



JAMES SAPIRSTEIN

James Sapirstein knows what it's like to roll with the punches and not let a few knockdowns deter him from striving and succeeding. After moving to Brooklyn from Argentina, he became the first of his family to graduate from high school and go to college. He was immediately attracted to the pharmacy field because it continually gave him new opportunities to discover new medicines and help countless people. He graduated from the Rutgers University College of Pharmacy, earned an MBA from Fairleigh Dickinson, and launched into a remarkable 37-year career with top-performing pharma companies such as Eli Lilly, Roche Labs, Bristol Myers Squibb, and Gilead Sciences, serving in nearly every role from sales to general management to CEO in locations around the world. As he gained valuable medical and social insights into developing medical products for the people who need it most, James put it to work, from navigating global pandemics to establishing a life-saving organization, and, most recently, leading a gastroenterology company, First Wave BioPharma, which aims to develop therapeutic products to serve unmet medical needs around the world. But it's a budding success story that almost never happened.

In 2018, James had essentially retired to a quiet life in Florida, when he received a phone call in 2019 from AzurRx BioPharma asking him to take the helm as CEO. He accepted and, 18 months later, acquired another company and renamed the new entity, First Wave BioPharma. The company develops pharmaceutical products designed to alleviate chronic ailments. For example, niclosamide

reduces the inflammation of ulcerative colitis and delays the disease's progression. "We believe niclosamide has the potential to treat several inflammatory bowel diseases including Crohn's disease," James shares. In addition, they also have adrulipase, a product for treating a life-threatening digestive disorder faced by cystic fibrosis and chronic pancreatitis patients.

While he's enjoyed an enviable career that might have many leaders seeking the spotlight, James' humility contradicts his remarkable accomplishments. "I'm a pharmacist first and foremost," he says. "I really care about patients and want to put medicine out there that actually works." This is also why he was involved in a number of philanthropic projects like Secure the Future, which he founded 23 years ago. This community of medical professionals has been working to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and has saved millions of lives. He was also integral in launching Viread and Truvada, crucial drugs for those living with HIV.

"My biggest motivators are the small victories," James says. "When we receive good data that we've spent years fighting for, that keeps me going." He also loves to see the growth of his team and colleagues. "Some of my hires have moved on to become CEOs themselves," he says. As someone who honors his own beginnings, watching people overcome hardships, be that be a chronic illness or a humble origin, and go on to live successful lives and help others, this is what drives James every day.

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