

## **Through the Glass Ceiling: Professional and positive**

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Nava Swersky Sofer isn't the type of person to look back at her accomplishments and congratulate herself. Instead, she says, she's a forward thinker who focuses keenly on her next move.

Swersky Sofer is at the top of her game; her determination, and sometimes inexplicable intuition, has brought her to the important role of heading Yissum-the technology transfer company for the Hebrew University, which owns patents and protects and commercializes the broad spectrum of technologies coming out of the university.

"We are the interface between academia and industry," Nava explains.

This is a large responsibility: Hebrew University accounts for one-third of academic, scientific research coming out of Israel, including half of biotechnology research. In total, more than 100 new invention disclosures are submitted each year, twice the industry standard.

Her knowledge gained from business management, venture capital, law and biomedical and the decades leading up to her position at Yissum prove a valuable advantage to her duties there.

The first Israeli-born in her family, Swersky Sofer was born in Tel Aviv in 1965 just months after her family made aliya from South Africa. She began her career at an early age as a lawyer, entering law school at just 16, and passing the Israel bar on her twenty-third birthday-the earliest allowed age.

Even before passing the bar, she was practicing law in the military as the defense counsel for the air force and navy, but she got her first taste of the business world during an internship at a commercial law firm prior to her military service.

She then whisked off to Lausanne, Switzerland, where she attended the IMD Business School, one of the top business schools in the world.

"I clearly wanted to be in business," she reflects, since as a clerk working on commercial deals, she remembered that the business world seemed much more enticing than law.

From the start, she was focused on entering the international platform, and as one of the youngest and most ambitious students in the business school, she was plucked up by Ciba-Geigy (now Novartis) after graduation. This unanticipated move proved critical for her career, and she quickly climbed the ranks to vice president.

"I didn't know about pharmaceuticals, I didn't want to live in Switzerland and I didn't speak German," she says, but she took the job anyway. The top-level management was a group of middle-aged men, and Swersky Sofer, a twenty-something Israeli woman.

"I was an unusual presence wherever I was," she recalls.

In the male-dominated business world, Swersky Sofer says people sometimes found it odd to see a female chairperson or head of a company, yet she has found herself in a room full of men on several occasions, but never thought she was at a disadvantage.

"If you are professional and positive in whatever you do, people will start treating you that way," she says, adding that she was able to gain valuable business know-how from a young age.

"Working for Ciba-Geigy was a tremendous opportunity to see the inner-working of one of the largest pharmaceutical companies," she says, but as the industry changed to include more research collaborations and capital raising, so too did Swersky Sofer.

She made the switch to venture capital when Ciba-Geigy sent her to California to head up their venture capital activities there; she had such a knack for it that a leading healthcare VC company, Sanderling, sought her out to join its team as a partner, where she made six deals for them in under five years.

Healthcare VC was a platform Swersky Sofer enjoyed - she is particularly proud of playing a role in developing a patch for Parkinson's disease: Discovery Therapeutics, a Sanderling portfolio company, which she licensed to Schwarz Pharma, now part of UCB, completed the clinical development and launched the patch in 2006.

"It's always gratifying to play a part in getting drugs to the market," she says.

Her business instincts speak for themselves. Serving as chairman of the board of Discovery Therapeutics, later renamed Aderis Pharmaceuticals, she ran the business side of the company in its beginning stages, taking it from \$6 million in value to \$120m. under her watch.

She also was responsible for the sale of BioCancell, a cancer drug development start-up founded by Yissum that had its IPO on the Tel Aviv stock exchange in 2006, and a \$10m. licensing deal with Shire Pharma to produce a drug developed by a Hebrew University professor, Meir Bialer.

After her five-year stint in California on the VC scene, Swersky Sofer moved back to Israel, realizing she wanted to raise a family here.

"I was 33, I had a phenomenal career, and I felt this was the right step for me."

Armed with knowledge from her experience in VC management, Swersky Sofer started her own company in biomedical investments, called Columbine Ventures, in partnership with Shamrock, the Roy Disney family's investment arm and one of the largest foreign investors in Israel.

After the initial capital was fully committed by the end of 2001, she took a back-seat role for a while, looking after existing investments and at the same time running another VC portfolio.

It was during this time that she had her first son, born in 2002. Her second child, a daughter, was born in 2004, when Swersky Sofer was a partner at Concord Ventures.

Swersky Sofer found the perfect mix of family, VC, pharmaceuticals, hi-tech and even law with Yissum, where she is involved with a broad spectrum of activities, from biotechnology to agriculture. Her legal training has proven useful and her understanding of VC is essential for running the technology transfer interests for the university.

Her first year at Yissum was challenging but fruitful; she established a new infrastructure and upped recruitment efforts in order to attract high-level professionals from the hi-tech and

biotech industries. She's seen 300 deals signed related to Hebrew University's inventions in 2006, which accounted for a 20% increase in revenues.

Swersky Sofer is charged with taking Yissum "to the next level," a task she doesn't take lightly.

"We want [companies] to come to us first when they look for new technologies or investment opportunities," she says.

"Running Yissum is a huge challenge and I view it as a form of public service after 20 years in the private sector," she says. "Education and research excellence are key to Israel's future, and this is a unique opportunity to help the university use its own resources to help itself.

***NAVA SWERSKY SOFER***

**Age:** 41

**Status:** Married with two young children

**Education:** Juris Doctorate, Tel Aviv University; MBA, IMD International in Lausanne, Switzerland; Diplomas from the Goethe Institute in Munich, the Instituto Trentino in Italy and the Sorbonne in Paris

**Professional milestones:** Vice president and member of the senior management group, Ciba-Geigy (now Novartis) in Basel, Switzerland; Partner, Sanderling Ventures in California; Partner, Concord Ventures in Israel; Founder, Columbine Ventures in Israel; Chairwoman of the Board of Atox Bio; Board member, Novagali, Tiltan Pharma, Biocancell Therapeutics, Optonol, and Bio-Jerusalem