businesses, each with its own specific health care focus.

Though he juggles several projects, he is currently more heavily involved in Dimagi, a company he started in 2002. At Dimagi, headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Kumar serves as chief medical officer and leads the India office and its global research and development grant pipeline. Kumar’s latest venture, ozorie, a range of natural topicals, is health care innovations. But not all of them pan out.

Kumar's start-ups, cogito health, and not-so-clear path to executing it. While ideas seemingly come easy to Kumar, who even at age 14 invented a secure printer-fax machine with his father, he admits being an entrepreneur is likely one of the most difficult “jobs” he has ever had. “The experience seems glamorous from afar, but it is a lot of nonstop work for little pay,” says Kumar. “The payoff is in the joy of creation, with a bonus of financial returns if you’re lucky.”

Fortunately for the many clients benefiting from his products, Kumar keeps at it. In addition to Dimagi and Cogito Health, he is the cofounder of Doctor Kanes, a short-day surgical hospital he founded with his father, a well-known neurosurgeon in India. One of the hospital’s focus areas is the use of ozone therapy for the treatment of hemiated discs, a therapy developed by his father. This led to Kumar’s latest venture, Ozorie, a range of natural topicals for pain relief and rejuvenation enriched with oxygen.
Kumar’s entrepreneurial wheels are constantly spinning. To budding entrepreneurs, he says, “Stop thinking and just do it.”

Top Chef
RAHUL AKERKAR BS’83, MS’86

Akerkar cofounded DeGustibus Hospitality with his wife, Malini, in 1996. They operate six restaurants and academia were “journeys unto themselves,” he adds. Doing various restaurant jobs taught Akerkar the food and beverage business, while the discipline of doing engineering research at Columbia helped him question the why-how of the tasks he was performing at work.

“Working was never a routine job for me,” he observes, “but rather a challenge to solve and master a problem or situation—much like a line of questioning one might develop while determining a course of research. This was an approach to work that allowed me to learn and grow as a chef, and to understand the business very quickly.”

Even though today Akerkar is not an engineer, he still thinks like one. “I love analyzing and interpreting my own business-specific data in an attempt to understand how I’m doing and to improve the business.”

Akerkar’s entrepreneurial path may have taken a few sharp turns, but Akerkar does not mind. He is a firm believer in going after what you enjoy the most. “Follow your heart and your dreams—have the guts to have faith in your own vision!”

Rahul Akerkar is all about mixing his passion for life, food, and science, and has managed to blend these key ingredients into a career as one of Mumbai’s leading restaurant moguls.

Akerkar is the managing director and director of cuisine at DeGustibus Hospitality Pvt. Ltd., says, “I’ve been able to shape and change the way people eat here, and that’s exciting.”

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