

Women Achiever's Spl: Seizing opportunity however small it may be: DR DEBORAH RATHJEN CEO, Bionomics, Australia

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A seasoned biotech executive of over 20 years, Dr Deborah Rathjen joined Bionomics in June 2000 from Peptech Limited, where she was Manager of Business Development and Licensing. She was a co-inventor of Peptech's TNF technology and leader of the company's successful defence of its key TNF patents against a legal challenge by BASF, providing Peptech with a strong commercial basis for licensing negotiations with BASF, Centocor and other companies with anti-TNF products.

Currently the CEO of Bionomics, she has been instrumental in turning Bionomics from a virtual company into a notable biopharmaceutical firm. Her role in the development of cancer treating drugs and other medications is a large contribution to Bionomics' current success in the biotechnology market.

Dr Rathjen has significant experience in company building and financing, mergers and acquisitions, therapeutic product research and development, business development, licensing and commercialization. Under her leadership, Bionomics struck a potentially lucrative research deal with American pharmaceutical giant Merck to define new pain treatments. The two-year research programme, if successful, has the potential to yield up to US\$172 million

(A\$191 million) through fees and milestone payments for Bionomics and undisclosed royalty sales. Dr Rathjen mentioned, "Having Merck as a partner not only has placed Bionomics on the pharmaceutical map, but having them as investors continues to validate our technologies and expertise."

When asked about her success mantra, Dr Rathjen said, "A mantra of mine personally which has also been adopted at Bionomics is "N.O.W" – NO OPPORTUNITY WASTED. Seizing any opportunity is how a small interaction or chance meeting can turn into successful business. Why wait for tomorrow to schedule that meeting or make that phone call."

Sharing her thoughts on gender parity in the industry, Dr Rathjen says, "Women are inherently planners. Although there may be some differences in the way that males and females plan their career, inherently, women who want a career as well as a family must plan in order to ensure the success of both. With respect to biology, this is a major difference between the sexes. Women must continue to worry less about fitting into glass slippers and more about shattering glass ceilings. To strive to make your mark in a male dominated industry."

Dr Rathjen has been recognised both in Australia and internationally through awards and honours including the 2004 AusBiotech President's Medal, 2006 Flinders University Distinguished Alumni Award, 2009 BioSingapore Asia Pacific Biotechnology Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, 2009 Regional Finalist Ernst & Young - Entrepreneur of the Year, and 2014 Woman Executive of the Year BioPharm Industry Awards. In 2015 Dr Rathjen was included in the Top 50 most influential Australia business women by The Australian newspaper.

Speaking about challenges in her career, Dr Rathjen said, "In the work place there are numerous challenges however being taken seriously not only as a woman in science but as a businesswoman has been a particular challenge. Balancing family and career and having to prove that you can successfully do both although, a challenge, has been something I pride myself on."