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Don't worry about your mistakes

Darlene McCord/McCord Research

By Gigi Wood

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Darlene McCord is no stranger to mistakes and errors, but she doesn't let them slow her down. She is the founder of McCord Research, a company that researches and develops high-quality wound and skin-care products using the latest discoveries in biochemistry, free-radical biology, molecular analysis, epigenetics, cell biology and electron microscopy.

"I started my supplement company and I reached my dream of market dominance in five years, but I had all kinds of things in front of that," she says. "I never lost sight of my vision, my goal to improve the quality of life for people in every country in the world. That has been my written goal for 25 years. That's the brass ring that I have and when you're going to decide if you're going to come out with a product or you're going to get into something, does it meet your stated goal? My goal is to improve quality of life and I never lose sight of that and I never make a product that short-changes my vision."

Ms. McCord recently opened an office in Coralville for her spin-off company, PinnacleLife, which sells the nutritional supplements she developed after decades of research. Her skin product line, Remedy, is the best selling of its kind in the country. Creating a prosperous company leads entrepreneurs down a path riddled with missteps, she says.



JOHN RICHARD

"Don't worry about making mistakes; I make them all day long. Just fix it and move on. Don't ever dwell on mistakes," she says. "It didn't work out exactly right, but life doesn't work out exactly right. You just learn to do more things right more often, the more you practice."

A biochemist by training, entrepreneurship is her true calling, she says.

"You have to have this absolute resolve. I was born for this role. I'm absolutely unemployable," Ms. McCord

says "When I started up this, women weren't entrepreneurs. And I wondered, 'Why can't I just be like everyone else? Why do you have to go out and be the boss? Why can't you just work for someone?' I beat myself up because no one else did it. I wanted to be like other people. And I don't think that's so much an issue today as it was in the early 1960s. I was raised to have a hope chest and go to school and get married and none of those things appealed to me. I wanted to own a busi-

ness and I didn't look at it that way, it's just what defines you as an individual. And today I don't think people beat themselves up, women, don't beat themselves up about that."

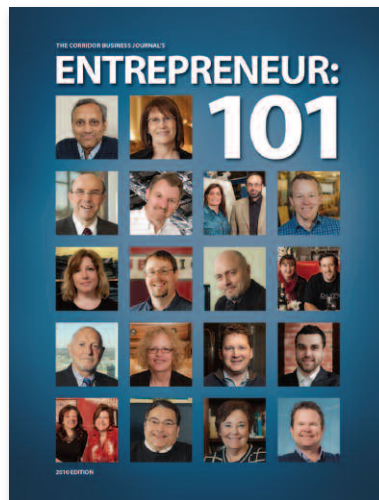
She was awarded her first patent in 1993 and founded McCord Research in 1998. She and her husband recently moved to Iowa City to tap into the scientific research resources in the area, including the University of Iowa. The two donated \$2.3 million to the UI Foundation to support biomedical research and provide fellowship support to students in the biosciences program. Her hope is those students stay in Iowa and continue their research.

"It isn't like I set out this big goal that's impossible to achieve, but I believe I can make a difference on a global scale with my products. And I'm going to continue on that way," she says. "My goal may be achieved after I'm gone because that's the vision of my company. And you hire people who have the same dream and vision because you want that vision and commitment to live on after you. If you look at the largest corporations around the world, the founders are gone, but their vision lives on."

That philosophy should be present when hiring staff.

"In selecting people, it isn't just the skills that fit into their position, it's do they buy into the dream, because if you

have staff that doesn't buy into the dream, then you can't grow your dream," Ms. McCord says. "What it



takes is everyone here has that same dream. They're not entrepreneurs in the way I am, they're entrepreneurs in their own space within the company. None of them have an 8 (a.m.)-5 (p.m.) attitude, they have an attitude of we're going to do what it takes to be successful."

The life of an entrepreneur is not for everyone, she cautions.

"If any aspect of it is like a job, then you either aren't a full-out entrepreneur or you haven't found the right calling, it's not something you want to do," Ms. McCord says. "I've been one for a long time and I work seven days

a week and I work long hours and I love every minute of it. It's not work. I go to bed thinking about some new idea and wake up thinking about some new idea... So if that kind of time commitment isn't something that interests you, if you prefer the stability of 40 hours a week and you want to go off on bike rides and have that whole freedom of what you do with the rest of your life, then you should think very carefully as to whether you're an entrepreneur."

True entrepreneurs have a certain personality and strong discipline, she says.

"You have to be a risk taker. It's easy to go out and get a good-paying job and go through the corporate ladders but there is no safety net for entrepreneurs," Ms. McCord says. "You have the discipline of personal decisions."

Despite her high ideals, Ms. McCord is no pushover.

"I'm not a soft business person," she says. "Business is business to me, and if you cross the line with me, I'm pretty quick to let you know that your behavior or actions are not acceptable. And in a business negotiation I will not blink. I set out with a goal and plan that is, 'I'm going to be fair I'm going to listen but I will not go beyond what is acceptable.'"