

2021 TOP WOMEN IN RETAIL

Women in Retail's 11th Annual List of the Leading Female Executives in Retail



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HONORING THE 2021 TOP WOMEN IN RETAIL



Women in Retail Leadership Circle (WIRLC) is proud to present its 11th annual list of the top women executives in the retail industry. Like the prior 10 years, the 2021 Top Women in Retail list features a who's who in the industry. Honorees, some of whom were nominated by WIRLC members, *Inner Circle* e-newsletter subscribers, WIRLC partners and retail industry insiders, were chosen based on several criteria, including position within their retail organizations, scope of responsibility within those positions, career achievements, involvement within the retail industry, and more. To be featured, all of the women answered a series of questions that offered great insights into their careers and what makes them tick.

Considering the challenging year-plus for so many in the industry, strong leadership has never been more important. Use this special report as a resource to leverage this year's honorees' wisdom to help move your career forward. Among other valuable nuggets, you'll learn why they love retail, the biggest professional challenge they've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they solved it, what they believe companies can do to retain and attract more women talent, how they recharge, and much more.

This report also features our second annual list of Women on the Rise, or women retail executives whom, while not yet at the top of the corporate ladder, are well on their way to being the next great leaders in the retail industry. Honorees, all of whom were nominated by WIRLC members, *Inner Circle* e-newsletter subscribers, WIRLC partners and retail industry insiders, are managers, directors or vice presidents; younger than 40; and currently employed by a retail organization.

The Women on the Rise are helping to shape the future of retail organizations. They're leaders of various departments and/or teams within their organizations, including general management, marketing, e-commerce, digital, technology, merchandising, and more.

We hope you enjoy this special issue. Lastly, if you have any recommendations for women you would like to see featured in the 2022 Top Women in Retail report, please send me a note at mcampanelli@napco.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Melissa Campanelli
mcampanelli@napco.com



HELEN ABOAH

CEO, URBAN ZEN

Everyone has their own idea of what makes an effective leader, but for me, the most important is leading without an ego. It's critical to the success of any organization that a leader is open to hearing both negative and positive feedback and prompting team members for fresh ideas. I credit a part of my success as a leader to embracing feedback and incorporating ideas to affect change in real time.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

The main obstacle in the beginning of my career was to learn to advocate for myself and not be afraid to ask for either salary increases or promotions. I had to learn to ask for what I wanted and be confident that I deserved it based on my experience, skill sets and measurable accomplishments.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I believe that successful leaders develop over time by focusing on their strengths and recognizing their weaknesses. My commitment to learning and growing began with my drive to understand the business from end to end with a heavy emphasis on human capital. I'm constantly learning from my teams, the market, and customers in order to respond and adapt to changes in the marketplace and deliver positive business results. I'm also constantly studying current trends in culture and lifestyle.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Regardless of the level of the role, I look for people interested in being part of a team. The building, managing and growing of any organization is a "we" effort and not "me" driven. I'm personally drawn to those who are ambitious, passionate and, most importantly, open to learning.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

According to McKinsey & Company, even though COVID has impacted all working women, three groups have experienced the largest impact: working mothers, women in senior management, and women of color. To attract and retain talented women, organizations need to develop formal processes aimed at doing just that. One thing organizations can do is create flexible working conditions that recognize family situations and household responsibilities. In addition, organizations can open communication channels with women employees to discuss their career goals and create opportunities for growth through upskilling and sponsorship/mentoring opportunities.

How do you recharge?

Recharging for me is changing my environment, whether it's spending time in nature or simply taking a walk around the block. And remembering to be grateful — gratitude shifts my mental state and reminds me of all the great things in my life.

What do you love most about the retail industry?

The reason I love working in fashion retail is really because I see it as a means of helping people feel confident in their own skin — one outfit or item at a time. Our personal style is how we communicate to the world about who we are, where we're going and how we feel in that moment. That's why I'm as product focused as I am consumer focused. That's why I enjoy retailing products that not only dress the body but tell a story. At the end of the day, any company's goal is to create products that improve, transform or simplify people's lives.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The Donna Karan Urban Zen brand has always been fully experiential. Our retail locations include restaurants, fine art exhibits, and wellness classes. With COVID, the lack of personal interaction with our customers was difficult. We had to find a way to create that intimate interaction and sense of community virtually. We began to offer virtual appointments with personal shoppers and design rooms, showcase interactive art exhibits, and bring our wellness classes online.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

JOANNE CREVOISERAT

CEO, TAPESTRY, INC.

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Retailing is a straightforward business. It requires anticipating your customers' needs and responding to them. The customer, and therefore the business, moves very, very fast which is why it's easy to get addicted to the pace, the innovation, and the excitement. Once you're in it, it's a hard industry to leave!

I'm also passionate about brands, which live in the hearts and minds of consumers. Tapestry is a house of three powerful brands, all with authentic heritage and distinctive positioning in the market.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

For context, during the winter of 2019-2020, we conducted a diagnostic "deep dive" into our brands and business. Coming out of this work, we formulated our "Acceleration Program," aimed at sharpening our focus on the consumer, leveraging data and digital, and transforming into a leaner and more responsive organization. In early spring 2020, before COVID took hold, we had just begun to implement this plan.

The pandemic actually provided the ability to fast track the strategies already in place. Key among them was our emphasis on digital, as the massive shift to online shopping was further fueled by the closing of bricks and mortar. As a

global company, we were also able to leverage early lessons learned in our China business and apply them to other regions, including North America and Europe.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Creating a culture that's purpose-led and puts people front and center is key. I'm convinced that Tapestry's ability to weather the challenges presented by the pandemic was due in part to our culture of embracing diversity. We have always strived to contribute to a world that's inclusive. We understand that we're better together when different voices, life experiences and perspectives allow us to develop entirely new ideas, solutions and products. This principle drives everything that we do, and it's embedded in the DNA of our company and in each of our brands.

Adopting an infinite mindset is critical for any leader. This mindset simply establishes that there's no "finish line." In retail, we compete every day to win the hearts, minds and share of wallets of consumers. With the ever-increasing speed that consumers are changing and evolving, staying close to consumers requires agility and the ability to sustain an accelerated pace of innovation. There's no end, when you can sit back and relax. I believe that leaders who embrace an infinite mindset build stronger, more innovative teams that have the resilience to thrive in an ever-changing world.





to my leadership team, to my board — who was very supportive — and to other CEOs. I focused on defining our strategy and purpose, refining and implementing the Acceleration Program to reignite growth against the challenging consumer backdrop, and staying true to our purpose and values in our execution..

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

It's a broad question, but we look for talent with a brand mindset, intellectual curiosity, and a proven

track record of leading teams and developing talent. Additionally, as I mentioned earlier, we understand that we're better together when different voices, life experiences and perspectives allow us to develop entirely new ideas, solutions and products.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

One thing that the pandemic has taught us is that we can deliver results with much more flexibility than we previously thought possible. Our learnings on remote and hybrid working should support more flexibility in how and where we work. At Tapestry, our workforce is majority women. We've been flexible during the pandemic, understanding the myriad issues of childcare, competing priorities, shared or cramped workspaces. We're staying close to our teams to understand and respond to their needs.

While our benefits vary by country based on local legislation and what is customary, in the United States, for example, we offer up to 12 weeks of fully paid parental leave. In addition, for corporate employees, we offer a Return to Work program to ease the transition after welcoming a child where you may work a reduced schedule while earning your full pay for a period of time.

How do you recharge?

I enjoy running and almost any other outdoor activity. Getting a dose of fresh air and exercise is my favorite way to recharge. I also value time spent with my family. I have three great kids and a husband who keep me grounded.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Learning to build and empower a team. Early in my career, I relied on my work ethic and my own experience to drive results. It wasn't until after I became a mom that I really began to appreciate how a strong team can support better work-life balance AND drive even better business results. As individuals, we have limitations on what we can accomplish, but the potential of a strong, diverse team can be limitless.

Over time, I've also come to appreciate the value of failures and setbacks in the business. Reflecting on "what didn't work" shows we tried to stretch the possible, and those learnings can unlock even more potential in the future. The key to leveraging this well is to develop a test-and-learn framework to take measured risk and test new possibilities.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Taking on the CEO role at Tapestry, initially as interim CEO in July 2020, was probably the biggest risk I've taken. I had been at the company for less than a year. We had begun an ambitious transformation and, at the same time, were in the early months of the pandemic. It was truly trial by fire. But it has been both exhilarating and incredibly rewarding. I'm fortunate to have a strong leadership team to help drive our priorities, three strong brands in our portfolio, and world-class talent across the globe who are passionate about what they do every day. I've been humbled by their passion, resilience and commitment to serving our customers.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I've really taken everything I've learned in previous roles and applied it to this opportunity. Early on, I did a lot of listening:

JOANA DANON-MCKENNA

PRESIDENT, WALKER EDISON

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love being able to design products and the customer experience of the future to delight customers. Constantly innovating with customer centricity is a driving force of successful retail companies.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Figuring out how to best protect our employees and care for their mental well-being. We solved it by evolving our culture to meet the needs of our employees in a bespoke way, which meant moving to flex PTO, offering remote and flex work options, and providing resources to address mental well-being.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

To be an effective leader in a post-pandemic world, you must lean into authenticity and empathy. The way we work has changed and leaders must be ready to build a culture of trust, transformative leadership, and clear communication to drive results moving forward.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

I've always been a futurist and clearly understood insights and trends long before the industry or colleagues recognized them. Therefore, I've had to work hard to develop both patience and persuasion to bring people along to understanding those insights.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

There have been several times when opportunities have presented themselves to take on a new and challenging role, but it included uprooting myself and my family to some other part of the world and often I have taken those opportunities — which in hindsight were a major risk — but they have always paid off.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a president?

I spent my 20s listening and learning, taking risks, trying, failing and surrounding myself with incredible leaders. There isn't a blueprint that you can follow to become a CEO, but there are decisions you can make along your career path that will allow you to develop as a strong leader and give you opportunities that will set you up for success.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

I look for experience over education and I like to hire people who understand and value people. We can create the most incredible products or services, but without developing, nurturing and valuing our people, we will go nowhere fast.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you

think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Women have historically played more than one role in their personal and professional lives, so it's crucial for companies to meet their employees where they want to be met and provide the resources, tools and flexibility to retain great female talent. From having equal maternity and paternity time off, flexible work schedules, resources for after-school care to employee resource groups, companies need to look at their workforce through a lens of empathy as we navigate a post-COVID work-life balance.

How do you recharge?

I love to travel the world with my family. Making memories and sharing experiences together is what life is about and I'm blessed to share this incredible life with my family and so many wonderful friends. I'm also an avid reader and carve out time every day to read. I think we should never stop learning and evolving as human beings.



What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love that retail is dynamic. That ever-changing nature of the industry provides unique challenges, opportunities for innovation, and many growth opportunities for our top talent. I enjoy that no two days seem to be the same. I also love the team interaction because you can't do anything just on your own.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Keeping my team engaged and connected while we couldn't see each other was a unique challenge. To help remedy this, I created a series of remote meetings called "Lattes with Laura." Rather than focus on business updates as so many other meetings do, these informal chats were just for fun and camaraderie.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

The past year has been unique in so many ways. It challenged our normal work processes and approaches like no other time in my experience. The one skill that has personally helped me through is mental agility. The ability for organizations and the people that power them to be nimble and able to shift quickly has been an absolute asset.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

In 2008, my whole division was dissolved at a department store retailer and I had to decide "what to do with my life." I chose to step out of my comfort zone and learn more about sourcing, product development and specialty retail. That decision would set a new trajectory for my career. I learned so much from my experiences and I wouldn't be where I am today without overcoming the adversity from that stage in my career.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

It sometimes feels like every decision is a calculated risk of some sort in retail. I'm proud of how Michaels responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, from prioritizing the safety of our team members to maintaining the momentum of our business. We had to make critical decisions about our holiday merchandise buys — when to bring the merchandise in and, more importantly, whether to hold back or not. We took the risk and stuck with our initial projections, and it paid off. Our Makers loved our holiday assortment!

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a chief merchandising officer?

Learning has been the key to growing my career. As I mentioned earlier, deciding to learn from a difficult experience earlier in my career set up an important new trajectory for me. Learning from those around me has continued to be a priority. I learned from the leaders with whom I've worked and have been fortunate to have mentors since I started in retail. I still stay close to many of those people, despite more than 20 years having elapsed. I also reached out to gain experiences

to take me out of my comfort zone, whether in a new role, a speaking opportunity, or a new leadership opportunity. Most importantly, I learned as I developed into my current role that listening and having empathy is the best thing you can do!

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

I've always prized the mental agility I mentioned earlier, but have most certainly elevated that skill in my priorities when hiring. Beyond that, I hire for attitude, grit and work ethic. Skills can be trained and refined, but a positive leadership attitude is something that's far more valuable.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Unfortunately, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that there are 1.4 million more women not working than during the same month last year. Companies can and should consider incorporating a hybrid work model. This is one powerful way to help any working parent — especially working mothers — because it offers flexibility for a more balanced and sustainable schedule.

How do you recharge?

Crafting, decorating, and hosting family and friends are just a few ways I like to recharge. Crafting provides an opportunity to be mindful and promotes relaxation, and hosting friends and family in beautiful spaces offers the opportunity to connect. I also love spending time with my two teenagers. They both still love hanging out with mom. Finally, I keep myself centered by working out consistently and indulging in my love for travel.





BEA DIXON

FOUNDER, THE HONEY POT

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love that mass market retail allows for small brands to compete with the industry giants. It provides a road for indie brands to become the industry giants of the future.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

COVID forced us into a period of revisiting our business while experiencing crazy growth. Our trajectory changed overnight and we really had to deeply reflect on the necessary

pivots while also relying on each other to guarantee our success. That said, without COVID and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, it would have taken us longer to scale our business the way we did.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Adaptability, compassion and a relentless desire to provide consumers with not only efficacious products but a safe and informed environment to build their own journey.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest obstacle was drumming up access to investors and venture capital partners. It's a tireless mission for most entrepreneurs, but became increasingly more challenging as a woman-owned, Black-owned brand who was sitting at the table talking about vaginas. Startups led by Black women receive less than 1 percent of venture capital funding. It's truly a conversation around access and how to generate forums for broader funding for not only diverse humans but diverse business initiatives.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

The genesis of The Honey Pot is rooted in risk. I created The Honey Pot while working full time and with a deep knowledge that it would grow into its own entity. While I was building it, the risk was more centered around my ability to do it all — managing a job and scaling a real business. Additionally, the mission I was establishing had yet to be expressed in the market, so I was working double time to secure the brand's vision and prepare the consumer for what the brand would be, all the while getting sleep, attempting to stay centered and continuing to pay my bills.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I've learned to entrust and remain confident with the humans that I've hired to support the brand's mission. It's humbling to both learn and see things from a diversity of perspectives with varying degrees of experience. Everyone has been hired because they're experts and phenomenal humans. That's what matters to me. Deepening the core ethos of the brand by way of the humans in this organization is critical to my success, too.

What traits, skills, and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Adaptability, authenticity, kindness and awareness. I think awareness stands out to me as I don't expect every human to be able to check absolutely every single box as it pertains to their skills and experiences. However, if they have a level of awareness and recognize where they're learning and where they want to go, I admire that. A startup takes that level of awareness and malleability — how can I figure out any number of fires that are presented day over day? The question I have is instead of being hyper specialized, how are you growing towards a seasoned generalist?

