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# 'You CAN HAVE IT All'

Scottsdale mother  
empowers women as  
leading expert in  
innovative dentistry

By Jordan Houston

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hen it comes to leadership, Dr. Sara Vizcarra sets the tone, not only as a professional but as a woman, Latina and mother as well.

Dr. Vizcarra, an esteemed dentist at North Scottsdale's Pinnacle Peak Family Dentistry, has built a reputation for herself as a knowledgeable, personable and compassionate doctor in a variety of services, including cosmetic dentistry, pediatric dentistry, orthodontics, prosthodontics and implant dentistry.

A single mother of one, Dr. Vizcarra has built an empire since beginning her practice, Pinnacle Peak Family Dentistry, at 10465 E. Pinnacle Peak Parkway, 15 years ago. She has since expanded the operation to include other doctors and specialists.

What makes Dr. Vizcarra's practice unique from the others is its specialization in temporomandibular

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Dr. Sara Vizcarra, a renowned dentist at AZ Sleep & TMJ Solutions, is a successful Latina, doctor, entrepreneur, mother, sister, daughter, aunt and teacher. She has made a name for herself as an accomplished role model for women, mothers and career professionals everywhere by enlisting passion, drive, dedication and courage.  
*(Photo by Walter Larsen)*



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joint (TMJ) disorders and sleep apnea.

"I can create a beautiful smile for a patient. That's easy. But to change the lives of patients in pain, now that's rewarding," Dr. Vizcarra says.

"My goal is to educate dentists in our community to look for signs of temporomandibular disorders. These specific cases are complex and could require additional time and research, but that's just part of the process if we want to achieve the goal of giving our patients a better quality of life."

A graduate of the University of Missouri School of Dentistry, Dr. Vizcarra broadened her specialties to include craniofacial medicine, offering treatment for orofacial pain, as well as dental-related sleep problems.

TMJ disorders, a type of temporomandibular disorder, can cause pain in the jaw joint and muscles that control jaw movement, according to Mayo Clinic. Causes include injury to the teeth or jaw, misalignment of the teeth or jaw, teeth grinding or clenching, poor posture, stress, arthritis and gum chewing.

"Many of the patients I have treated have come into my office in severe pain. However, after a few weeks of treatment, they come back smiling and even bearing gifts," Dr. Vizcarra says with a chuckle.

Dental sleep medicine is an area of dental practice that focuses on the use of oral appliance therapy to treat sleep-disordered breathing, encompassing snoring and obstructive sleep apnea. Dentists, like Dr. Vizcarra, generally work with physicians to identify the best treatment for each patient.

"Much of it is educating my patients about nutrition and how to decrease inflammation, as well as encouraging them to get better sleep," Dr. Vizcarra explains.

After completing several residencies, coupled with years of treating these conditions, Dr. Vizcarra has become a diplomate of the American Board of Craniofacial Pain, the American Board of Craniofacial and Dental Sleep Medicine, and the American Board of Dental Sleep Medicine.

"I am lucky to have chosen a career which has provided so much fulfillment. Although it took determination, courage and vision, nothing was going to stop me,"

Dr. Vizcarra says.

"When it comes to leadership, you must be able to establish goals and execute your vision. However, you won't be able to do so without a good team around you to help every step of the way."

The triple-board-certified dentist attributes much of her success to her staff of 14.

An idol for women in the workplace, there is more to Dr. Vizcarra than meets the eye.

Dr. Vizcarra balances her time by conducting free lectures and classes to other providers in the community.

"In my spare time, I teach other professionals about craniofacial pain, and one day I would love to educate the public as well," she says.

Her classes seek to raise awareness about the signs and symptoms that are often overlooked in her field.

Dr. Vizcarra is also dedicated to volunteering dental care to patients who don't have the resources to get the care they need in the United States, as well as Central and South America — stemming from her childhood in El Salvador.

Growing up in a small town, Dr. Vizcarra recalls the first time she encountered a female dentist when she was 12.

After moving to a larger city with her mother, a dental appointment helped her realize she wanted to pursue the profession.

"For some reason, I always thought dentistry was an important aspect in my life. I checked myself into the local hospital, which was like a big clinic, for a dental appointment," Dr. Vizcarra recalls. "With a lot of socialized health care systems, there are no parents, no informed consents, nor money to deal with. You simply check yourself in for regular checkups.

