

“ I risked going out on my own and never looked back. ”

K. ANJI REDDY

CEO tips

- Think Big. Even if you have taken a path that gives you lots of money, think big and change the way people live.
- Don't get bogged down by failure. It helps to work harder to achieve your goals.
- Intuition is very important. Whether you like it or not, it is your intuition that makes the difference between success and failure. If you have it in you, there is no way you will not succeed.
- Transparency is the key. Don't sweep anything under the carpet.



The founder of one of India's largest pharmaceutical companies, Dr Kallam Anji Reddy (63) is scientist, entrepreneur and visionary all rolled in one. His is the first pharmaceutical company from the Asia Pacific (outside Japan) to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Today, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, founded with a seed capital of \$160,000 (Rs 80 lakh), has revenues in excess of Rs 2,500 crore.

I come from a village Tadepali near Vijaywada just across the River Krishna. I finished my schooling in an old village high schools called Nuthakki which was where my grandmother lived. I had an amazing Telugu teacher—because of him I can recite Telugu poetry even today. Our science teacher was not as inspiring so I wasn't very keen on taking science after school. I was more interested in history instead. However, a cousin of mine who had done history himself, insisted that I take science. So I went to the Hindu College in Guntur and studied science.

I was fascinated by physics but ended up choosing to major in chemistry and joined the Andhra Christian College in Guntur. Chemistry, to me, was a wonderful subject because it encompassed the whole of nature. We had outstanding chemistry teachers and just listening to them was as if we had *buttified* the entire text—that's what we call learning by rote in Andhra. In addition to that, I had a photographic memory which also helped a lot.

I then joined the University Department of Chemical Technology, (UDCT) Mumbai. It was very difficult getting in because it was highly competitive and the seats were limited. I took a B.Sc. Tech degree looking at the chemistry of pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals. There was a pilot plant of Pfizer nearby that was working on an anti-TB drug and just watching it inspired me to try and achieve the best. It transformed my life.

After UDCT, I did my Ph.D from National Chemical Laboratory, (NCL) Pune. That taught me how to go about good science. But the kind of confidence I got in NCL was not so much because of my Ph.D but because of something else. My professor asked me to find a new

equation for something called liquid diffusivity. I formed the equation using just a slide rule and a calculator within two days. The results were so good that the equation eventually went into chemical engineering text books. It gave me the confidence that if I could do this, I could do anything. That was also the main reason for my getting into discoveries of new drugs later in life and also in leading my company more as a scientist than as a chairman.

After my Ph.D, I worked with the public sector Indian Drugs and



Flashback: Reddy during his Ph.D days at NCL, Pune

Pharmaceuticals Limited (IDPL) for a while, where we did a lot of technology improvement. We were transferring laboratory processes to plant scale. And we did that successfully with not one or two but over a dozen drugs. I then set up Dr Reddy's Laboratories in 1984. This was to make bulk drugs, which we did quite successfully. I set out on my own because I thought a public sector company could not offer me much. I saw it as an opportunity to climb up the ladder. In IDPL, I got only one promotion in six years, so I realised the only thing for me to do so was to stand on my own feet. I took the risk and never looked back because the technological strength that IDPL gave me was phenomenal.

I have also had my fair share of failures. To cite an example, we at Dr

“A failure makes you work harder to achieve your goals.”

Reddy's developed a new class of molecules that was named after me. It had the potential to reduce both a person's blood sugar and lipids and was touted as a billion-dollar drug. Unfortunately, there were problems when trials were conducted to test its efficacy. That was the worst moment in my life. Ours was the first Indian company to invent a new class of molecules and suddenly it was all over for the drug. I felt totally miserable for a day. The next morning I went for a walk, came to my lab, called all my people and told them not to be disheartened and urged them to move forward again together.

Failure taught me that you have to work harder to reach the same goal. Maybe I would have become complacent if the drug had gone through. I would have had \$150 million in my kitty as royalty and would have become lazy. Today, we have many first-in-class achievements. We currently have nine new molecules in the pipeline. We believe this will increase to 20 molecules in the next three years, which is considered impressive by any standards. Meanwhile, I will continue to do what I'm doing. What propels me is that, at times, it feels like I'm actually playing God and that if my drugs succeed, in some ways I am working next to God by saving people!

My advice to the young is that even if you have taken a path that gives you lots of money, think big and change the way people live. Intuition is very important. Whether you like it or not, it is your intuition that makes the difference between success and failure. Other values that are important to have are transparency and more transparency. Don't sweep anything under the carpet. I've seen people getting into trouble by doing that. You have to lie to cover a lie. ★

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