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I think it's about creating safe spaces and opportunities that still empower those women to exist outside of the workplace and feel held. We consistently minimize a human's existence outside of the workplace, but being able to punctuate the sheer importance of who you are externally and how that is ultimately translated and of benefit internally is hugely important. We want people with stories, and children, to enrich the fabric of any organization. That should not only be honored, but acknowledged.

How do you recharge?

Meditation. I allow myself the latitude to do this in whatever way I can, but I absolutely have to sit in silence and just be daily.



What do you love most about the retail industry?

Retail is one of the most consumer-inspired industries — we have the opportunity to both create new trends and see them emerge. For us, in jewelry, what I love most is watching our more than 26,000 team members bring our purpose to life — inspiring love — in a world that very much needs more love. When we do this, we become a part of our customers' most celebrated moments — whether they're getting engaged or selecting the perfect Zoom-worthy self-expression for themselves.

We have the wonderful privilege to be part of people's meaningful life moments. There's not a time that I don't go into our stores and hear a story of one of our jewelry consultants being invited to a wedding because they've become so close to the couple that they were helping to find the perfect engagement ring. When done right, retail's focus is on delighting customers with wonderful products and services and building trusted relationships. What's not to love about that?

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The most important thing to me — and my leadership team — was doing everything we could to keep our people safe, while we focused on the sustainability of our company for the short and long term, knowing our more than 26,000 team members rely on Signet for their family's well-being. With this as our primary focus, we closed our stores before government mandates required it. It was the absolute right thing to do and yet it created a very different business challenge — how do we keep serving our customers when our primary mode of business was through brick-and mortar sales? We pivoted quickly, reinvented ourselves and created a truly connected way of doing business. All the credit goes to our team members, who quickly embraced new capabilities and rolled out new digital features such as virtual search; virtual try on; buy online, pick up in-store; and other features. Our e-commerce sales went from approximately 5 percent four years ago to 23 percent by the end of our fiscal year 2021. Connected commerce is now an integral part of our business, and we have so much upside to gain. I'm so very proud of our team. Not one single person fell prey to the sense of doom that major, unexpected crises can easily create. To the contrary, we decided to shut down, lean in, and speed up.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Values-based leadership and transformation, I believe, mark the most successful leaders. Have a people-first approach to every decision. This has always been my priority, especially during COVID-19. I also believe that the key to leadership that lasts in a world where very little else does is to embrace transformation as your most inspiring leadership aspiration. It's not always easy. The pressure to take risks and make decisions with imperfect information and uncertain judgment

can be intense. But it's infinitely rewarding work. As we like to say at Signet, "pressure creates diamonds."

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

As a working mom with young kids, I was constantly having to juggle the complexities of growing responsibilities at work and demands of very active children. Through that, I learned some key lessons that allowed me to manage: the first is that the best way to confront complexity is with simplicity — you have to whittle down to the "can't give" priorities and do those well. Everything else will fill in around that. Secondly, you have to make time for yourself. Managing your own energy can often get put on the back burner, but it's critical not to let that happen. It's the analogy of putting the oxygen mask on yourself first or you won't be able to help those around you. I think we all perform better when we can relax our minds and bodies routinely with exercise, hobbies, and time with family and friends rather than getting trapped in a 24/7 grind. Easy to say and hard — but so important — to do.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

When I was at Procter & Gamble, we wanted to develop beauty and personal care products to delight lower-income customers. I was convinced we were thinking about it the wrong way, so I took a risk that I knew might inconvenience my team and get some eye rolls. I assigned my team the task to live on the budget of a dollar channel customer for two weeks, immersing ourselves and viscerally experiencing the choices that these consumers were confronted with every day. I hoped this would open our minds to think about and "live into" how we could improve our products in ways consumers would truly value.

I asked everyone to take the task seriously and not cheat. So, when one of my kids came home and needed supplies for an unexpected school project, and I had not budgeted out the money to pay for it, I had to spend my gas money. I took the bus to work that week instead. These were the little moments of experiential learning that led us to become the No. 1 beauty company in the dollar channel and directly feeds into how I think about consumer experiences and immersive learning today.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I started managing a P&L three years into my career at Procter & Gamble. As I grew to increasing responsibility, I got a more holistic view of how to run a company — smaller sizes growing to bigger sizes. I focused on how well-rounded my learning was because that's ultimately what gives you the perspective to make better decisions and to be a better leader, especially across functions that you don't understand very well. I also asked a lot of questions and listened — really listened — to the answers to ensure my understanding. Over the course of my career, I've come to love leadership opportunities that demand transformation — whether it's the transformation and resurgence of a great brand like Olay or Pantene, getting a startup like Assurex Health ready for

transformative scale, or leading the transformation of a company like Signet that has so much potential just needing to be unleashed.

I wouldn't have known this about myself if I hadn't had a variety of roles early in my career. That's where you learn what you're good at and what you like to do. Many times, those two things go hand in hand. Becoming a successful leader is much more about acquiring broad knowledge and experiences, not about how fast you can get promoted.

What traits, skills, and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Curiosity, humility, and demonstrated leadership would be a few key ones. Curious people are continuous learners and often highly innovative — always looking for better ways of doing things. Humility opens our minds to others' expertise and points of view, allowing us to ask questions without feeling we need to have all the answers. It's a cornerstone of building a diverse team that can be more agile and act quickly. I've also found that leaders seek out opportunities to make a difference, and they do so in all aspects of their lives — at work, in nonprofits they support, and at school. Therefore, people with a track record of leading teams to deliver exceptional results are likely to keep doing it.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I'm a CEO today, but I will always be a mom first. The pandemic created overwhelming hardships for parents raising young children, and by a large proportion, this impacted women more so than men. At Signet, we've been focused on creating gender parity and are committed to ensuring parity for all our team members at every level.

As the world begins to reopen, we'll be mindful of what we've learned during the pandemic and have flexibility in mind. One bright spot of COVID-19 is that it taught us to focus on how to achieve outcomes and productivity in ways that we never thought possible. We're all learning a new way of living, of



working, of relating. And we all have blind spots to the impact it has on others. Listening to our team members is key. In the end, our goal remains the same: to ensure there's opportunity for all people to work at Signet, where they can bring their best selves to work; introduce ideas that grow their passion, not just their job; and join us in inspiring love.

How do you recharge?

I recharge by being with friends and family, playing sports, working out, golfing, boating and learning something new. It's important to recharge and make time for those we care most for so we can bring our best selves to work and play.



LESLIE FERRARO

PRESIDENT, QVC U.S. AND HSN

What do you love most about the retail industry?

As retailers, we can make a difference in the lives of our customers, day by day and even moment by moment. I find this incredibly inspiring and energizing. When we get it right, we build connections and relationships with our customers, and those

relationships can last a lifetime. In addition, companies like mine — that reach customers wherever they are — had special opportunities over the past year or so to help people through an isolating time. I found this very rewarding.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The health, safety and well-being of our team members, customers and community have been our top priorities throughout this pandemic. We moved quickly to keep our team members as safe as possible, shifting over 10,000 office-based team members worldwide to work from home and changing virtually every other aspect of how we operate, on a global basis, in just a few weeks. At the same time, we pivoted our product mix to meet customers' rapidly changing needs, and we expanded our social programming to offer customers new ways to connect while sheltering in place.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Flexibility, agility and accessibility. We've all been working under extraordinary circumstances, and it's still not clear what the "new normal" will be. Therefore, it's important for leaders to move quickly and be as flexible as possible with team members as everyone adapts to a constantly changing situation. This includes encouraging team members to take care of themselves. Success in business and in life is a marathon, not a sprint. Also, it's important to listen to your team. Passionate people want to be heard, so strive to create open, honest dialog, where everyone is respected and the best ideas win.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

When I first started in business, I was in the mode of "proving myself" and putting all of my energy into my career. I knew I was making sacrifices elsewhere, but I thought I had to do it to get ahead. A few years in, I realized this was a mistake. First, it was unhealthy; I ended up just feeling depleted and not always performing at my best. Second, I discovered that some of my most creative ideas come to me outside of work. By prioritizing things like healthy eating, time with family and friends, exercising, and making time to do things "out of my routine or comfort zone," I became more effective in my career.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Early in my career, I was a mid-level executive at the New York headquarters of a global company that strongly valued international experience for those who aspired to senior roles. This company had a program that offered international assignments to young women executives. I took a chance and transferred to Australia — our leading division at the time, where I had never visited and knew no one — and helped launch a new product into that market. It was an incredible experience and set me on a path toward my current role.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a business leader?

I'm a lifelong learner, so I'm always trying to expose myself to new topics and ideas. I network when I can, particularly with other executive women. I attend conferences and I enjoy speaking on panels — I learn as much as the audience does, if not more. I constantly listen to podcasts and read books and blogs, many recommended by my colleagues and my network. I try to always be in listening and learning mode.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Trust and accountability. Nothing kills a relationship faster than lack of transparency and follow-through, so I look to surround myself with people who hold themselves, their teams, and our business partners to the highest standards of integrity. It's equally important that each member takes full responsibility for delivering results. We have to be able to rely on each other.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I'm a firm believer that the most significant competitive advantage a company can have is its culture. Creating an environment of collaboration, support and teamwork, where team members feel comfortable sharing their views and have genuine concern for one another, gives an organization an incredible collective power. And it's vital to work to create an inclusive environment that provides equity flexibility and a sense of belonging for every team member.

How do you recharge?

Spending time with my family is so precious. I'm one of seven sisters so family time is something I grew up with understanding the importance of. Time with my husband and our three girls (and multiple pets!) is my priority and is incredibly valuable to me. Also, time with my extended family is also very important to me. I think it's easy to feel depleted when you feel overextended and stop putting yourself and your self-care first. It's easier said than done, but it's important to set boundaries and prioritize your health and well-being.

EVA GORDON

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, STORES AND SERVICES, THE CONTAINER STORE

What do you love most about the retail industry?

There's nothing like being in a store full of customers! The energy is contagious. At The Container Store, we call it Air of Excitement: the buzz you get from employees' passion for helping customers find the perfect solution and customers' delight at discovering new things. There's a product demonstration to your left, and a custom closet designer presenting a design to a client to your right. If you're ever having a blah day, go visit a store!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Ensuring that all our employees felt safe, secure and heard, especially during the chaotic early days. The answer was communication, communication, communication. We sent out weekly update memos and created an employee COVID hub on our intranet. We kept everyone constantly updated on the latest guidance in their locales. We also extended leave of absence periods, created safe celebrations and a special dress code (lots of carry-outs in the summer heat), and gave all employees appreciation bonuses on three different occasions. We also surveyed employees to ensure we understood their comfort level with our health and safety protocols, and our plans for operating as circumstances evolved.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Empathy and listening to understand remain as important as ever, but the pandemic clearly demonstrated that being nimble, creative in the face of obstacles, and generating ideas from front-line employees are game changers. The best ideas for continuing to thrive as a business came from our employees. As a company, we took risks, tried new things, and had a "whatever it takes" attitude. I'm so proud of how we united more closely than ever to weather the challenges.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

As a young leader, gaining credibility and finding a voice in my role with colleagues who had more tenure and didn't always see store leadership as a strategic partner. Therefore, I continually looked to add value to the business and our initiatives, sought to understand their priorities and concerns so I could be supportive and, most importantly, lead an impeccable stores organization that delivered consistent results. As they say, nothing succeeds like success!

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

When the pandemic started, our first reaction was to close stores. But we wanted to keep our employees working and our stores productive, so we quickly developed a virtual sales and design program, shifted online order fulfillment to store curbside delivery, and implemented socially distanced appointment selling. We didn't know if these strategies would pay off, but they did keep us going strong during the worst period.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as an executive?

I work as closely as possible with my colleagues and leaders. Everyone has their superpower. Understanding how I can adapt some of the strengths I admire into my own style has been helpful. It also helped me understand how to fully be myself and leverage my own strengths to be the best leader I can be. I've worked to be as well-rounded as possible. Every area of the business matters, and stores are the hub of the wheel. I strive to be able to speak and contribute to all our results, strategies and initiatives, whatever area of the business.

What traits, skills, and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

- ▶ **A win-win mentality.** Someone who understands customers, vendors, employees and shareholders can all win together.
- ▶ **Curiosity.** Someone who asks questions and is genuinely interested in learning
- ▶ **Strong communication skills.** You can't be an effective leader if you can't motivate and energize the team, clearly articulate priorities, and personalize your approach to work well with all different kinds of people.
- ▶ **A love of retail.** Energized and engaged with customer and employee interaction.
- ▶ **Continuous improvement.** Never satisfied, always anxious to move on to the next opportunity to be a better leader and a better company.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

The U.S. lags in supporting working women, especially working mothers. Without diversity of thought, in all its forms, we lose out on valuable contributions. Addressing childcare, elder care, and all the caregiving and emotional labor that women shoulder should be a priority for each company to address in the ways most meaningful to their employees.

How do you recharge?

I garden. It has some of my favorite things:

- ▶ physical exertion;
- ▶ immediate results; and
- ▶ I can't look at my phone while I'm doing it. LOL!



JOANNA GRIFFITH

CEO AND FOUNDER, KNIX

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love that we're in an era of reinvention. It's a time that requires creativity, curiosity and collaboration, all with the intention to better serve the customer. As someone who loves a good challenge, I couldn't imagine working in another industry.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

During the pandemic, I set out to raise the largest amount of funding yet for Knix. Not only that, but I was doing it while pregnant with twins. With less than 3 percent of venture capital dollars going to female-led startups, sole female founders in 2020 raised \$1 billion less despite a record venture funding surge in the United States. On top of that, I was also up against the prejudice of being a pregnant CEO and founder.

I had received disparaging comments in the past when I was pregnant with my first child, so this time I decided to set some boundaries. I told the investment bank that we were working with, Baird, that if anyone questions my abilities to lead a company because of my pregnancy, to remove them from the round. I knew that ultimately anyone who had those thoughts would simply not understand what Knix stands for and believes in. I closed a \$40 million minority growth equity funding round three days before giving birth to my twin girls on International Women's Day. This year I've developed a newfound respect for my personal strength, both emotional and physical. I've learned to trust my instincts, lead with heart, and not second-guess myself as much.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

The biggest takeaway I've learned from owning and leading a business during the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of agility and staying true to your company values. We've always been a pretty nimble company, so as soon as lockdowns across the globe started, we were quick to act and pivoted our campaigns and business practices. For example, when our physical stores temporarily closed, we launched Virtual Fittings, building on our customer's online shopping experience, while also providing employment opportunities for our store associates. Now our Virtual Fittings program sees over 2,000 fittings a month at full capacity and it's a sector of the business that we're focusing on expanding and investing in.

At the onset of the pandemic, we also made a quick decision to stay true to our values and found a way to be part of the solution by running our personal protective equipment (PPE) program. This helped the team have a sense of purpose, especially in the early days of the pandemic when it was so easy to feel lost and confused. The importance of community is stronger than ever before, and running a company during the pandemic definitely put our values to the test. However, I can honestly say that our team and brand are coming out of it stronger than ever.



Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

The biggest risk I made with Knix happened in 2016. When I founded Knix in 2013, I started by wholesaling our products to brick-and-mortar stores. I worked to scale Knix to be carried in over 700 retail locations across North America, but something wasn't clicking. We were a mission-led company with a big focus on body positivity and inclusivity. Unfortunately, at that point in time, the majority of retailers just weren't at the same place. We'd have customers drive from store to store only to be told that they didn't carry their size. There was a clear disconnect between the message we were putting out as a brand and the experience that our customers were having.

So in 2016, I made the difficult decision to switch gears. Slowly we pulled out of every retail location and switched our focus to selling entirely online. It was a big risk because it cut over 75 percent of our revenue at the time, but in the long run, it was the smartest decision we ever made. Becoming a direct-to-consumer brand was a turning point for Knix that led to just shy of 4000 percent three-year growth. We made that choice by listening to our customers and understanding how they wanted to shop and interact with us as a brand.

Fast-forward to 2021, and it's that same focus of listening to our community that has driven every major decision we've made as a company this past year and has ultimately resulted

in the success we experienced throughout 2020. As an e-commerce-first brand, we were well-positioned to handle the impact of the pandemic.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

When I started Knix I really underestimated how much of a mental game it would be. I'm not the person I was seven years ago, or even seven months ago. I've learned that effective leaders are always working on themselves. You have to be hyper aware of your strengths, your weaknesses and your mindset (with mindset being the most important). If you can change your mindset, you can change your life. That's the mental shift I had to make as I grew and scaled the business. I've had to accept that failure is inevitable and it's part of the process. You're never going to have all of the answers because if you're doing things right all the time, you will feel stretched constantly. It has been important for me to surround myself with people that are also on the path to self-improvement (whether that's through friends, podcasts, conferences or books). I've also made the effort from day one to talk honestly and openly about the challenges that I've faced to create a safe space for growth for myself but also my colleagues and friends.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

We've gotten into a great place with our team and office culture where we have a group of really passionate and talented people that are working towards a common goal. Our team has the speed, agility and confidence to tackle any obstacle without feeling discouraged. There's also a strong sense of personal accountability, so everyone on a team can trust their co-workers to do their job to the best of their ability, which in turn makes the group task much easier.

We've worked really hard to achieve this amazing group of employees, ensuring every person we hire fits into this positive culture that we've been fostering. That's why I always start off by asking candidates to tell me about themselves as a person — the stuff that isn't on a resume. I find that this helps ease the awkwardness/tension that can exist in an interview and invite more of a free-flow dialogue. You can have all the right skills for the job and that's fairly easy to assess; figuring out if the candidate is a fit culture wise is the hard part.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

The majority of employees at Knix identify as women, and this can be heavily attributed to the culture and overarching brand mission that we have. Our brand mission is to inspire our community to live unapologetically free. This is the same as our internal culture at Knix. We accept everyone for who they are; what happens when you do this is that you foster an environment where everyone feels safe, respected and valued. This includes our female employees and parents. The parents at Knix never have to worry about their children

popping into Zoom calls; we know their children's names and they are part of our community. My son Cole sometimes sits with me during our companywide meetings, and other employees' children often make meeting appearances, and that's more than OK!

At Knix, we are a mirror to the world, and this is real life! We know we have to support each other and create an environment that not only attracts women, but can also retain them. We have a high-performing team at Knix, but we also still put great value on work-life balance. Because of this, if you came to our office at 7 a.m. or 7 p.m., you would never see people working. This may seem strange for a brand with our level of growth, but it's because the office culture we created fosters a high level of performance and productivity, and above that we want our employees to have time to spend with their families and friends or to simply recharge.

How do you recharge?

Spending time with family and friends. I get energy from being around the people I love.





MARY JIMENEZ

CEO, MODCLOTH

What do you love most about the retail industry?

The constant evolution! I've been working in retail for a minute and it never ceases to amaze me how the industry keeps innovating. Just when you think, how many more ways can you recreate a silhouette, boom there comes an amazing designer

that blows your mind. I love how the industry is transforming to create less waste and that we're finally starting to embrace that. Also, the evolution of one type of beauty standard to multiple beauty standards and body positivity.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Adjusting our workflow from the office to home. How do you maintain the teamwork, camaraderie, sharing, listening, seeing, touching, fitting and brainstorming just to name a few when you're not physically together?

Luckily, I didn't have to work very hard to solve it thanks to my very creative team. Our creative marketing team shifted to shooting on vintage-inspired mannequins, our incredibly talented graphic design team developed campaigns with graphics and gifs. Our designers set up mini design studios in their homes and learned how to show a line over Zoom. Our technical design team did the same, taking the fit forms home and had samples delivered to their homes. They took turns messengering samples around and getting them back to the vendors all over the world. Fittings over Zoom. Everyone had to learn to trust their partners for approvals; that's a lot of pressure for the approver. The buyers had to learn to get inspired by lines sheets and CADs from our external vendors, not to mention assorting a line at home and conferencing with their partners. Our customer care team, who are always ModStylists, also had to be there for our customers who just needed to talk. There are so many more examples. I worked on keeping the communication flowing across the different workgroups and keeping the morale up without any bs about what we were all going through.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Be flexible and have a backup plan. Recognize that you don't know everything and really listen to your team. The best ideas in the last 15 months were not mine or for that matter anyone on the executive team. They came from THE team.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

I'm an introvert. That doesn't help when you're starting out as an assistant buyer and you lack the experience and confidence to break through. In fact, I had a GMM who stated that I wouldn't go far. Luckily, I had great mentors, including my buyer at the time and the DMM who promoted me to my first associate buying position.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Moving to Singapore early in my career to work for DFS as a buyer. People thought I was crazy and that I was going to stunt my career growth. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that move. I had the opportunity to work for an international retailer and learn about customer buying patterns from different countries. Last but not least, Singaporeans are the best people and they taught me to work as a team to accomplish a goal and they developed my palate!!!

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

Watching and learning from the best. I'm not that original! I didn't plan on becoming a CEO. I never had that on my vision board. I enjoy working with teams to create and curate great product that makes people, especially women, feel good.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

In addition to the required skill or talent needed for the job, positivity, experience in adapting and/or dealing with ambiguity, the willingness to be a true team player and roll up your sleeves regardless of title to get the job done. It doesn't hurt if you're an animal lover ...

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

- ▶ Offer programs and benefits that support and uplift women:
- ▶ Schedule flexibility, including work from home. The positive thing out of this pandemic is that we proved that we can be as efficient and even more efficient working remotely.
- ▶ Better healthcare.
- ▶ Daycare options for humans and dogs.
- ▶ Longer maternity leaves.
- ▶ Leaves to take care of family, as it often falls on women to do this.
- ▶ EQUAL PAY!

How do you recharge?

Pre-pandemic, SoulCycle plus yearly vacations to Italy to see my family and lay on the beach.

During the pandemic, being alone together with my husband, long walks with my dog, and watching Scandinavian noir series and movies. From now on hopefully a combination of all the above.

MOLLY LANGENSTEIN

CEO AND PRESIDENT, CHICO'S FAS

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I learned at a very young age in my mother's boutique the power clothes have on transforming a woman. This stays with me today — this opportunity to make a difference transforming and instilling confidence and joy. Confidence is beautiful!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

This was everyone's first pandemic. Facing how to run a company during this time was the biggest challenge. We were dealing with impacting everyone's life and livelihood. Acknowledging this and asking how people were doing was first; then we could focus on the priorities of the business. I leaned into professional organizations like the Retail Industry Leaders Association, mentors, our board of directors and professional advisors. We focused on fact gathering, meeting with the teams, resolving issues, building a plan, executing that plan, and moving to the next problem. We did it as a team; this was a time to come together.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

The most effective leaders I experienced this year expressed gratitude. Sharing thanks and encouragement to colleagues and customers brought out the best in both. Leaders that can shape a clear strategy will be successful when they galvanize against their values to support the strategy and express gratitude on the journey.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Not being taken seriously. Having the most popular dog name as your name, a tendency for a high-pitched voice, and being small in stature were made more challenging when a leader used to refer to me as "little Molly." I learned to physically take up more space and watch my pitch. When I became a vice president, I asked the leader privately how my new team could take me seriously when he referred to me as "little Molly," especially when he didn't refer to my peer (who happened to be 6'2" and male) as "little Rob." Know when and how to approach people. This leader is still a mentor for me today.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Many years ago, I had proven to myself that I was ready for the next level role but was told by my boss that I was too good in the role and she couldn't replace me. I went over my boss's head to ask for the next role and expressed why I thought I was ready. This worked out for me a few months later when a role became available. I got the position and



then spent the next 10 years moving up in the company taking on new roles every two years. The leader I reached out to is a mentor of mine to this day.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

You never stop developing yourself. Do the job you have today to the best of your ability, know for yourself what you want to learn and vocalize that with your peers and leaders. Learning is curiosity and a constant journey. My preparation is surrounding myself with people smarter than me so I can learn from them and we can push each other and the company further.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

I look for people who are humble and live for the values of the company, have a shared curiosity, and have a proven track record. We need leaders today who can be in the ring when they need to and not lead from the bleachers.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Women have left the workforce to care for children and parents. Companies need to recognize that we need to support the whole person and understand their needs. Here at Chico's FAS, we have many things to support all of our employees, including an on-site daycare facility, a fitness center, a health and wellness clinic, drop-off and pick-up dry cleaning, and mobile mammograms — and you can bring your dog to work. Recently, when reopening our campus, we launched 100 percent workplace flexibility for all our headquartered team members. We need to meet our people's needs so they can lift up the company.

How do you recharge?

Through nature — kayaking, walking in the mountains or parks, skiing, yoga at dawn on my patio. Anything outdoors — it's both my retreat and recharge!

MARY BETH LAUGHTON

PRESIDENT AND CEO, ATHLETA

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Besides being able to work cross-functionally with so many teams, I love that it's really an ever-changing landscape. We're seeing so much change and evolution — from trends, customers' behaviors and shopping habits, technology, global events — something is always moving the needle. Athleta is a customer-centric company, meaning we put the customer at the center of everything we do. We're constantly evaluating and re-evaluating what our customers need and what they want to see from us, and using those learnings to change and adapt. I think there's so much opportunity to innovate in retail in areas like the future store experience, and I'm really excited to help play a leadership role in this evolution.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The biggest challenge was accepting the situation, understanding the needs coming out of it, and deciding how to move forward while keeping customer and employee safety at the center. We know that the pandemic brought massive change and we know our customers were thinking, behaving and shopping differently. I worked very closely with my leadership team to take these learnings and brainstorm ways that we could evolve quickly as a brand to meet these customer needs.

For example, we started to make innovative, breathable masks and brought them to market within 60 days of the start of the pandemic. We launched new products our customer was looking for, including a new sleep collection, and we created a series of virtual events called (Em)Power Hours where customers could engage with the brand and a community of other women safely from their homes.

Through these efforts, we saw incredible return on our business and found that customers truly wanted to engage with us, despite the shifts that were occurring in their lives. Our internal culture mantra is "Power of We," which means that the magic happens when we work together. Collaborating with my team to pivot and move quickly to adapt to the circumstances was key to our success in navigating through it.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Moving forward, two really important skills to lean on are intuition and empathy. As a leader of a brand, especially during the last year, people look to you for guidance — which can be challenging when it's something you've never had to lead through before. That's where intuition really comes into play; just knowing when decisions and opportunities feel right or wrong, no matter how they look on paper. This proved itself during the challenge of last year. You can't be prepared or truly know how to navigate something like this, so leveraging intuition and blending it with strategy to make decisions was key to get through it all and showed me how important and valuable intuition is as a leader.

Empathy is also a huge one. I saw firsthand the variety of unique experiences and situations that our customers and employees faced. It was a challenging year and has affected everyone to some degree. During that time, I kept reminding myself that everyone is human, and that this pandemic is larger than just any one of us. Being empathetic of our customers' situations and trying to truly understand what they wanted and needed from us at the time was a key driver in our strategy. Internally, the same goes for employees. Listening to what they wanted and needed from their workplace was hugely important as we determined the best path forward when offices closed, and also looking ahead to the future. Leading with empathy and compassion drove better results across the board and spoke true to our values as a brand as well.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Early in my career I joined McKinsey & Company as a consultant, which was a great way to learn about different industries and companies. This was in the 1990s during the dot-com boom, so I was often staffed on startups and asked to do all sorts of roles that extended beyond just building presentations. For example, I was staffed on a search engine startup where I was asked to help oversee the Quality Assurance department. I had no idea what QA in a technology company even was, much less how to manage it. But I decided to throw myself in and learned as I went. Experiences like this helped me be comfortable acting on my feet, absorbing new information quickly, and making decisions without perfect experience or data, which has helped me throughout my career.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

When I was at Nike, I had an opportunity to take on my first big leadership role running Nike's European e-commerce business across 21 countries. The role was based in the Netherlands, and I had recently learned I was pregnant with my first child. I decided to take the risk to move to another country by myself (it took time to transfer my husband's job) while pregnant and taking on my first big role owning a P&L and larger team. But it really paid off — not only did I learn a

HER TO REALIZE THEIR LIMITLESS

POWER OF SHE



ton professionally about how to lead a culturally diverse team and complex international business, but I also benefited from the personal experience of living abroad.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

One thing I've done at several points during my career is create new roles for myself to learn new skills and help the companies I was working at open up exciting opportunities. For example, when I was at Nike in a strategy role during the earlier days of e-commerce, I saw that all our subsidiaries were trying to develop and grow e-commerce businesses, so I suggested a new role to help them with this. That is where I really learned the nuts and bolts of this space. At Sephora, I was running the e-commerce business but saw the opportunity to truly put the customer at the center and think through their full journey across touchpoints by combining the store and digital teams under one umbrella, which led to me taking on the company's first omnichannel leadership role.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

What's really important to us at Athleta is that our team members' values align with the brand mission. We use this lens as our north star for everything that we do and create. We're always looking to bring in people who are passionate about our core values of empowering women and girls, sustainability, and inclusivity. When you truly believe in the work you're doing, the result is so much more powerful and rewarding. I'm so grateful for our incredible team and the work that they do, and also happy that Athleta can offer a space for them to do meaningful work.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

This is something that's really important to us at Athleta and Gap Inc. We're a company that's inclusive, by design, meaning we weave inclusivity into every aspect of our business. Gap Inc. is one of the top retailers to employ primarily women and was the first retailer to confirm Equal Pay in 2014. Similarly, Athleta is a values-driven brand, and its mission is all about empowering women to realize their limitless potential. Our leadership team is entirely female, as is most of our workforce, both within our corporate offices and stores. Not only does this push for equality happen within our walls, but we also strive to ensure that what we're creating out in the world reflects this too. We recently launched a new program under the Power of She Fund committed to empowering women through childcare. This fund, created in partnership with Allyson Felix and the Women's Sports Foundation, addresses the inequalities facing female athletes. These grants offer funding for childcare costs to professional mom athletes competing in the Tokyo and Beijing Olympic Games. Additionally, Gap Inc. has also committed to joining TIME'S UP Care Economy Business Council, which advocates for and seeks to reimagine our nation's caregiving infrastructure to get people back to work and build a more robust, resilient economy. We hope these initiatives really make a difference in supporting women so that they have the resources to support their family without giving up their career.

How do you recharge?

I enjoy running almost every day. It's my time to gain perspective and recharge. While I run, I enjoy listening to podcasts; I think they can offer a good, fresh perspective. It's always good to step outside the box and consider ideas from other angles — it helps me keep an open mind. I also love to hike with my friends, play tennis with my kids — anything to keep my body moving. And, of course, spending quality time with my family always gives me the best kind of reset.