"There she was, the first female doctor I had ever met. I remember sitting in the dental chair while getting my fillings, looking up and thinking she's so pretty," she says.

At 16, Dr. Vizcarra and her family moved to California to flee the Salvadoran Civil War of the 1980s.

The teenager maintained a hard work ethic throughout school to help her family financially and save for dental school. Dr. Vizcarra worked as a waitress and a seamstress in Los Angeles.

"We were typical immigrants with

nothing. We lived in a tiny little apartment, and my mom went to work as a seamstress," Dr. Vizcarra says.

"After high school, I had to help her, so I worked in the sweat shops. However, I was determined to become a dentist ever since I was a little girl."

Dr. Vizcarra graduated from the Kansas City dental school in 2003. She practiced public health, helping the underserved population, before exploring the continuing education courses that ultimately changed the trajectory of her career.

"I went to a class about sleep apnea, and I was so intrigued," she says. "That led to all kinds of advanced learning about really extensive, heavy restorative cases."

Her curiosities about how head and neck pain could be associated with teeth grinding and snoring stemmed from her family's personal journey with sleep health.

During this time, she realized that her then-12-month-old son, Luis, began to grind his teeth. She also suffered from temporal headaches, neck pain, TMJ disorder and insomnia.

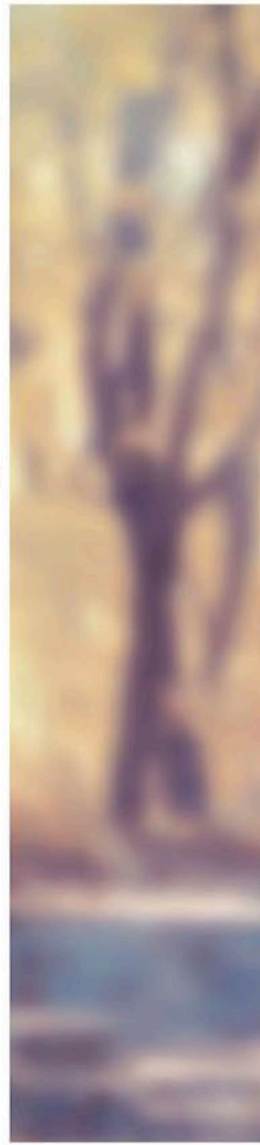
"I think what makes us better doctors is the fact that we are patients ourselves — we also sit in that chair and have treatments done," Dr. Vizcarra says.

"It was sort of my personal journey to find out why my son was grinding his teeth down to nothing and how I could help him."

