

Women in Science: Susanne Schaffert

Susanne Schaffert, President of Advanced Accelerator Applications, describes her career in science.

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We recently chatted with Susanne Schaffert, president of Advanced Accelerator Applications (AAA). AAA, a radiopharmaceutical company acquired by Novartis, is developing innovative technologies that have the potential to radically transform health care and impact the lives of patients. In this latest installment of “Novartis Presents: Women in Science,” Schaffert describes her work at AAA and the evolution of her career.

When did you first know you wanted to work in science?

When I was finishing up school, I had a love for the arts and creativity but was always fascinated by innovation. It was the realization that science is where you can make an impact on daily lives – something that is so important to me. For example, chemistry impacts your day from the moment you start brushing your teeth!

Tell us about your career evolution.

I received my Ph.D. in chemistry and ultimately began my career in the lab. It was there that I realized I was passionate about science, but I wanted to be able to connect what I was doing with other aspects of the industry and make a difference in people’s lives.

My first venture into business was a role in marketing, where I led the oncology business in Germany. From

there, I chose various roles that were focused in science and marketing and gave me increased responsibility. For example, I took a role as head of investor relations, where it really helped that I understood the science and could explain the innovation and its importance to our investors.

Tell us about the transition to AAA and what excites you about it.

The new innovative scientific platform that AAA has created is what thrills me. We are working on different and exciting things in oncology like combinations of diagnostics and therapeutics, creating new approaches in patient management, and creating unique ways for physicians to visualize and treat tumors. We are more than 650 people strong at AAA, inclusive of researchers and scientists, and we continue to grow.



Schaffert visiting AAA's manufacturing site in Millburn, New Jersey, in the US

What is your advice for young women interested in science?

Stay curious! There are constant advances in science and technology – especially in the last 5 years – so if you keep learning and continue to be open-minded, you can continue to make an impact.

Also, it's really about networking. It's important to build bridges and know who you can tap into to help you solve a particular problem. When I look at when I started my studies in chemistry, 10% of females were in the class and only 5% of them actually finished. Now, I'm seeing more women getting involved and taking opportunities in science – and that encourages me because diversity is so important in a team to drive different thinking and innovation.

What is your favorite part of your job at Novartis?

Definitely the people. I think the privilege we have working in health care is that you are surrounded by supersmart people who are talented and passionate. I love driving solutions for patients, and I feel privileged to work with my team.

I love working in an environment where the ultimate goal is serving patients. First and foremost, my team has the passion to impact and change patients' lives.

What is the most challenging part?

The biggest challenge in this industry is maintaining the right balance between moving fast to innovate and meet the needs of our patients and ensuring that we are operating at the highest standards of quality and compliance. Both are essential to achieving success, and as a leader, it is up to you to keep the equilibrium throughout the organization.

What types of qualities do you look for in talent?

There are a few things that I look for, but especially in health care, people need to have a passion for helping patients. That is our ultimate purpose as employees in oncology. That passion drives us to do our best every day.

Other great qualities include being resilient and persistent. Business and science can be tough and you will face many challenges, but believing in your dreams and not giving up is very important in order to develop successfully in your career. Accept that the business includes failures and that only helps you succeed in the end.



Schaffert with other attendees after a speech at a women's leadership program.

“Novartis Presents: Women in Science” is an ongoing series showcasing women at Novartis who are helping develop innovative oncology medicines for people with cancer and related diseases.

Susanne Schaffert is president of Advanced Accelerator Applications and one of our #WomenInScience

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