RATI SAHI LEVESQUE

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, THE REALREAL

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love how quickly and rapidly the industry and the customer have evolved. Every couple of years, we see companies and emerging brands come in and disrupt the space, we see just how much digital continues to shape how we enhance the shopper experience, and we continue to see brands shift their business to acquire and retain new customers. The customer is the driver of these shifts and now we're seeing that they're socially and environmentally conscious, they're more resourceful when it comes to educating themselves about a brand or a trend, and they hold companies accountable. The customer's shopping habits have shifted from what used to be price-driven to, "Does my purchase satisfy me and support the greater good?" I absolutely love the thrill of trying to keep up with them!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

At the beginning of the pandemic, we had to make some tough decisions, as most companies had to. We saw demand and supply get cut in half; in order to keep the business afloat, we had to make some tradeoffs that impacted our TRR community. It was something that was unpredictable and out of our control, but nonetheless made every business decision that much more tough to make. The one thing I can say is that going through something as challenging and unknown like COVID-19 was that we've become more proactive at preparing for the unexpected.

Given what we've experienced this past year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Preparedness. Whether you're an established leader or someone starting out in the industry, the one universal thing we learned during this pandemic is being prepared for almost anything. While the pandemic took the world by storm — and by surprise — we shifted from this reactive, startup phase to a company that's looking around every corner and preparing for best- and worst-case scenarios.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

When I was starting out, I remember how often I pushed my own thoughts and opinions aside to appease my bosses, and I remember thinking just how counterintuitive that was. I have this memory of helping my boss with something and I wanted to make a suggestion that I thought made more sense than what he was explaining. I reminded myself that he hired me because he liked what he heard in my interview and that he appreciated my point of view. I ended up interjecting and made a recommendation that my boss respected and ultimately agreed with.

Throughout my career, I've actually been fortunate enough to work with women who either spoke up or encouraged me to speak up, and that's my biggest advice to young women starting out. Your opinion matters. You were hired because of it, so speak up!

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

At TRR, we invested in a lot of different ideas at the beginning, but one of the biggest risks we ever took was opening our first store. It was a huge investment and there were a lot of risks associated with opening a store in New York City — the city that boasts every type of retailer and fashion designer! But we took a leap and ended up seeing a huge halo effect. We now have 17 retail locations nationwide. Of all the decisions we make, we hope to get at least 80 percent of them right. It's all a risk, but you'll figure it out along the way.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a leader?

Believe it or not, it was taking time for myself. It took me a while to realize that, but no one is going to take the time for you, you need to take it yourself. Taking time off and setting boundaries was key to my development (it still is); it gave me the space and capacity to recharge and remain focused and present in both my work and personal life. Think of your career like a marathon: pace yourself and give yourself a moment to catch your breath so you don't burn out.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

I'm really committed to building a resilient workforce, especially for younger women who are just stepping into their careers. They're the future leaders, and given all that we've been through the past year, it's so important to be strong, resilient and confident. I look for people who are driven by curiosity, have an appetite to learn, have a strong point of view (and aren't afraid to share it), and are motivated to help achieve both business goals and their own professional goals.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Flexibility. We recognize that people have lives outside of work and with the help of technology, people now more than ever are able to balance work with their personal lives. If results aren't suffering, why shouldn't you be able to work and attend your child's sporting event?

How do you recharge?

I ride my bike to Ocean Beach by myself — no family, no phones, no disruptions — and I take a minute to just breathe and clear my head.



ROSEANN LYNCH

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER AND HEAD OF THE RALPH LAUREN FOUNDATION, RALPH LAUREN CORPORATION

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Having been in the retail industry for nearly 30 years, there's a lot to love. What I love the most is the diversity of the teams, the dynamic nature of the industry, and the pace — the need for constant innovation and direct connection with customers while delivering on consumer needs.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Balancing the needs of our key stakeholders and our workforce. How to keep our employees safe, healthy and confident so that we would emerge from the pandemic stronger than before. Understanding all of the implications of the pandemic on the employee experience and the unprecedented unique challenges it caused our people to face, at home and at work. Ensuring tools and resources were available to people who needed to be work-enabled in their homes, and providing the necessary health and safety measures for our frontline workers. I solved it by leaning in on our Ralph Lauren purpose — “To inspire the dream of a better life” — and making sure that our programs, policies and solutions were all centered around the RL Way — doing the right thing and putting people first. Our values as a company are always the best filter when faced with challenges.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Agility, ability to adapt, openness, instincts combined with data, and a people-first mindset.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

I've faced many obstacles in my career. Early in my career, some of the greatest obstacles came with being a single mother — trying to balance being active, engaged and present for my girls while being able to provide the essentials while aspiring to the best life I could give them. I overcame it, first with strong faith and optimism, then by creating a solid network of support through family and friends to help me raise my children and provide me with the confidence to trust the process. Then I found my best friend and partner, who created the conditions in our life for me to thrive. He's my best friend, advocate and “soul” supporter.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

My husband and I created the Iron Buddha, a fitness studio focused on promoting strength and endurance for physical and mental well-being. Though this is what I would currently consider a risk, it has kept us and our family emotionally and spiritually fulfilled and inspired during the pandemic. Through Iron Buddha, we've built a community that has allowed us to focus our attention on what we could do for others to bring them peace and comfort and create a collective safe space.



What steps did you take to develop yourself as a Chief People Officer?

I never throw away my shots (Hamilton). I always filled the void, listened more than I spoke, didn't make judgments without facts and lots and lots of questions, led from the heart, and put people first. I've always been curious. I read a lot. I spend a lot of time scrutinizing and wrestling issues to the ground with my team. I learned how to be a leader of teams by taking roles that required leadership, purpose and vision. I take the job seriously, but I don't take myself too seriously; I never forget how to have fun at work.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Humility, grace, collaborative mindset, team orientation, experience, and having faced and overcome some level of adversity.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Flexibility will be key, in addition to inclusion in the truest sense of the word. Don't have women at the table and not empower them — give them a voice and provide real access for them. Show them more women leaders in their companies. Have women tell their stories to the next generation without masks or shields.

How do you recharge?

Writing, yoga, running, breathing, and being a mom and wife actively.

MARGARET MORASKIE

CEO, LEVINGER COMPANY

What do you love most about the retail industry?

There's a lot to love. First, I would say it's a naturally collaborative and supportive ecosystem full of growth and opportunity. I've made some connections that will last a lifetime. The pace and the constant evolution and change. This industry looks very different than when we started our careers. It has been an ongoing adventure in learning. As a sign in my office says, "We're All Mad Here." I think we retailers all have a fabulous spark of madness!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Ensuring our team and their families were safe, and like everyone else, being nimble enough to adapt at a moment's notice. It seems like each week has brought us a new challenge. The key — rather than solution — remains communication and flexibility. We've all had to think outside of the box.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Empathy and listening to others' ideas; authenticity; and the flexibility to take a different path. Your strategy and end goals may not change; your values shouldn't change. The road to those goals may take an unexpected and innovative turn or two.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Early on, after I had my daughter and had returned from leave, I asked my supervisor what more I could do to learn, grow and advance. I believed I had more to offer but was told that I had gone as far as I could at the company and there was no room for further growth. I took his comment as legitimate and began a job search. When the time came, I went to another senior executive whom I had worked with extensively to request a reference. He was shocked and wondered why I would leave. He believed I was a valuable contributor and could do more! The rest, as they say, is history. My career took on a whole new reality and I grew in ways I could never have imagined. I learned then and there not to let anyone count me out or tell me how far I could go.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

In the early years of e-commerce, we had a website that was beautiful and completely nonfunctional. As in ... it couldn't handle traffic. We couldn't advertise or it would crash, and it was EXPENSIVE! The time came to either abandon ship or stick with fixing it. You see, the thought was that we needed a big-name brand partner to develop the site and it was excruciating. Just simply not the right fit for our business. When the time came to stay or go, our team proposed a smaller partner for development, and we spent months on our due diligence. We presented and our CEO



wasn't convinced. He had been burned by a smaller (out of business quickly) partner in the height of the dot-com bubble. I spoke up again and again, we had heated debates, and finally he decided to trust us. He let us take the risk (he is still a tremendous mentor and one of the best leaders I've ever worked with). Fast-forward: It was the right decision. Our volume grew by over 75 percent in the first year and we never looked back.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

Well, I'm a new CEO, but regardless, I don't believe that the work of learning and development is ever over. I'm a work in progress both personally and professionally. As a leader, I've worked hard to turn constructive feedback and do better each day. I also listen to the team. To form connections, learn from others and especially our customers has and will always be core to my development.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

A passion for learning and a desire to contribute. A positive and fearless attitude of collaboration. The ability to problem solve without blame. Technical skills can be taught; attitude can not.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

We must be empathetic; we must listen and adapt. Many women have so much on their plates. Career, family and oftentimes being caregiver for both children and parents. It's just too much to juggle. We must be understanding and flexible with these schedules. Given the stats, it seems women have finally said, "it's just not worth it." There must be more. We need to be innovative with benefits to provide a satisfying and "worth it" career.

How do you recharge?

Spending time with friends and family. I love to travel, even just quick getaways or staycations. A change of scenery can work wonders. I try to meditate each evening. And I read ... I read a lot.

CHRISTIANE PNDARVIS

CO-PRESIDENT/CHIEF MERCHANDISING AND DESIGN OFFICER, SAVAGE X FENTY

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love how dynamic and ever evolving the retail industry is. There have been numerous cycles of evolution ever since artisans and merchants started bartering their wares in open air markets. We've gone from department stores, which started in the United States in 1858 when Macy's opened its doors in New York City, to the beginning of mail order with The R.W. Sears Watch Co. catalog in 1888, to the rise of the indoor shopping mall which began in 1956 in Edina, Minn. and helped define the suburbs as we know them. And we're living through a monumental shift right now with the rise of digital commerce. I love that retail is full of complexity and challenges, and that as retailers we seek to better service and satisfy our customers' needs and wants every day. And we get a report card every day that tells us how we're doing. I couldn't imagine being in a different industry, honestly.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The biggest challenge for me has been balancing the needs of the business against the needs of the team and our people. We've been through several waves over the course of the

past 18 months at Savage. There was a period of uncertainty early on as no one knew what to expect personally or with their businesses. That uncertainty gave way to unexpected growth and consumer demand, as like many direct-to-consumer brands we saw record traffic to our site and interest in our products. Our teams worked hard to help us capitalize on this opportunity, chasing inventory and fueling the business. They found new ways of working, which was especially challenging for my design, product development, technical design and production teams. Their jobs are inherently not virtual and took longer and were harder in the work-from-home environment we were in. So we made a commitment to provide as much support as we could for the teams. We organized social activities (fitness classes, cooking lessons, a costume contest, guest speakers, trivia nights), carved out a day every month for team members to style their day and dedicate time to whatever they needed or wanted to do, doubled down on recognition and awards to ensure our teams knew we saw their hard work and appreciated their efforts. I personally tried every day to lead with compassion and understanding, reminding the teams to take time for self and be kind to themselves.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Building your crisis management skills — or more broadly, learning how to lead in the face of adversity. It's obvious how this was important during the pandemic. While we hope we don't face another crisis such as this one, it's certain we will all face some type of professional adversity. As a leader, you need to instill calm and be able to rally the team to the task. You cast a large shadow, larger than you realize. It's important to maintain your composure so you can approach the situation in a deliberate and methodical manner. If you're chaotic in the face of a crisis, your team will be chaotic as well.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

As an African-American woman born and raised in the South, there was this unwritten rule passed down over generations that you had to be guarded around groups from outside of our community. That you couldn't reveal your full self and personal details about yourself around others. In the same way that people put on work-appropriate attire every day before going into the office, I put on what I thought was a work-appropriate persona every day before going into the office. I did my work, got my job done, but held back important parts of me. And my career stalled early on. I didn't advance as quickly as some of my peers, I didn't build sponsors who advocated for me, and I wasn't as connected with my co-workers.

It took me working for a dynamic African-American woman who was her complete and holistic self at work — a woman who wore her natural hair and fashionable clothes in a more conservative environment, who just showed up authentically every day — for me to realize how much my “work persona” was holding me back. Her example freed me. I saw her being recognized and promoted for her accomplishments



faster than her peers. This is why representation and visibility matter. You cannot be what you cannot see, and she was the example that led me to re-evaluate my entire approach to work.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a president?

I didn't specifically take steps to develop myself as a CEO. I've always focused more on developing myself to be a great leader and a strategic business person. I think that distinction is important because you can lose sight of what's most important if you're too focused on chasing a title. I'm inherently a curious person; I love to learn and I'm not afraid to ask questions. Those characteristics have enabled me to lead areas outside of my functional expertise, and doing that effectively is an important foundational step to becoming a CEO or president. I also learned quickly after I started leading teams that I had to spend as much time thinking about my team — meaning the people on it, whether they were in the right roles, how it was structured, what support they needed, how they were being compensated, what type of culture did we want — as I did thinking about my business. You cannot drive consistent, long-term business results without a solid team foundation. They go hand in hand.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

I like to hire the best athletes to join my team. And what I mean by that is to hire people who are smart, self-driven, curious and courageous. They may not have as much functional experience as others, but I believe you can teach smart people the more functional and technical side of roles. However, I cannot teach someone how to be inquisitive and to ask good questions. I cannot teach someone how to be accountable and to want to take ownership. And I cannot teach someone to be results driven. I also look for people who have overcome challenges and gained insights from those experiences.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I find this incredibly sad and disheartening. I lost a talented woman on my team because she felt she couldn't manage her role and her daughters' needs during the pandemic with remote school. We worked with her to take a leave of absence in the hopes that the time off would enable her to address her family needs. Ultimately, she decided not to return, but I felt better about the conclusion because our approach let her know that we valued her, wanted her to stay in a job she loved and was good at, and were open to creative solutions. I think companies have to take a more bespoke

approach to fostering work-life harmony for women and recognize the unique demands women often face as the primary caregivers for children and parents. It means making special accommodations and potentially spending more funds on them. It's not just the right thing to do. It will result in better retention, less loss of institutional knowledge, and higher employee satisfaction.

How do you recharge?

I try to find small moments for myself. It may be 20 minutes for a walk around the neighborhood or for a Peloton ride. Or it could be giving myself an at-home facial. Or binge watching a show. With the pandemic, I haven't been able to travel and visit friends and family, which is one of the main ways I used to recharge. I created a motto for myself during the pandemic: "You are doing the best you can at this moment." It's a reminder to be kind to yourself and not hold yourself to an unrealistic standard.



DEBRA PERELMAN

PRESIDENT AND CEO, REVLON

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love the challenge of keeping up with consumers' changing needs. The industry is so dynamic, with new consumers, new products and trends, and technology pushing us forward in unexpected ways. Navigating these ongoing changes in order to enable an unforgettable consumer experience is what energizes me on a daily basis!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

Our primary focus throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was, and continues to be, keeping our employees safe amidst a lot of uncertainty, including our supply chain and R&D facilities that have remained open throughout the pandemic.

