

# Human Ecology



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# Starting Line

Divya Gugnani launches Wander Beauty, her fourth new business

**Divya Gugnani '98 just can't stop founding companies.** She is currently on her fourth venture, Wander Beauty, which followed intense negotiations—with her husband.

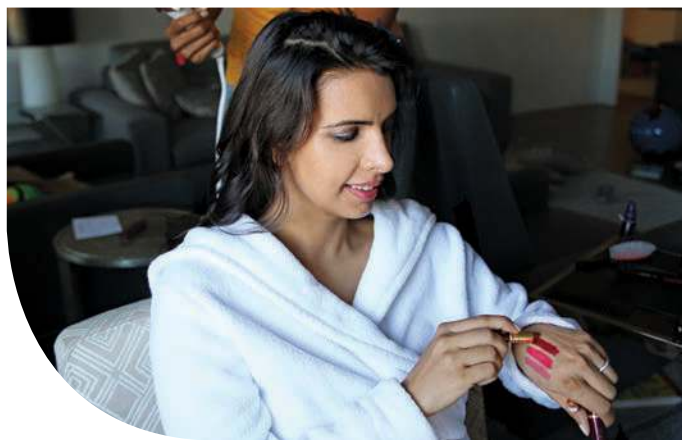
“When I had just delivered my daughter and was itching to start another business, my husband said, ‘Please, not another company!’” recounts the self-proclaimed startup junkie, who grew up on Long Island. “I told him, ‘Just one more, one more!’”

Gugnani and her co-founder, supermodel Lindsay Ellingson, conceived Wander Beauty to offer fuss-free makeup essentials made from “globally inspired” ingredients that work equally well for models on the go and multitasking working moms of two young children, such as Gugnani herself. Since its launch in April 2015, the company has grown quickly, selling its products across the United States and in Europe and Asia.

What keeps Gugnani thirsting for more is not just the thrill of success. “What I love about being an entrepreneur is the constant mission to create,” she explains. “I love experimenting and taking risks.”

At Cornell, Gugnani’s explorations took her well outside her Policy Analysis and Management major into a School of Hotel Administration cooking class as she followed an early passion for food. “That was a defining experience for me,” she says, one that motivated her to attend the French Culinary Institute and apprentice with chefs on nights and weekends while working full-time at investment bank Goldman Sachs.

Gugnani, who also worked in private equity and venture capital and earned an MBA from Harvard, melded her love of business and food in her first enterprise, Behind the Burner. “I never had more fun in my life,” she says about producing video and TV content with tips and techniques from culinary experts. “But it was not a sustainable, scalable business. Everyone needs to have a failure in their career to serve as a strong learning experience.” Although this “failure” nevertheless made money and resulted in a six-figure book deal—Gugnani published *Sexy Women Eat* in 2010—she refused to let it define her as an entrepreneur.



So Gugnani launched Send the Trend, a website for curated women’s fashion accessories, received \$3 million in venture capital funding, and sold the company to QVC within 11 months. “It was like a rocket ship, an out-of-body experience,” she says.

Building on her volunteer work at the Human Ecology Career Exploration Center, Gugnani advises budding entrepreneurs through her investment vehicle, Concept to Co. She stresses the importance of finding a strong focus and hiring capable, flexible team members, such as Alix Kriss, who has worked with Gugnani for seven years. “Divya

has a contagious passion for all things business,” Kriss says. “She is extremely hard-working and focused, and gets so invested in her ideas that it keeps her up at night.”

While Gugnani could once get away with sleeping at the office, she now strives to balance her intense work days with a young family. “People always ask, ‘How do you do

it?’” she says. “I tell them, ‘I don’t do it alone.’ My husband is supportive and engaged, and we get help from family members. But sometimes things fall apart. You just take every day and do the best job you can.”

For now, Gugnani has no plans to leave the “outer orbit trajectory” of her latest launch. “Wander Beauty has been the perfect storm of having a great idea, a great team, the right marketing message, and the right product come together,” she says. “This has really been a unique experience.”

— Olivia M. Hall, PhD '12