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From the Puget Sound Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/news/2018/04/05/women-who-lead-nonprofits-need-strong-leaders-and.html>

Women Who Lead

Women Who Lead: Nonprofits need strong leaders and a powerful mission

► **SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:** Apr 5, 2018, 3:05pm PDT

We asked women business leaders to share their thoughts on leadership and gender. Here are their stories.

A medical diagnosis, surgery or dramatic health symptoms can upend your life. It doesn't matter if you are a CEO, college professor, musical composer or mom, nothing quite prepares you or your family for navigating medical information and choices that come fast.



In 2008, I co-founded Allied Health Advocates with business partner Beth Droppert, who is a registered nurse with a bachelor's of science in nursing. We had met at an Arthritis Foundation event when she told me she had the idea for a business providing independent nurses directly to patients and their families. I was immediately drawn to this important idea after seeing how patients struggled and successfully managed their health through the work in my first business, founded in 2002.

Before we started the company, Beth and I spent a year laying out our goals, what we individually wanted to achieve and our values. It was important to make sure we were aligned.

Through that business we saw firsthand the life-changing experiences patients and families face and noticed how frustrated, worn-out or just befuddled people were at the way health care "worked."

We also noted that patients who had a health advocate by their side were getting better care.

To explore how to share what we'd learned, we hosted a Convening Conversation on Health Advocacy event in 2011 with a wide variety of people who had backgrounds as medical providers, insurers, educators, nurses, advocates, patients, consultants, working with seniors and in voluntary health organizations.

A handful of people continued to meet and helped create the first nonprofit organization in the country solely focused on health advocacy: the Washington State Health Advocacy Association (WASHAA). Our idea was to create an ecosystem of people who see the need for health advocacy, those who do health advocacy and people who want to build their own health advocacy skills.

Today, our organization helps people understand their health choices, find support for those choices in and out of the medical system and connect with professionals and services in our state.

It is not simple to take an idea and turn it into a nonprofit organization or business. Here are a few principles we applied to help create our success:

ALAN W. ABRAMOWITZ

Robin Shapiro is the co-founder and chairwoman of the board of the Washington State Health Advocacy Association

A powerful mission, vision and values are important to keep activities focused and make sure that everyone in the organization is in alignment with what needs to happen and how we get things done. Even nonprofits have a “culture,” although smaller organizations might not spend a lot of time thinking about it. That can be at your peril. People are attracted to other people and organizations that know who they are, what they want to do and where they need to go.

Strong leadership counts. Nonprofits spend a lot of time worrying about who they attract to their boards, and should with good reason. A well-balanced board that includes varied skills, experiences and perspectives helps staff see the big picture and can leverage a small staff’s time and resources to have a bigger impact faster.

We are building toward the future. We always keep one eye on what we want to become. This helps us with our decision-making in terms of investment and scalability, even if our focus is on education and awareness. We not only focus on our day-to-day activities, but we ask ourselves if what we are doing today is contributing to what we want to be tomorrow.

If we could change the world we would make health care simpler. But until that time comes, we are committed to sharing our knowledge, skills and connections so ordinary people can learn from insiders what you might need to know with health care decision-making.