For our office-based workers, we shifted, essentially overnight, to a distributed workforce with everyone working remotely. Being unable to interact with my teams in person was a huge challenge, especially during such a difficult time. We had to change how we collaborate, how we ensure decisions still get made quickly and, importantly, how we maintain our culture. In response, we shifted many of the ways we work, with a focus on agility and empowerment. We had to optimize our communications strategy in terms of the tools we use as well as the nature and frequency of our communications. Transparency of information became the focus to ensure we were providing enough guidance and direction given the uncertainty in the world.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Transparent communication; ability to build effective teams; quick, yet thoughtful, decision making.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

One challenge I faced was forging a career path in environments that were primarily male dominated. While there was certainly support for women continuing to "climb the ladder," there were limited role models and it was harder to envision what opportunities may lie ahead. As a result, I've always been focused on finding mentors and role models to guide me to the next level, without compromising other parts of my life, such as my family. This experience also shaped how I think about leadership and culture today, specifically in creating an environment that fosters mentorship, continual learning and career development opportunities.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Taking on the role of CEO at Revlon definitely felt like a risk at the time. I hope I'm not alone in feeling that no one is ever fully prepared to take on a CEO role. However, I wake up every day energized by the opportunities in front of me. I'm so proud to be a part of the legacy of this company and impact these iconic brands.



What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

One of the most critical pieces of being a CEO is building the team around you. No CEO can run a company on their own, and the strongest CEOs can go further with a great team working together aligned towards the same mission and end goals.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Setting aside skills, which is a given, I look for individuals who live our company values of inclusion, collaboration, innovation and accountability. I also look for individuals who are energized to be a part of our team and to work together to make an impact, specifically inside the company, but also as to the broader world.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

For me, it's about leading by example. Revlon's leadership team is ~50 percent women and our board of directors is ~45 percent. I believe this shows other women what's possible. Critical to retaining and attracting more female talent is presenting opportunities for them to build and grow their careers at Revlon. Like many companies, Revlon is implementing a hybrid work model when we return to the office in September. This additional flexibility hopefully helps women, as well as men, in juggling their home priorities in addition to professional priorities.

How do you recharge?

I love starting my day on my Peloton, and spending my evenings and weekends with my husband, four kids and two dogs. Exploring new places always re-energizes me, and often helps bring fresh perspectives.



LAURA RAVO

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, STRAND BOOK STORE

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Retail management is a notable, remarkable profession that's constantly evolving. You always have an opportunity to transform

yourself and your business. Senior leaders have the honor and tremendous responsibility of having lives in their care — the lives of both employees and customers. Post-pandemic, there's a new era of leadership emerging defined by courage, connection, compassion, adaptability and resilience. Skills not taught in school, but learned through experiences and mentors. Success in the future will be defined by a leader's ability to deliver people, planet and profit.

- ▶ **People:** How do you inspire and genuinely take care of your teams? Is your team's well-being and safety your top priority?
- ▶ **Planet:** What is your role in corporate social responsibility? Are you giving as much as you can, where, when and how you can?
- ▶ **Profit:** Are you playing the infinite game and making decisions based on rebuilding and flourishing in the future?

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

With the pandemic, we as retailers were thrust into the forefront and suddenly became essential workers, a role none of us signed up for. Change management and effective communication took on a whole new meaning and significance. Navigating COVID has been a delicate balance of taking care of my people, my customers and trying to drive enough business to keep the company afloat without compromising safety. It required constant communication with teams to understand how they were feeling, managing their fear and anxiety, and keeping them informed of changing safety protocols, procedures, CDC requirements, etc. We set up dozens of coffee chats so we could listen to what was on people's minds and really understand how we could support one another. I don't know if I solved it, but I did my best to create a culture of safety, trust and genuine kindness.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

If I had to choose five skills, they would be listening, communication, compassion, humility, and courage. You have to be open to listen to what's happening with your teams, as they're the closest to your customers. Then, you need to meet people where they are, as everyone's personal and professional circumstances are different. Everyone has something going on right below the surface. As leaders, it's not about us anymore. It's about serving the teams we lead courageously, and knowing if we take care of them, they will absolutely take care of our customers and the business will follow. That's where the magic always happens.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Leading with authenticity! It may sound trite, but I grew up in the department store era, which was mostly male dominated at the time. Success was measured through toughness, being perfect, and never, ever letting your guard down. There was absolutely no crying in retail. It was not until I moved to beauty that I met some of the fiercest women in the business who led from a very different place. They taught me that kindness should never be mistaken as weakness, and vulnerability is a real super power. It blew my world wide open!! I needed to step back, drop the mask and discover who I was at my core, not who others expected me to be. It took courage to stay true to myself; it still does.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a COO?

I've always been curious and an avid learner. I'm fortunate to have a very strong and generous network to lean on. I spent time with my C-suite mentors and friends to really understand the ropes of the role. Then I jumped head first into the book business, learning all I could as quickly as I could. When I needed help with an e-commerce platform and a holistic marketing plan, I reached out to the fabulous Melissa Campanelli and Jennifer Dispasquale for help (yes, shout-out to Women in Retail Leadership Circle). They immediately connected me to Cindy Marshall, founder and CEO of SHINE Strategy. She in turn connected me to FitForCommerce, and before you know it, we had a team and a plan. The moral of the story is that you never have to do it alone!

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

For me, the tried-and-true winning formula for leaders tested over time is simple. First, there's trust, which is a combination of authenticity, human connection and credibility. Who are you and what do you stand for? Can you create a safe place for your teams and allow them to show up as their true selves? Can teams count on you? How do you show up ALL of the time? Then there is vision. Do you have a clearly defined mission and purpose? What's your north star? Will teams follow you?

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I believe Michelle Obama said it best: "If you want me to do the job, you've got to pay me to do the job and you've got to give me flexibility. And flexibility means that I will work my tail off for you, but you better pay me and value my family." We have to stop looking at this as a women issue; it's a workplace issue.

How do you recharge?

I walk and meditate as part of my daily ritual. I started this practice during the pandemic and I've carried it forward. Nearly every day, you will find me and my dog, Bianca, walking along the Hudson River. That really helps put life into perspective. Also, I'm active in giving back to my community through work with City Relief and my parish. Serving others gets me out of my own head and fills my cup more than I could ever imagine.

JENNIFER STENDER HAWKINS

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, CENTRIC BRANDS, MEN'S AND WOMEN'S DIVISION

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I'm passionate about creating a great customer experience and using technology to move the business forward.

And, of course, I love everything about the product piece of the industry, the trends, when items "hit," and working with design to create the perfect assortment.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

The biggest challenge was the first 60 days and making all the changes necessary to weather the storm for the duration of the pandemic. It was incredible how cross-functionally our teams pulled together to totally change how we work in a short amount of time.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Flexibility, compassion, strategic thinking, and innovative/forward thinking.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Very early in my career I wanted to be in the apparel business, specifically golf apparel. At the time, I was living in Minnesota and had never visited New York. I applied for a job with Liz Claiborne — who at the time was launching golf — by sending golf balls with my resume that were printed with "Give me a shot" and my phone number on them. I received the job offer and moved to New York to start my career in fashion.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

One of the traits I think is most important is having the spirit of working to "yes." No two days are the same and it's important to be ready to jump into the task that the business demands.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Flexible scheduling, advanced training, mentorship, and inclusivity.

How do you recharge?

Any time I get to spend with my daughters helps me recharge. They've grown up so quickly and I really cherish my time with them both. In the summer I like to paddleboard or go for long walks with friends. During the pandemic, I really enjoyed taking different virtual cooking classes. It was really relaxing and helped improve my cooking skills!





PAIGE THOMAS

PRESIDENT AND CEO, SAKS OFF 5TH

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

It's key to have a seat at the table. Once you have that seat, ensure you use your voice as a leader to advocate for your team. I've found that you are the culture you wish to have, and by speaking up and utilizing your voice, you can directly impact change.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

I moved from Seattle across the country to New York City to join Saks OFF 5TH. Our company has come out of the pandemic stronger than before, and we continue to experience rapid growth within our e-commerce business.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

Throughout my career, I've practiced the four R's — Resume, Results, Relationships and Reputation. I believe these to be the key to being a successful leader. With more than 20 years in the industry, I've built a strong foundation and developed relationships with colleagues, peers and mentors that have supported me and my career growth.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Beyond being a subject matter expert, authenticity is key. It's imperative that my team leads with integrity and authenticity to motivate our associates and get the support of the organization.

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Retail is fast-paced, and luxury off-price retail is even faster. I love that we're constantly innovating and evolving to best serve our customers. I'm also a big believer that retail is a team sport, and I thrive in that collaborative environment where we're all working toward a common goal.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

While this past year-and-a-half has brought unexpected challenges, it has also been the greatest year of learning. I joined Saks OFF 5TH in February 2020, right before the pandemic started. We had to ensure our people and customers were safe, while also managing the business. My biggest takeaway from that experience is operating as a collective leadership team and showing a unified front, and providing the confidence our associates needed to double down and drive the business forward. By listening to our team and community, I learned a great deal about our needs, and we've been able to pivot quickly to return to growth.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

This past year I've done a lot of listening. I want to ensure I have visibility and hear directly from our team on what the pain points are that we need to solve. By being a good listener, you can truly empower your team to share ideas and foster a collaborative environment.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

As a female leader and mother of three, including two young women, this issue hits home. At Saks OFF 5TH, we've committed to offering flexibility to our team to ensure there's the right balance between professional and personal. Throughout my career, I've been privileged to develop meaningful mentoring relationships, and it's something I emphasize with our team. My door is always open for guidance, advice and requests for mentorship. My mentors have helped me tremendously and I want to ensure that I offer the same support to others.

How do you recharge?

It's so important to take time off and prioritize your personal life. I strongly believe that as leaders we need to model this behavior for our teams. I encourage my team to disconnect on the weekends, spend time with family and friends, and take vacation time. With that being said, I believe in a "work hard, play hard" lifestyle. I typically spend my time off traveling, hiking or going on adventures with my family. During the workweek, exercise is key for me to recharge as it forces me to turn off my brain and focus. I find I have more clarity after working out and then I'm able to re-enter "work mode."

JUDY WERTHAUSER

CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER, FIVE BELOW

What do you love most about the retail industry?

For me, it's all about the people. I've always been a student of behavior. Whether it's customers or employees, I want to know: What drives them? How do they think and why? And with that knowledge, how can I help create experiences that make them happy and fulfilled? Retail provides an exciting backdrop to those questions. It's an energetic, fast-paced classroom.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

In March, we closed nearly 1,000 stores across the U.S. The question we had to wrestle with was: How do you hold onto your crew, protect your culture, and manage the emotional well-being of your team and individuals as they navigate the unknown? The first thing we did, even before we shut down, was organize a cross-functional team to represent all internal stakeholders and help navigate decisions. Then we ramped up communications, increasing frequency and transparency. And lastly, we took care of our crew, ensuring they had access to resources and benefits. By June, all of our stores reopened. We managed to avoid layoffs and every single store manager returned when we reopened.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

I think the skills needed are similar to what's required of leaders now or even before the pandemic. Part of leadership is understanding and adapting to the environment and the needs of your team, customers and company. Our role isn't to solve problems, it's to navigate choices.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

I was being viewed narrowly and typecast as an HR professional. One of my respected business partners encouraged me to expand my horizons. He believed in me, so much so that he asked me to run a distribution center. Not as a HR person, but as a business leader. I turned him down because, to be truthful, I didn't have the same confidence in myself that he had in me. But his words meant the world to me and that vote of confidence carried me far in my career.

As a woman in leadership, I see it all the time. Women, in particular, are far less confident than their male counterparts. As a student of behavior, I know that when confidence is deteriorated, especially by a leader, performance can spiral down. But when confidence is built and employees are supported, great things happen. I use this perspective for myself as well as others I coach and develop so that individuals can reach their full potential.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

Early in my career, my husband and I owned a business. We went from one store to a dozen stores plus a manufacturing site and hundreds of employees across multiple states. In our late 20s with three kids and no money, we signed 10-year leases. It was a huge risk, and in that moment, I gained real

perspective about what it means to run a business. I learned what's at stake and how to protect it. I got smart about business financing, buying and supply chain. We ended up closing the businesses, which created the next career risk! This experience significantly influenced my perspective of risk and the lessons learned have shaped and informed everything I have done since.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a chief experience officer?

I grew up in a family-owned business and quickly learned what hard work and accountability looked like. As I got older, I made strategic choices for myself, focusing on business and psychology in college. When I started working in corporate, I purposely selected projects that created strategic value for the company, putting me front and center with the business and leaders. I worked with experienced consultants and learned how to frame business and people problems. I educated myself in areas where I had less confidence. And I worked in a broad set of industries — retail, banking, and restaurant/franchise.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Character. I want to know who they are, how they've made their choices, and what makes them tick. I want to know what kind of work ethic they have and how they set their priorities. And I want to know how they're going to fit on a team. Beyond that, I look for their level of curiosity and ability to learn, their problem-solving skills, and their resiliency. In that order.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Many women are leaving the workforce because they feel like their companies are making them choose between their work and their family. There are too many barriers — whether it's childcare, transportation, work conditions, or schedule — forcing women to make a hard choice. The pandemic exacerbated this, but it also drove a ton of innovation that could provide more flexibility and other unique solutions to keep more women in the workforce. Companies have to consider new ways of working to compete.

How do you recharge?

My time with my family is sacred. It recharges and centers me so I can continue to give in my career. Since my three children were young, we have a tradition of a weekly family meal. Now my kids are grown and have partners. We still practice this tradition. The entire family comes home, I cook, we laugh, talk and transition from a work week to a weekend.





JOICE WIRKUS

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING, BIG LOTS

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Being successful in retail requires a mix of sound data/analytics with creativity and hypotheses to determine how to position and react to consumer needs. I love that blend, especially because the pace of retail is constantly evolving and keeps you on your toes. To me, it's like timed chess playing — great strategy with flawless, coordinated execution under pressure.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

I was promoted to senior vice president, marketing, in May 2020, during the heart of the pandemic. I took the role of my former boss, and we didn't backfill my prior role. To be successful, I needed to raise my game to the C-level while still ensuring flawless operations from my prior role during a time when decision making was highly accelerated, constantly pivoting around the rapidly changing consumer mindset. "Surviving and thriving" through the pandemic required a lot of long hours, collaboration, strong communication, flexibility and a positive attitude. These additional pressures were felt through the organization. Paramount was taking the time to convey to my team the "why" behind the "what" to drive consistent alignment and ensure they knew that I appreciated them — as a talented team member and as a human being with their own personal stressors. In the end (although this isn't close to over!), we are a stronger team because of this experience, and we know we can handle just about any curve ball that comes our way.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to be an effective leader going forward?

We will never go back to a working situation where everyone is in the office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. And I think that's a good thing. We've all learned to be much more productive in our professional and personal lives, and life is too short to not consider the precious value of time. Given the new hybrid environment we're all in, I believe effective leaders need to:

- ▶ **Understand that you get the most out of people when you empower them,** trust them and provide flexibility in their work schedule/location.
- ▶ **Have an inclusive and flexible approach.** There's no chance that the old adage of "the only thing constant is change" has ever been more true than now.
- ▶ **Keep a sense of humor and be yourself.** Leaders are consistent, genuine and have a good perspective on life. They use phrases like "next time consider ..." vs. "change this immediately, and I don't care what it takes."

