

# Bite



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Dr Rashmi Gupta chooses  
to see obstacles as  
opportunities in disguise.

# What doesn't kill you

Resilience is having the ability to transform obstacles into opportunities, something dentist and business owner Dr Rashi Gupta has in spades. By **Rob Johnson**

**T**he word 'resilience' gets thrown around a lot during times of stress. It has connotations of keeping your chin up, rolling with the punches, and other vague pieces of advice that don't help much when those punches are actually rolling in. But resilience has a different meaning for a business. And businesses like Dr Rashi Gupta's exemplify it.

She opened the doors of her first practice at the height of the global financial crisis. She has recently expanded it this year, at the start of a global pandemic. Her practices are in Victoria, which has endured two lockdowns and where unemployment

peaked at 14.4 per cent before the stage 4 lockdowns. Perhaps as a result of this, resilience is baked in to her business model. It's as much a strategy as a state of mind.

"I honestly feel every time I run into obstacles or any kind of problems, it just makes me stronger," she says. "Because when these things happen, you look into what can you improve. And a lot of my business ideas have come in during these [difficult] times."

In April this year, during the first wave of the pandemic, fewer patients were booking appointments. So she called her staff in and ran a management program. They focused on improving the patient experience

and customer service throughout the months of April, May and June. They were determined to be more than prepared for when things started returning to normal—they were going to be better.

It wasn't the first time they had taken this course of action in lean times. "I remember about two years back in June, July, we had a fall in revenue and there were fewer patients," she says. "We sat down and we worked out a plan for what changes we were going to make, to make things better. And it's amazing ... those little changes, and how they work for you. I honestly feel we've come out stronger every time we have had these issues."

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Dr Rashi Gupta

In partnership with her husband, Aseem Gupta, she has built up two practices and a childcare centre, and has plans in play for a medical centre and another childcare centre. She has achieved that in just over a decade, after arriving as an immigrant and while raising two kids. She’s achieved it because resilience has always been fundamental to the way her business operates.

## Early years

Dr Gupta completed her degree in India in 2000, and arrived in Australia four years later. She was expecting the first of her two children, and had no contacts in the dental profession she could lean on. She did her board exams and decided to apply for the OTC program administered by Dental Health Services Victoria. But even at that point she faced hurdles.

“I was given the wrong date by a colleague and I remember calling them up and them telling me that I was too late for the interview,” she says. “I’m not a quitter, so I called them and said, ‘Just give me a chance. I don’t want to miss it because of the date. If you can still arrange for me to come in and talk to you and wherever it goes from there, that’s fine’. I got in.

“It was very stressful time, but I made it. And then RDHM, the Royal Dental Hospital, really supported me going through the program. I had a mentor as well in the hospital. And then once I cleared my exams, I was offered a position to work in the hospital right away.”

From there she planned out what she wanted to do, both professionally and with her practice. Orthodontics and implantology appealed greatly.

She and Aseem also spotted an old practice in Geelong—Norlane Dental

Surgery—that they felt they could fix up. “It was in a very bad way,” she says. “All the chairs were old, and there was no technology at all. No computers, manual film processing in a dark room, all appointments and treatment plans were done on paper.” They bought the practice with immediate plans to transform it. It took them just two years.

Aseem has been a key partner in all this growth. “He’s a software engineer by profession, then did his MBA,” she says. “He always wanted to open up his own business. He’s the big mastermind behind a lot of the decisions we’ve made in terms of business and in terms of growth, I must say. He was working for an IT company and then he decided he wanted to open a Montessori preschool. When we bought the practice, he made a lot of decisions with that as well. He helped me manage the whole practice and manage the people as well.”

Dental school doesn’t teach you how to run a business—either in India or in Australia. Like most of us, Dr Gupta learnt on the job. “But I got a lot of help from Aseem,” she adds. “He believed in delegating, giving people timelines and letting go. I must say for me, for the first one year, the turnover of my staff was very high. But after the one year, I learnt, and now my staff don’t want to leave. I am a very rules-oriented person. So if it’s got to be done this way, it’ll be done this way. There’s no going off track with anything. And when you’re managing people, you don’t always get that exact result you expect, even if you’ve been very clear about things. So it was hard initially.

“I’ve learnt to slow down and be able to give feedback throughout and get the work done, even if it’s not done in the first go, which was what I was

expecting initially when I started.”

## Ever expanding

All while this was happening she furthered her education in orthodontics and implantology, locally and in the US and Colombia. Which takes its toll. “My daughter complains all the time. She’ll talk to me for hours on the phone. And she takes a promise from me every time: ‘You will do your courses in Melbourne, you won’t go anywhere else.’ I give her a promise for one month at a time.”

Meanwhile she helped her husband manage his Montessori preschool. All of which had been planned: “Every year, on the 1st of January, we would sit down, the whole family and work out the whole plan. We’ve had plans about how many childcare centres we’ve got to open and how many surgeries, and how to build it up. So it hasn’t just happened; it’s all planned. Of course, we’ve been lucky in terms of how things have worked out for us.”

A second surgery in Hopper’s Crossing (where the Montessori preschool is located) has been growing steadily (although somewhat on hold with the stage 4 lockdowns), and the couple have sourced another block of land in Norlane to open a larger medical centre and another preschool, as well as relocate and expand the existing practice.

Which sounds like an insane workload—but being insanely busy during a pandemic and recession is not such a bad thing. “It comes to the vision for all three businesses,” she says.

“We both sit down together and work things out. We have different ideas obviously, but the final implementation is both of us working together on all these, on the vision, and how they’re going to make things better.” **Bite**





Dr Gupta says she couldn't have achieved what she has without her husband Aseem.