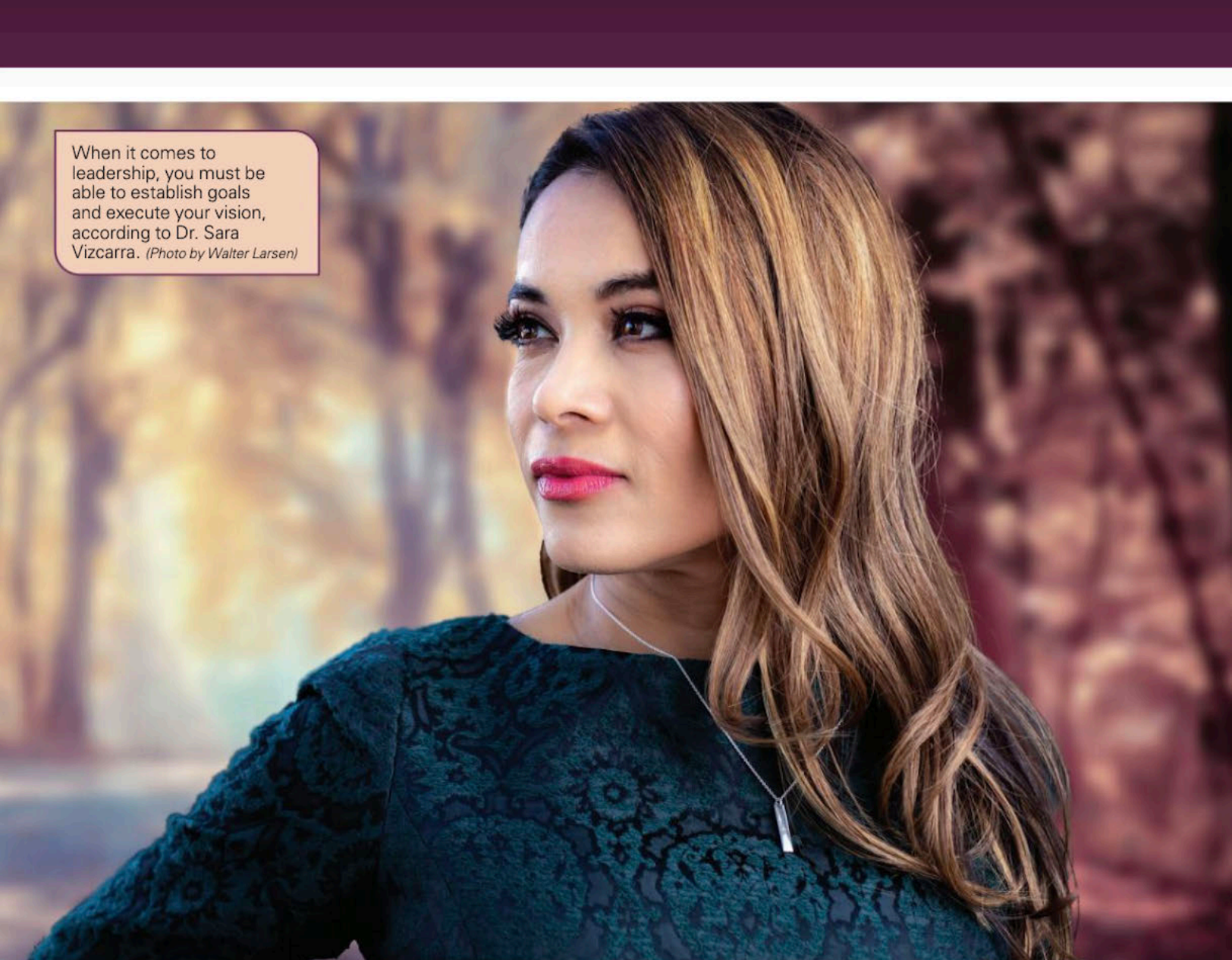
After learning those symptoms were related to the sleep cycle, she was inspired to help her patients sleep and feel better. That led to several residencies across the United States, which were dedicated to these topics.

Dr. Vizcarra eventually made her way to Arizona and has only continued to flourish as a leader within the field, and as a woman.

Her path is a testament that women can,







When it comes to leadership, you must be able to establish goals and execute your vision, according to Dr. Sara Vizcarra. (Photo by Walter Larsen)

in fact, have it all.

A proud mother, Dr. Vizcarra champions balance and organization as the keys to a bountiful life.

Dr. Vizcarra starts each morning with a list of three tasks to accomplish before the workday.

“I don’t like clutter. I keep it simple,” she says. “I think less is better when it comes to the clarity of the mind.”

Typical agenda items include meditation and yoga, she adds. This structure allows her to make time for jogging, hiking, salsa dancing and cooking.

“I like to lead by example. I can’t tell my patients or staff to be healthy if I am not healthy myself,” she says. “That is the first thing on my list.”

Although her leadership capabilities were tested in unprecedented ways during the height of the 2020 pandemic, Dr. Vizcarra

refused to give up on herself and her staff.

Pinnacle Peak Family Dentistry closed its doors at the end of March and did not reopen until early May. Throughout that time, Dr. Vizcarra armed her staff with the knowledge to comply with the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) guidance for health care workers and employers.

She also created projects geared toward helping her community in various ways, such as offering grocery pickups for elderly patients.

“Last year was a tough year for us. There were tears and sleepless nights, along with a lot of stress and worrying,” Dr. Vizcarra says. “There have been many obstacles in my life; however, this was different. I was concerned for my practice, my patients and my staff.

“I wasn’t going to let COVID-19 defeat me,” she continues. “Both practices

emerged from the shutdown stronger than ever. Our schedules are full, and we continue to grow.”

Pinnacle Peak Family Dentistry has expanded to three operatories and added a new associate to the practice. It has also acquired a new water-based laser that aids in tissue preserving, regenerative and bone-building procedures. The staff at Pinnacle Peak Family Dentistry and AZ Sleep & TMJ Solutions continues to take courses on the latest technology and procedures for better patient care. 🌟

### **AZ Sleep & TMJ Solutions**

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