- ▶ **Have courage to swiftly exit people that aren't pulling their weight** or aren't accelerating your business forward because they drain morale and put more pressure on your top talent if you don't act.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Before coming to Big Lots, I spent nearly 18 years at PetSmart. Over that time, I had seven different roles and continued to take on more and more responsibilities. Typically you ascend in your career by moving to another retailer and bringing your experiences. This also gives you an opportunity to "reset" your brand. I chose to stay there because I loved the mission, the culture and the people with whom I worked. But I didn't have the chance to reset my brand over those years, so I needed to think about how mine could evolve over time, changing public perception from being a wide-eyed go-getter that could get things done to a leader that could energize a team to get things done while I focused more on driving the overall strategy while building future capabilities. What makes you successful in your current role likely won't be what makes you successful in your next role. I was constantly thinking about my executive presence and what I needed to do to be seen as the person ready for the next role/promotion. My best advice is to think, act and dress for the role you want next.





Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

As mentioned, before coming to Big Lots, I spent nearly 18 years at PetSmart in Phoenix, starting as a marketing manager and ascending to the role of vice president of marketing. I absolutely loved every role I had because I was so passionate about the mission, loved my team, and was able to learn so much over the years. But that’s a long life at one retailer, and I believe people really grow professionally when they move around a bit more than I did. New career experiences, just like everything in life, broaden your perspective and make you a more well-rounded person. In 2019, one of my most valued mentors, Bruce Thorn, who is now the president and CEO of Big Lots, called and asked me to move out to Columbus, OH, to join the Big Lots team. Leaving friends, family and my home of nearly 20 years and moving across the country to a city to which I had never been before seemed overwhelming. But I truly believe that when someone you highly respect tells you that they want you for a new role, you take the leap because it’s the highest professional compliment. So I did. Big Lots is an amazing organization with an incredible culture and is well-poised for massive growth. I can’t imagine being anywhere else right now, and I’m so thankful that I took that risk (although I’m still getting used to snow!).

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Given there’s rarely a true unicorn out there, you can hire for a perfect fit on experience or a perfect fit on behaviors (aka, “success factors”). It’s rare to find an exceptional person in both areas, even more so in this market! I prioritize success factors over experience (not to say that they aren’t both important), because gaps in experience can be filled with training. But you can’t teach someone to be a critical thinker if they’re not, a collaborator if they prefer to work alone, or

a strong communicator if they don’t understand 1+1=3. The key to recruiting is hiring for EQ over IQ. Traits that I look for are positive attitude, flexibility, fire in the belly, strong communication ability, and the courage and intellectual curiosity to always be asking “why?”

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

There’s no one reason why this trend has happened, but I think one of the key factors is that many families realized that life is short, and time with their loved ones is more important than a dual income. Attracting more females requires considering that women are the ultimate multitaskers, and they require increased efficiency in how they spend their time. No longer is there a work-life balance, it’s a work-life blend. The workday never ends! Offering benefits like childcare on site, flexible work schedules/location, and creation of resource groups for women to network and mentor each other are great starts.

How do you recharge?

I’ve learned the hard way that recharging is critical, and you have to put the laptop down every once in a while. For a good part of my career, I always prioritized work over taking care of myself, and that was very draining. I now make time nearly every day to get to the gym and get in a great sweat. I also take my dog, Teddy, for a walk. He loves to smell the flowers and air, and I realized that I do, too. And I golf (poorly) with my husband. All of these things energize me and make me feel physically and mentally stronger to take on the next day. Never underestimate the power of being physically active, taking vitamins and eating right. Your body will thank you, and the next PowerPoint deck or email response can wait until tomorrow ...

JUE WONG

CEO, OLAPLEX INC

What do you love most about the retail industry?

Retail allows our clients convenience, instant gratification, treasure hunt, moments of joy, retail therapy, escapism, and even a euphoric experience. Where else can you evoke such different emotions for different people at any given time? When needs and wants collide, magic happens!

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

COVID-19 brought about opportunities and surfaced experiences that I drew on with veracity. I generally default to what I know when I'm in crisis mode. COVID-19 was no exception. This was a time where I needed to be there for a new team (I joined Olaplex on Jan. 8, 2020, and the world, as most of us knew it, went into uncharted waters around March 17, 2020). I ensured my investor/owners that I have strategic plans, mitigants and contingencies all rolling at the same time and made sure I was physically and mentally healthy to execute and flex when needed.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

The ability to lead, motivate and inspire with purpose and empathy.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

My ambition was my biggest obstacle. I thought I could do it all. I was hearing not to listen but to respond and act because I believed I already had the answers! I wasn't asking for help, thinking it signaled weakness. Nobody even knew I was married, had children or even a life because I kept my personal life locked up in a separate compartment. I left for a business trip because I simply believed I had to when my daughter was going into a major surgery. Nobody at work knew, and I thought I was being so professional ... on the long flight to Australia from Los Angeles, I started thinking, what if something terrible happened to my daughter during surgery? That was when I realized I needed to learn to prioritize, seek guidance and be present in everything I do and wherever I may be. I am still a work in progress.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

I made a career change at 33 years old, at a time when I was the "youngest in everything." I was a director (that was a material title before title inflation) at PepsiCo International leading its Counter Trade Division; an executive board member for one of our China JVs; identified as a top performer and nominated to the Top 50 Women to Watch by The Wall Street Journal. I felt like I was invincible. For personal reasons, my family and I relocated to Scottsdale, Ariz. I made a career change and joined the Dial Corporation as a brand manager. I took a 70 percent pay cut to start all over again. When I look back, I know I made the right decision.



What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I learned in my first CEO role in 2009 that as CEO, you are given authority, but respect and trust have to be earned. To earn the trust and respect of your team, peers and superiors, you need to deliver for and with them. I always put myself in the other person's shoes. With my team, I remind myself what I needed from me when I was them. With my superior, I ask, "What would I want from me if I were them?" I always remember the line from "The Devil Wears Prada" that "a million girls would kill for this job."

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Drive and understanding the importance of being a subject matter expert. My pet peeve is when someone is looking to do something more when they're not even doing their present job the best that they can. Also integrity, and standing up, standing with and standing by your team.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Understand the needs of women in the workforce like we strive to understand our customers in retail. Women in the workforce are leaving in droves because of childcare needs that they cannot find; job displacements because of the skills gap; and inflexible work cultures. Addressing all of these will help to recruit and retain women in the workforce.

How do you recharge?

I love creating content on Instagram. I come up with ideas by starting with a song in my head. I also love my morning runs in New York's Central Park, listening to the songs that I potentially could be using for my Instagram (@juewong888). Finally, I love reading and dancing without a care on my terrace, which I call serenity in the sky.

ANNIE YOUNG-SCRIVNER

CEO, WELLA COMPANY

What do you love most about the retail industry?

There's so much to love about retail! For me personally, it's imagination, exploration and experiences coming together. I truly love being in retail stores. I've had the privilege to work in 30 countries across the globe. Going out on a market tour and visiting stores, I gained incredible insights about the culture, the innovation and design techniques. Nothing beats a front-row seat to observing consumer engagement in-store.

Being a retailer is also incredible. You get to see your ideas come to life and receive immediate consumer feedback. The opportunity to innovate experiences beyond expectation is something all retailers are striving for.

I think technology is changing the expectation of retailing. Frictionless "retailtainment O2O (online to offline)" is now the new norm. Leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) to personalize engagement and gamification of experiences can enhance customer loyalty, and the insights can lead to breakthrough innovation.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

No one and no business has been immune to the wrath of COVID. From the outset, our No. 1 focus has been the safety of our employees. We've had the opportunity to work with governments to help them deploy vaccines to our employees, their families and our customers on site — just one example of going beyond. We also supported the salon industry, which is comprised mostly of small businesses that were shutdown globally because of the pandemic. People everywhere felt the isolation. We leveraged the opportunity to connect the industry by sharing best practices on how to manage during the mandatory closures.

Additionally, we transformed our education programs to digital platforms. This allowed us to elevate coloring and styling capabilities. We also produced our first virtual online event WeCreate and reached nearly 100,000 beauty professionals across the globe with training and development — and brought the professional community together. We waived the participation fee, giving back to the industry around \$30 million worth of content and education. It gave us so much pride that we were able to help rebuild skills as the industry started to reopen. We hope it played a small part in rebuilding their businesses.

Our second move, like so many others, was to accelerate e-commerce. Shifting our sales operation online to MyWellaStore.com was a big move. The pandemic created the demand for fast digital transformation and our ability to deliver on it helped salons go from "click to collect" and strengthened our relationships with customers across the globe. MyWellaStore now has nearly 90 percent global distribution and is a fully digital-first business channel supporting the professional community. We support salons with better purchasing controls as well as subscription refilling to manage supply. The pandemic accelerated this change and has proven a real differentiator to help our business partners.



Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

These last two years have taught us that we need to adapt to constant change while remaining focused on our values, goals and delivering with excellence in execution. Stakeholders are demanding more from companies and their leaders, as is society. Company purpose and values are key to a business's ability to live its truth and deliver on its ambitions. We're building a values-led and purpose-driven business that's diverse, equitable and inclusive. We want the best people but also the most diverse leaders who bring differing perspectives, ideas and ways of problem solving. The most successful leaders are going to be holistic thinkers who can flourish in the many business paradoxes they face each day and thrive. They will need to make tough decisions and ensure they align the organization on the path forward by owning the minds and hearts of the people.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

Growing up in a Chinese family, perfectionism was something that was encouraged and somewhat expected. I remember my parents telling me that if I didn't get into the "right" kindergarten, it could jeopardize my college opportunities. As I moved through my career it became obvious striving to be "perfect" was not a plus, and in fact was holding me back. As I became more comfortable with myself, I began to understand asking for help was not a weakness, but a strength. Showing flaws allowed others to better connect with me and it helped me gather support. Once when I was in barista training as a new leader at Starbucks, a board of director — who doubled as my mentor — told me, "I know you read the training material and have studied everything forward and backwards. Spill something on yourself — it will make you more relatable." My mentor's comments stuck with me forever.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

The biggest risk I've taken is probably leaving PepsiCo as my career hit a 20-year mark. I was well positioned to rise through the executive ranks there, was very comfortable, and had amazing mentors. Starbucks was a brand I was very passionate about and I was also passionate about founder Howard Schultz and the vision he had to transform the brand and the business at a time when it was declining. I followed my passion and my heart and pushed myself to learn new skills, a new industry, and the importance of community as a business driver. Starbucks is inherently connected to the communities it serves and there's such satisfaction for me in seeing local communities and people thrive. It's what drove me to Starbucks and is a real goal for me at Wella Company as we get to serve and support the success of the independent salons and stylists all over the world.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

I'm curious and a perpetual learner and listener. Very often the greatest ideas are percolating around you, so actively listening and asking probing questions of your consumers, your customers and your teams will bring out great ideas and solve problems in unexpected ways.

I also believe it's important to set goals. We're all professional athletes, just within a corporate team. We need to define and focus on the goal and keep moving toward achieving it. The plays to reach it might change, but it's about having the right mindset and determination to constantly drive toward it.

And, no one can do it alone. I've been privileged to have extraordinary leaders as mentors in my career, and the developmental value they've provided me cannot be overstated. The support network, the guidance, insight and wisdom have helped me grow.

I've been incredibly fortunate to have the support of my family. A husband who gave up his career to follow mine. Children who have been willing to relocate and explore the world with us.

So many have helped me that it has instilled in me the desire to pay it forward by mentoring others. My greatest legacy is the leaders I've had a hand in supporting to be their best and unlock their potential.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member?

Passion and a strong work ethic will get you a long way. I look for great leadership skills and functional expertise that will strengthen the team. I've always appreciated leaders who can see what's around the corner while having the ability to stay focused to execute the plan. And being able to galvanize the organization and own peoples' minds and hearts always wins in my book.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

Women still bear the majority of the burden at home so it's critical we find flexibility in the workplace to ensure we draw more women back to work. The best talent will thrive if the organization and its culture enable people to bring their best selves to work and unlock their gifts and potential. At Wella Company, we're embedding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across the organization. Our hiring process makes certain we see diverse slates for open roles, while also being inclusive to present all the best candidates. Since our company became independent in December 2020, more than 70 percent of our new hires have been women — not solely because of their gender, but because they're the best candidates for the positions.



Finally, how do you recharge?

I love to travel and experience other cultures and people, and food! It's inspiring to really put yourself in a new place and explore it fully. I learn so much and it's such a tremendous reflection on the soul of a country.

I also love to spend time with my family and my dogs. I really enjoy reading, power yoga, and watching my son play college soccer. And yes, I LOVE to shop! My recommended must-read book to everyone is Indra Nooyi's book, "My Life in Full." It's a front-row seat to her life with such authentic stories and lessons. She addresses some big issues that we all need to hold hands to work on. It's truly inspiring.

HEIDI ZAK

CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, THIRDLOVE

What do you love most about the retail industry?

I love creating products that positively impact women's lives — helping them to feel comfortable and confident throughout their day (and night!). Being in the retail industry allows me to connect with and learn from our customers, constantly evolving as a company and brand to meet their needs.

What has been the biggest professional challenge you've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how did you solve it?

While we were well positioned before the pandemic hit, in March 2020 we had to rethink our inventory assortments pretty quickly and lean into the new comfort and leisure trends we were seeing with people spending more time than ever at home. After we started experiencing higher demand for our wireless bras and sleepwear, we quickly pivoted to grow those categories tremendously over the last year. Our fashion items have been a huge success during the pandemic, like our bright yellow lace bra. We launched this in the midst of everything going on, and surprisingly sold out within a month. The success we saw from this showed us how people still wanted beautiful things and were willing to invest in purchases that made them happy — even if they couldn't go out in their yellow lace bra, and no one could see it.

Given what we've experienced this year, what are the skills that you believe are critical to being an effective leader going forward?

Communication and inspiration. Especially being remote, I've focused on overcommunication to our team via weekly emails, monthly all-hands meetings and more. Also, making sure our team feels connected to our mission, and knows how their work is impacting millions of women's lives.

What was a key obstacle you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it?

When I was at MIT Sloan, I knew I wanted to work in retail, but there were no retail companies coming to campus to recruit and very few retail companies that took summer MBA interns. I knew I had to get retail experience that summer so that when I graduated I could get a great full-time offer. I made a list of the top 20 retail companies in New York City that I was interested in working for and sent out emails to Human Resources to submit my resume. When I didn't hear back, I felt like giving up, but instead, I started cold calling each company, one by one. I ended up eventually connecting with the senior vice president of new business development at Aeropostale, and secured a summer internship and later a full-time job. Whenever you come to a crossroads in your life where your options are to give up or keep pushing, always keep pushing.

Can you talk about a time in your career when you took a risk and it paid off?

One of the most difficult decisions I've had to make in my career was leaving Google to start ThirdLove. I loved my time at Google. It was a great, stable job at a fantastic company, with incredibly smart people — but I was too comfortable. So I took a risk and left to start ThirdLove with the goal of



providing a better product made for everybody and a better shopping experience to categorically change the way women shop for bras.

What steps did you take to develop yourself as a CEO?

One way is through YPO (The Young Presidents' Organization), a group I joined a few years back. It's a confidential way to meet with and talk to other executives across diverse industries, learning from each other's sets of experiences. Each YPO day also includes an educational component, and I love learning new things and being inspired through the speakers or content of the day.

What traits, skills and experience do you look for when hiring a team member? We've learned to take our time hiring and have encouraged our team to refer their friends. We're always looking to add team members who are curious, have a can-do attitude, and are energized by challenges and change.

There has been a global mass exodus of women leaving the workforce as a result of COVID-19. What do you think companies should do to retain and attract more women talent?

I'm actually a part of the paid leave initiative put forth to Congress over the past few months, and have joined Congressional leaders in calling for the passage of paid family and medical leave legislation in the upcoming Biden-Harris Recovery plan. Nearly 2 million women have dropped out of the workforce since COVID hit, with many being forced to choose between taking care of their families and pursuing their careers — something that paid leave support can help to change. Having a baseline for benefits in the United States is really important, and we strongly believe that an investment in this is a valuable investment in women and the future of our economy.

How do you recharge?

Exercise! My life is pretty hectic between being CEO of ThirdLove and raising two kids, so every morning I try to make time for myself and squeeze in a quick workout. Adding a Peloton bike and treadmill to my home takes the stress out of trying to make it to the gym and ensures that I do something every day for myself before diving into my busy day. And a massage every few weeks helps too.

THEODORA “TEDI” BURGOS

DIRECTOR OF RETAIL, LOVESHACKFANCY

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

The people! Having had the opportunity to work my way up from starting out as a sales associate to where I am now, my love has never changed. It has always been the people — both employees and customers — that have driven me and continue to drive me. I have an immense sense of respect for people who work in stores and are on the front line driving businesses. My No. 1 passion is my team — to be able to spend time with them, whether it's five minutes or a day. I genuinely enjoy learning about who they are, why they do what they do, and how I can help them achieve their goals. I love meeting customers, understanding why they are choosing to shop in person today vs. online. Having those interactions enables me to strategize and implement tactical experiences to drive personal relationships with new and established customers. Our whole business model is founded on people. Our people drive me — employees and customers. They are what keep me engaged and motivated.



W WOMAN
on the RISE

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It means more than I could express. Running a business is tough — at any level. Climbing your way up the ladder as a store employee is extremely hard. It has been historically hard if you're a woman or anyone who doesn't fit the idea of what the mold is. I've always known that I wanted to work in retail and run a business. Starting off as a sales associate at 18 years old without any experience, I had many people doubt me and pass over me for opportunities. So to be recognized is validation. It's motivation to keep going and chase after my dreams and to continue creating change on a micro and macro level.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I believe my ability to adapt and flex with change has been the most instrumental skill in the build throughout my career. In retail especially, you need to be able to pivot as the climate is fluid and ever changing. In an ever-changing environment, leveraging problem solving, strategic planning, creative thinking and communication are all skills that have propelled me to where I am.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Mentorship has absolutely helped me in my rise throughout my career thus far. I've been fortunate enough to be able to say that I always knew what I wanted to do. With that being said, I knew I needed to work my way up. In fashion, it's fast paced and you have to be able to evolve and change. I'm lucky to have had strong mentors throughout all stages of my career, which has allowed me to put in the work and grow. You have to have people who believe in you. Finding people with the right vision to help push you along is everything.

When I was working in stores at Michael Kors, my biggest advocate was my director of retail at the time. He believed in me and was unwavering in his time to develop me and advocate for me. He taught me the value of people and mentorship, which I still carry with me. My biggest mentor and role model to this day was my CEO at DVF. She pushed me outside of my comfort zone. She taught me the importance of collaboration and really understanding every facet of the business. She ingrained in me the importance of cross-functional relationships and the need to break down the silos. She believed in me and empowering women — I take that with me every day. I truly do not believe I would be where I am today without strong mentors and leaders.

What are your career goals?

I would like to continue to grow my career and oversee a full direct-to-consumer channel. My absolute dream would be to join the C-suite. While I focus on my professional goals and aspirations, I also aspire to become a mentor myself. I hope that I can do for someone what others have done for me. I would like to join an organization that focuses on the mentorship of young women — our youth are the future. I hope to give all that I've learned to someone else to see them hopefully eclipse me.

What do you like to do for fun?

I enjoy staying active by working out daily at 6 a.m. before my day starts. I find it exhilarating to push myself. I'm always in competition with myself: How much weight can I lift? How much stronger am I compared to last week, last month? Working out is more than just fun and enjoyment, it's an outlet for me. It gives me an hour each day to focus on myself, and we all need that. Outside of working out, I love to spend time with my daughter, who turned one this past June. My family is my No. 1 passion outside of work. Anything I can do with my daughter and husband, even if it's nothing, is fun and leads to a great day.



ASHLEY CANNING

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF E-COMMERCE, SH*T THAT I KNIT

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I absolutely love how fast paced the retail industry is, especially after COVID-19. We've all been thrown into an environment where we must be quick, nimble and creative to be successful.

to be vulnerable in sticky situations has allowed me to be a more relatable leader, showing folks around me that it's OK to not always have the answer, but to take the hard questions, research them, and come back with a thoughtful answer.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely. I wouldn't be where I am today without the help of my mentor, Emily Culp, a thought-provoking leader that has challenged me throughout my career at Keds and into my next role at Sh*t that I Knit.

What are your career goals?

I'd love to keep growing as an individual, advancing within the retail space by taking on more responsibility, eventually getting to vice president/president one day.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love spending time with my husband and two-and-half year-old daughter, Penelope, and our yellow lab, Olive.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It's an amazing honor to be named a rising star in retail and am so thankful for the opportunities I've had along the way to get me to where I am today.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

The most powerful skill I have is recognizing when I might not know something and admitting it. Finding the courage



HILLARY CROWLEY

VICE PRESIDENT OF DIGITAL COMMERCE, QVC

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I love being able to combine data, intuition and creativity to build brand strategies where you can truly imagine yourself as the end customer. The fast-paced and constantly evolving landscape has always been a draw, too. It means there's a new challenge every day, which keeps things interesting and feeling fresh.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

When I think about the women I've met and been inspired by through Women in Retail Leadership Circle, I've always been in awe of their accomplishments, but even more so of their bravery, passion, resolve and vulnerability. Being recognized among women like this is truly an honor that makes me feel incredibly proud and grateful.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

Accountability and vulnerability quickly come to mind for opposite reasons — the first as a more natural strength, and the second as one I've worked very hard on over the years. I've always held myself to a very high standard of accountability. I believe this builds trust and forms meaningful, real relationships, which to me represents the most critical foundation for success. Vulnerability is something that hasn't always come as naturally to me. In the early stages of my career, striving for perfectionism seemed like the path to proving myself as credible. Over time, I've realized that truly opening up with others builds so much more respect and allows for a much clearer path to personal growth and being a more impactful leader.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Without a doubt, yes. I've been fortunate enough to have several mentors over the years, all of whom helped me grow in different ways. An important realization for me over time was that not all mentor relationships are the same. It's really valuable to recognize what you need to focus on most, which obviously evolves over your career, and how to lean on different types of mentors to help fill those needs. I also think being a mentor to others has been equally important in my growth; being able to help others in recognizing their potential to grow is incredibly rewarding.

What are your career goals?

To always keep growing. I'll be honest in saying I don't know exactly what the end of that — or even the path along the way — will look like, but I do know that becoming complacent or stagnant in the impact I can make or in my own development will never be in the cards.

What do you like to do for fun?

Spending time with my family (I have two small children and another one on the way that keep me busy!), reading (when I can find the time, I love a good "beach read" page-turner) and running (it's time I can have to myself to release stress).





SHANIE CUNNINGHAM

GLOBAL HEAD OF CUSTOMER MARKETING, BODEN

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I guess you could say this about many industries, but I love that retail is in a state of change and pushing us all to think about our customer in new ways. I find that exciting and inspiring, and it pushes me to try to be better, broader and faster in my thinking.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It's an honor to be recognized this way. It's humbling to think about and makes me proud of myself and my team.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

Communication, empathy, integrity, humor and resilience. I love to have a laugh with the team and figure out what motivates people. I never take myself very seriously, but I'm always looking to remove obstacles or ways

to raise others up. Being a compassionate leader is serious business to me and it has meant collectively my teams have been successful.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely. I've gained confidence in myself and my abilities by having mentors that either pushed me, opened conversations up for me, or just introduced me to a wider network. That confidence helped me grow as a leader and have the courage to take on new opportunities.

What are your career goals?

Stay challenged and keep learning and growing.

What do you like to do for fun?

Everything! If it's not fun, why are you doing it?



ALICIA DEFINIS

VICE PRESIDENT, PARTNER GROWTH, WALKER EDISON

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

For me the retail industry is about making sure people have access to the products and services they want or need. During the pandemic I was working for Walmart e-commerce and I would often think about how important our roles there were. We were making sure the virtual shelves were stocked with the products people needed. We were serving a very important purpose. That's what I love about this industry — the service we provide to our customers.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It's incredibly touching and humbling to be recognized in this way. It's fulfilling to know that my work and contributions are acknowledged. And I know that I have many more big challenges to navigate and people to serve on the path to where I'm going. I'm really in awe of this community and look forward to continuing to empower other women leaders.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I would say that adaptability and relentlessness have been the skills that have served me the most. The majority of my career has been spent in the e-commerce industry, which is ever-changing and incredibly fast paced. Learning to embrace change instead of resisting it has allowed me to grow both professionally and personally. I think some people assume being "relentless" is a bad thing, but I see it differently. I'm relentless in my pursuit to solve big problems,

challenge antiquated ways of thinking and drive meaningful progress in the organizations I serve. This has allowed me to make a big impact on the teams I've had the privilege to lead.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

I like to think of mentorship as a two-way street. Both the mentor and the mentee should be learning and growing in the exchange. I find these are the best and healthiest mentorship scenarios. I've had some amazing mentors along the way — one of whom nominated me for Woman on the Rise! So, yes, mentorship has helped me in my career and in my personal development.

What are your career goals?

Take a company through IPO, be a founder, become the best leader and contributor that I can possibly be.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love live music, days spent in the sunshine — preferably on a beach or a boat — travel, good food, and time with my family.



CHRISTIANA DIMATTESA

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, D-TO-C CHANNELS
AND EXPERIENCES, UNDER ARMOUR

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

The people! Human-to-human engagement is what our industry is built on. As we all know, introducing technology and digital connectivity is massively important to the evolution of our industry, but we can't forget about the people. The relationship in retail between your store employees and your customers can make or break a consumer's experience and their long-term relationship with your brand. I want to continue to push my peers to invest in their retail teammates and focus on continuing to educate and empower them as well as providing clear career paths from the field to corporate. Investing in our people should not be optional as they are the face of our brands to our customers.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

This is quite an honor to be recognized as a 2021 Woman on the Rise. Twenty-four years ago I started my first part-time job in retail lacing sneakers. Not only was I the youngest employee on staff, but I was also the only female employee at the store. I recognized early on in my career the immense challenges it would take to get from part-time retail employee all the way to a corporate executive role, not to mention the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated sports industry. I'm hoping that being nominated for this recognition will give me the opportunity to continue to drive more awareness around the need to create more opportunities in our industry to develop future retail leadership starting with young women in stores.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I believe that my leadership skills have greatly helped with my career development. I'm a strong believer in the power of servant leadership. Being able to lead and empower a large group of employees over my career has given me the opportunity to run a team that can adapt and react quickly, deliver positive results and, most importantly, celebrate the wins as a family together. You cannot be successful in your career if you don't have the power of a team fighting alongside you.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

I believe there are three very important relationships that you need to have in your career for sustained growth: mentorship, sponsorship and great leadership. Although we don't often have a choice in who our leader is, we do have the choice of who we lean on for mentorship and sponsorship. Having a mentor that you can go to for advice and be open to receiving direct and honest feedback from is highly important to your personal development. Having a sponsor that is at a higher level than you and has a seat at the table where they can fight for you and get you more exposure is extremely valuable to your growth, both within the organization and within the industry. I've been extremely lucky in my career to have had an incredible group of men and women who have stepped into each of these roles for me, and am forever thankful for their ongoing support. I daily make an honest effort to turn around and do the same for those below me.



What are your career goals?

Both within my organization and within the industry, my goals are heavily focused on shaping the future of retail and developing future retail leadership in partnership with my industry peers. After a year like 2020, we all quickly realized that we will never fully be able to predict what will come in this industry, but what we can do is focus on developing strategies, building tools, and developing people to adapt to ever-changing consumer behavior in the retail environment. More importantly, I want to continue to encourage and engage in new forums that provide retailers the ability to connect and to support each other and learn from each other.

What do you like to do for fun?

The last 18 months has given me the opportunity to slow down and refocus a lot on what's important in life. As much as I love to travel and miss the fun and excitement of being on the road, I've found myself prioritizing time spent with loved ones. I've found a great deal of enjoyment and fun in spending quality downtime with my friends and family. Aside from that, I've also picked up a bit of an obsession for mini golf!



LAUREN GOLDENBERG

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER, NORDSTROM MEDIA NETWORK, NORDSTROM



What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I love the direct line to the customer. I started at Nordstrom working on the sales floor, and there's really no better way to find out how customers want to shop and how we can best serve them than to be face to face.

We're able to be nimble and adapt based on customer feedback, whether that be on what our merchants buy or how we approach marketing.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It's humbling and makes me very proud. However, we work as a large team all focusing on how to ensure our customers look and feel their best — it truly takes a village! I'm fortunate to be surrounded by strong women who I get to learn from every day.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I try to be an owner at heart and remain curious. Part of that is being hyper self-aware of what I don't know — that way I

can take the extra time to be a student of the business and continue my education. The industry is constantly evolving, so I don't think I'll ever stop learning, which is motivating for me.+

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely. I have had several amazing mentors throughout my career who have helped push me towards my goals. Having people in your corner who root for you to expand outside of what you think is possible — paired with some very honest feedback — is priceless. I wouldn't have even applied for half the roles I've had without a mentor telling me that I'm just as capable as anyone else. I work to pass it along and be there for other people to do the same.

What are your career goals?

I'm very excited to continue to grow the Nordstrom Media Network; it's very rewarding to be here at the beginning of something completely new and to get to help shape the future vision of the program.

What do you like to do for fun?

Most weekends you can find my husband and I cooking, playing with our dogs, and thinking up new DIY projects for our house.



MARGOT GRINBERG

VICE PRESIDENT OF E-COMMERCE AND DIGITAL MARKETING, MOVADO GROUP



What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I love how the retail industry is constantly evolving to meet the changes in consumer behaviors — what they want, how they want it, how they consume media, and where and what they purchase. Creating products that allow for the consumer to form an emotional connection is always the most rewarding.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

I'm truly honored to be recognized alongside these driven, intelligent women by Women in Retail Leadership Circle. It inspires me to continue to innovate, evolve and leave my mark on the retail space.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I think my ability to adapt and change has been instrumental in my career development. I also think finding that right balance between using data/analytics and trusting my instincts has truly helped my career growth.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely. I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of many people at Movado Group. My mentors have taught me skills that have helped me excel at my job. Perhaps most importantly, they've helped me develop as a leader and taught me how to use my voice constructively within an evolving organization and retail environment. They've pushed me to think creatively and taught me how to manage a challenging environment.

What are your career goals?

I want to continue to grow as a leader, stay at the forefront of the fast-moving, ever-evolving retail environment, and continue to build innovation in the watch and jewelry spaces. It's also important that I set a positive example and take time to mentor others just as I have been fortunate enough to have individuals who have played instrumental roles in my career development and continue to do so.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love to run, try new restaurants, and travel. I'm always up for a new adventure!



JEN HARNESS

MARKETING DIRECTOR, CONTENT AND EXPERIENCE, THE MICHAELS COMPANIES

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

The ever-evolving journey. Customers' needs change, technology changes, and the world changes. Retail is the ultimate game of constant building and improving to satisfy the customer.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It feels incredible, like all my hard work is paying off. It makes me proud of the effort I've put in, and I hope to inspire others to keep pushing through the obstacles.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I look at every experience as an opportunity to learn and grow. I strive to be a servant leader who excels in removing obstacles so my team can achieve the great things they've set out to do.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

One-hundred percent yes! I've been fortunate enough to have many great mentors in my career who have helped me network, focus my career goals, and build my strengths. They inspired me and gave me confidence to reach those goals.

What are your career goals?

In the short term, I look to continue building my skills and breadth of experience across the retail industry. In the long term, I aspire to launch and lead my own company, and my invaluable experiences in retail along with the support of my mentors will get me there!

What do you like to do for fun?

As an artist, I enjoy trying new art techniques and getting my two little ones involved in creative play.



KEIR HARRIS

VICE PRESIDENT, HEAD OF SALES, RALPH LAUREN CORPORATION

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

For me it's the perfect mix of using my left brain and my right brain. I get to take my education in business and something that I've loved since I was a child and combine the two every day. I love that our products are tangible, accessible and part of everyone's daily life. I love seeing people wear our product as I'm walking down the street or watching TV. I also love that the industry and the way the customer shops is constantly evolving. Plus, as an added bonus, it's refreshing and inspiring to see so many powerful women leaders in the industry (although there could always be more!). I know that our industry is special and unique in many ways and I don't take that for granted.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It's such an honor! I've worked incredibly hard in my career and this recognition by such an incredible organization was so unexpected and is incredibly appreciated. Often we get caught up in our day-to-day responsibilities (especially these past 18 months), and I'm thrilled to attend the Women in Retail Leadership Summit and meet so many talented, high-achieving, phenomenal women in retail. So much of what we do in this industry is about partnership and collaboration, and I'm thrilled to meet so many new like-minded women in the industry.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I have a pretty good balance of people skills, financial acumen, integrity, determination, an unwavering work ethic, and a passion for the brand and the product that I work with every day. Passion is key, and if you can combine that passion with flawless execution, you can achieve your goals. Also, evolving and adapting with the times have been key to my success. What works for early in your career isn't necessarily

the same skill set that's needed as you grow into leadership roles. So constantly being a sponge and learning as I grow has been critical to my career development.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely! It takes a village and I would be nowhere without mine! Mentorship comes in many forms and I have had mentors, sponsors, cheerleaders and relentless coaches throughout my career. Having someone who has an interest in seeing you flourish and become the best version of yourself is critical. They can be a sounding board when you're facing a difficult decision, a confidant when you encounter a difficult situation, provide advice as you're trying to navigate your next career move, or push you when you think you've reached your limit. Also, not all of my mentors have been more experienced or senior to me — some of my most trusted advisors are my friends. Remember, iron sharpens iron! I also take that approach as I mentor others as well — we all need one another to lift us up, bring up our names in rooms where we are not present, and push us to be greater. No one can do it alone.

What are your career goals?

Ultimately I plan to be CEO one day in the not-too-distant future.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love traveling, cooking, spending quality time with friends and family, Pilates, binge watching a great show, and dining out. I also miss Broadway.



BAHJA JOHNSON

HEAD OF CUSTOMER BELONGING, GAP INC.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

Customer curiosity, learning agility, and a collaborative spirit. At the root of all these skills lies an extrovert with an extreme amount of empathy for others, and a growth mindset rooted in the mantra of “if you know better, you do better”.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Mentorship has provided me opportunity, but sponsorship has been the true unlock in my career success. The distinction between the two is critical. While a mentor traditionally is focused on imparting knowledge and wisdom on their mentees, a sponsor is someone in a position to advocate for you and your career aspirations. This requires leaders to invest more time in getting to know those they sponsor; however, the career payoff is more impactful in the long run. I’ve been fortunate to have an army of incredible sponsors throughout my career, but the sponsorship I received in bringing Color Proud to life was game changing. My sponsors advocated for me in spaces I didn’t even know were possible, granting me access and opportunity throughout my journey, to now leading Customer Belonging. Given the nature of the work, much of which had not been done before, that sponsorship was critical to many of our initial wins (e.g., Banana Republic’s True Hues campaign).

What are your career goals?

To leave behind a legacy rooted in lifelong learning and a passion for people. I’m giving myself permission to fill in the specifics as I go.

What do you like to do for fun?

What is fun? Just kidding. Honestly, the pandemic has been an 18-month test in maintaining balance. I don’t always pass, but I’m getting better every day at making time for things that bring a smile to my face: yoga, meals with friends, and time in the sun (get me to a beach and I am a happy camper). I also cannot wait to get to an in-person dance class again and *fingers crossed* an NFL game once the season starts!



What do you love about working in the retail industry?

What I love most about the retail industry is that change is the only constant. The thrill of reinvention keeps you on your toes no matter your role or functional expertise. Every season provides the opportunity for something new. That said, we’re living through one of the most monumental eras in fashion history. The fashion industry has a critical responsibility to reflect and honor the values of its consumers. It’s what makes my work so rewarding — we’re the generation that will change both the face and the trajectory of the industry as we know it.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It’s such an honor to be named a rising star in retail, as it represents what’s possible when you unlock your authentic voice. I didn’t know it at the time, but in 2017 I sent one email that would change the trajectory of my entire career — an email advocating for driving inclusion with intention across every facet of our brands — which eventually led to co-founding the Color Proud Council. Since then, I’ve continued to push the boundaries to embed inclusivity into everything we do, advocating to ensure all our customers feel seen and valued across our family of brands and beyond. It’s unreal to be recognized for work that’s so deeply rooted to my purpose — I could not be more honored.



JAMIE LEE,

HEAD OF DIGITAL EXPERIENCE, EVERLANE

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

A growth mindset, living fearlessly, and resilience. In having a growth mindset, it's enabled me to always stay curious and be a "student always" — even if it means being a beginner at something new and being open to learn from anyone in the room. In living fearlessly, it's pushed me to take risks and be willing to fail fast across established brands and organizations, and it's been the driving factor in helping shift thinking across legacy organizations. Resilience is also instrumental. I've gone through many speed bumps and failed initiatives, and through this I've been able to learn and be willing to keep pushing forward despite setbacks.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Mentorship ignited and continues to shape my career path in retail and digital. I've been fortunate to work with incredible leaders that taught me industry best practices; what true servant leadership looks like; and the tools and ways of thinking so I could craft my own career journey. It also showed me the value of diverse thinking. Now, I have my own personal "board of directors" from varied experiences and perspectives to provide ongoing thought partnership.

Mentorship has also inspired me to give back to the next generation of retail leaders, and I'm excited to see what they do next. I currently serve as a career coach at University of California, Berkeley; a professional mentor at Braven to help first-generation college students land their first job; and a judge for new business ideas from underrepresented entrepreneurs at the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship.

What are your career goals?

To create lasting impact across retail and for consumers. When I retire, I hope to leave the industry, the people I work with, and consumers we serve in a better place than it was when I started my retail journey.

What does impact mean to me? It means leading high-growth brands and organizations that have the platform to transform an industry globally, igniting the next chapter of legacy brands through digital and retail transformation, or mentoring and leading the next generation of diverse retail leaders that can reinvent what the industry looks like by 2050.

What do you like to do for fun?

The world is an amazing place with so much to explore and learn. I love immersing myself in new cultures by traveling the world with friends and family; staying active through endurance races, hikes and the newest fitness classes; learning from others through coaching and (audio) books; and getting an adrenaline kick through new experiences (some highlights: sandboarding across the Florence dunes, and waterfall rappelling in Hawaii!).



What do you love about working in the retail industry?

No two days are ever alike in retail and e-commerce, and the industry provides a unique opportunity to solve complex, challenging problems at lightning speed. What I love most about the fast-paced environment is the chance to see which brands can leverage art and science to provide meaningful value for their customer and shape the future of retail.

As an entrepreneur at heart, I'm excited about the number of "blue ocean" opportunities that brands have to push the industry forward — whether it's how to tackle personalization at scale, adapting to shifting consumer preferences as it pertains to the secondhand market, or how to push forward the next generation of "social shopping."

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

Grateful. It's an honor to be in the company of such amazing women and, more importantly, a nod to my mentors, managers, professors and colleagues who believed in me, taught me all I know now, and continue to empower me to make an impact in the industry.



LIZ LIVINGSTONE

DIRECTOR OF LOYALTY MARKETING, J.CREW

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

There are many things I love about working in the retail industry. One of my favorites is connecting with the customer — how they behave and how they present themselves to the world. The customer is at the center of all my business decisions.

industry in the first place and has pushed me to learn, grow and push the boundaries of what's new and next for the retail industry's future. Retail can be a tough business. Grit has helped me persevere through difficult periods and come out stronger on the other side.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Absolutely. Mentorship has been integral to me rising in my career. I'm lucky to have had many strong mentors throughout my career to help me celebrate bright moments, navigate difficult decisions, and provide much-needed advice and perspective. Mentorship has been important to me, so I pay it forward: I mentor women from my university, and eight years ago I co-founded and led a mentoring program for students from my high school.

What are your career goals?

I aspire to the highest roles in the retail industry, and to do so with purpose and integrity.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love to explore new places, cook, bake, attend live theater and shop.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

It means the world to me to be recognized as a rising star in retail! I've followed my dreams and get to do something that I love, in an industry that I love. This inspires me to continue to do great work and make a difference in the retail industry, for J.Crew, and for the teams I work with.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

Analytical rigor, curiosity and grit. I started my career in engineering before pivoting into retail. Engineering established my comfort approaching problems systematically and telling a story with numbers.

Genuine curiosity and love of retail attracted me to this



TAMARA PIRCZ

VICE PRESIDENT OF DIGITAL COMMERCE, THE VITAMIN SHOPPE

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I grew up working in retail stores, and am a merchant at heart. I love being a customer, and looking at things from a customer's perspective to create amazing experiences. Retail in particular is such a fun industry because it moves so fast and is always changing. You never get bored and there's always something new to learn!

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

I'm blown away and honored to be named a rising star in retail! Throughout my career I've always just focused on doing my job to the best of my ability and making sure my team has what they need to succeed. To see that recognized within the industry is an incredible bonus.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

I believe being adaptable is the No. 1 skill that has been instrumental in my career development. It certainly wasn't a skill that I always possessed, either. I've had to work extremely hard at learning to roll with change, as well as learning to pivot when things aren't working out. Adaptability is so critical both in leadership, especially with the events over the last two years, and in retail because the customer is forever evolving and changing.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

I think mentorship has played a huge role in my career. I've been so fortunate over the years to have worked with so many talented people and leaders. Some have been more formal mentorships than others, but I've learned something from every person that I've worked with.

What are your career goals?

My career goals are to continue doing what I love for as long as I can. I hope to pay it forward — to other young women especially — all the great mentorship that I've been afforded over the years.

What do you like to do for fun?

I like to binge-watch home improvement shows while snuggling our puppy. I also recently just got back into horseback riding after a 20-year hiatus with my daughter, which has been an amazing experience to share with her.





SARAH SHELDON

SENIOR DIRECTOR, E-COMMERCE, MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I love the seasonality of it and the need to constantly innovate to improve the customer journey. I love working with partners and brands that appreciate the craftsmanship of products or the technical problem solving.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

First and foremost, it's humbling to be recognized by my peers,

and it also further empowers me to keep testing and learning. The great advantage to digital and analytics is that you can try and fail, but you still learn from those experiences and can keep improving the experience.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

Being in digital, often a growing function at many companies, means wearing multiple hats to keep up with the growth.

While challenging at times, I've become a really good problem solver even without the discipline in each function. The ability to break down problems to their root cause helps solve issues and move quickly.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

I'm a huge believer in mentorship, but I think mentorship is a fluid term. I've had the privilege of working with some of the greatest business and creative minds in the industry and I learn from watching all of them. I even learn from those horrible bosses. However, I've also had some brilliant and kind mentors that helped paved the way for me and have been sounding boards in my career. I've equally learned by trying to pay it forward to others.

What are your career goals?

My short-term goal is to be a CMO; my long-term goal is to take all of the skills I've learned in marketing and e-commerce and use it to support a purpose I care about, whether it be environment and conservation issues or women's rights.

What do you like to do for fun?

Play with my almost-two-year-old daughter, who is always up for a good time. On my own time, yoga and hiking. Also, who can ever be in a bad mood at a Mexican restaurant with guacamole and a margarita?



BROOKE WHITTAKER

DIRECTOR OF VIRTUAL SALES, SIGNET JEWELERS

What do you love about working in the retail industry?

I've worked in the jewelry retail business for nearly 20 years! I absolutely love the variety, constant change and innovation. No two days are ever the same! The love, the fashion and emotion of jewelry sales. We create connections with our guests and maintain those relationships over time. It's very rewarding.

What does it mean to you to be named a rising star in retail?

I'm very humbled to be a honoree. I attend a lot of virtual sessions and workshops hosted by strong female leaders. There are so many talented women running large corporations and starting their own businesses. To be counted among the newest generation of women retail leaders is a huge honor. I'm proud to represent Signet Jewelers and support all of our diversity and inclusion initiatives.

What skills do you possess that you believe have been instrumental in your career development?

In order to succeed in retail today, you have to demonstrate agility. The shopping environment is rapidly changing, and being able to innovate and implement quickly has allowed me to help my teams meet their customers' needs and drive performance. I strive for self-awareness — when to listen, when to learn, and when to speak up and share my ideas. My leadership style is very collaborative. It's important to have a team where everyone has input and we leverage each other's strengths to achieve our goals. I also seek out feedback — what is going well and what could we improve on.

Do you feel mentorship has helped you rise in your career? If so, how?

Mentorship has been instrumental in my career success. I've been blessed with several incredible mentors who gave me the confidence and opportunity to share my skills on a larger scale. They have helped create a safe space for me to learn, to try, to fail and to succeed!

As I've expanded my area of influence at Signet I've tried to pay it forward and mentor others around me. As a member of the Women's Business Resource Group leadership committee, I've helped bring amazing seminars and workshops to Signet team members at all levels. This includes the #IamRemarkable initiative, which strives to empower women and people in under-represented groups to develop the confidence and competence to engage in self-promotion and challenge gender modesty norms.

What are your career goals?

I've recently accepted a promotion into a newly created role: director of virtual sales. I will be supporting our virtual jewelry consultants across four banners in the United States and Canada. I intend to help our guests shop whenever, wherever and however they choose by creating a seamless, connected commerce experience. Our team is highly trained in relationship-based selling while using the latest virtual selling technologies. Our goal is to be the best in the industry with the highest customer service ratings.



What do you like to do for fun?

I live in Washington state and my family and I love to explore the Pacific Northwest by camping in our travel trailer! We have five pets whom we love dearly! I'm also a wine enthusiast and love visiting the local wineries here in the Columbia Valley.

When I'm not working, or being a mom, or camping with the family, you can find me volunteering at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. I've been an event chair for the organization for several years. I began fundraising for the CFF nine years ago after my daughter, Quinn, was diagnosed with CF.



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