

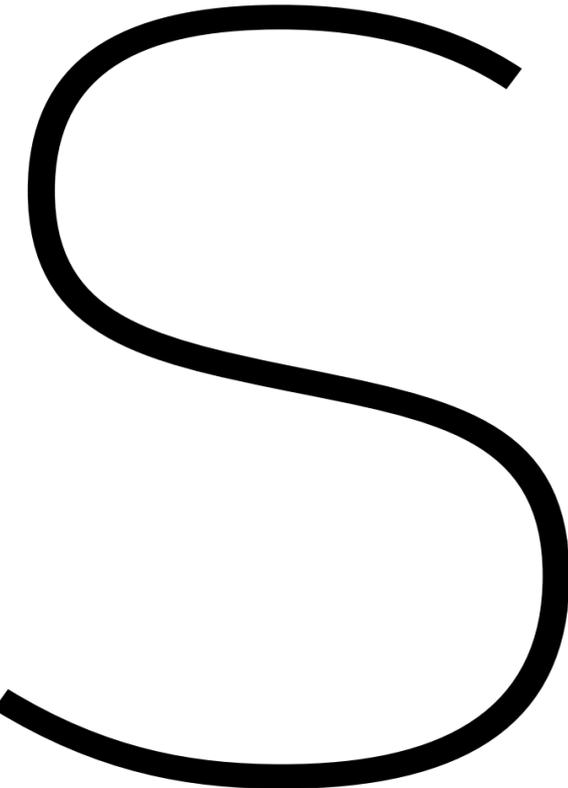
CHARACTER STUDY

BY TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF COMMUNITY BEFORE THE IDEA OF SOCIAL MEDIA HAD EVEN ENTERED THE MODERN LEXICON, LESLIE BLODGETT TRANSFORMED BARE ESSENTUALS INTO ONE OF BEAUTY'S BIGGEST SUCCESS STORIES EVER. AFTER SELLING THE COMPANY AND TAKING A STEP BACK FOR TWO YEARS, BLODGETT IS BACK—AND READY TO TAKE BARE TO NEW HEIGHTS.

BY PETE BORN / PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROGER DAVIES



Leslie Blodgett in Coqueta, the San Francisco restaurant that she and her husband own with chef Michael Chiarello.



eventeen years ago, Leslie Blodgett, the young and more-than-a-little nervous chief executive officer of the struggling Bare Escentuals, walked out on a QVC TV soundstage, broadcasting live, with the hope of convincing enough women to try her unorthodox mineral powder foundation. Little did the untested, unscripted Blodgett realize then that she was about to make the score of dreams—\$45,000 of foundation sold out in six minutes flat—and incite a revolution that rages today.

That six minutes in West Chester, Pa., changed the way women relate to makeup, putting bareMinerals foundation on the map during a health-conscious craze sweeping the country in the late Nineties.

The natural ethos of her message in 1997 still reverberates today with the emergence of entirely new product categories that embody Blodgett's original spirit. "It helped to fundamentally change the market," says Karen Grant, vice president and global industry analyst for the NPD Group. She points to evidence of Blodgett's lingering influence today: hot product categories like primers, concealers and brightening products, and facial finishes with a natural look.

Blodgett's performance also brought TV shopping to the fore and ushered in the age of direct selling, now typified by brands like Smashbox. By going on QVC and then launching infomercials, she created a path to survival for fledgling brands that lacked the heft to get into department stores. "The success of bareMinerals was a catalyst for the evolution of QVC's beauty business," says Claudia Lucas, QVC's director of beauty merchandising. "Prior to the brand's debut, beauty was a small part of QVC's overall business, but it has grown substantially into one of our largest categories." Today, QVC's beauty sales are more than \$1.1 billion.

But Blodgett's marketing and selling methods perhaps have made a bigger impact. She spoke to audiences in a free-form, free-wheeling and thoroughly untrained manner, full of passion and with a preternatural sense of empathy that allowed her to bond with her customers. If Estée Lauder was the master of the woman-to-woman sales ethos, Blodgett is a magician with the girlfriend-to-girlfriend vibe. "She's al-

ways thinking about the customer," says Simon Cowell, the current ceo of Bare Escentuals. "That is the biggest driver for her. She once told me that she feels personally responsible for every customer either having a good or bad experience with us." Cowell adds, "Having built a \$1 billion brand from pretty much nothing, she is extremely grounded. She always talks about her flaws, about her insecurities. She becomes really relatable and very real."

"Leslie was doing social media before the term was ever invented," says Allen Burke, the retired director of beauty merchandising at QVC, who joined the network a month after Blodgett started. "She had a genuine conviction that [mineral makeup] was the product of the future. It was her baby, she owned it completely."

QVC program host Lisa Robertson, who worked closely with Blodgett for many years, says, "Leslie took [what was a] corporate approach and made it personal. She didn't talk to women as a group, she talked to them as individuals. She understood the importance of other platforms long before the advent of social media, and met women where they were."

By crisscrossing the airwaves and the countryside on promotional tours, Blodgett proselytized to the point of building a cult of mineral-makeup fans. "She really invented community before community became a buzzword," says Carsten Fischer, corporate senior executive officer at Shiseido Co. Ltd., which acquired Bare Escentuals in 2010 for nearly \$1.7 billion.

"Leslie is singularly adept at combining her passion for winning and sense of fun to inspire her teams, her customers and her colleagues," says Masahiko Uotani, Shiseido's new president and ceo. "She is an inspirational leader who has taken a beautiful product and created a community that has in every sense elevated what a beauty company is expected to deliver to its customers and partners. Her drive for success is enhanced by the spirit of joy that she brings to the job."

Blodgett, by nature, is a compendium of contradictions. She was so shy in her youth that she dreaded going to parties; to this day, she needs to find ways to calm her nerves before speaking in public, then delivers a stem-winder that can leave the audience in awe. Extremely personable, she's equally as formidable. Blodgett says she likes a good debate and even admits to sometimes overdoing the boardroom combat.

"She's very real," is how Cowell puts it. "The debating thing is very interesting because the result is that it makes our ideas bigger and better."

In explaining how Blodgett thinks from a different vantage point than other people, Cowell observes that one of Blodgett's signature moves is the use of the question "why?"

He recalls telling her that Bare was about to launch a product that would catch a growing trend. Blodgett's response: Why? "It doesn't matter if it's a trend or part of the industry," she told him. "Why are we following the industry. Why is it going to matter for the customer, why is it right for our brand?"

He concludes, "She takes the 'why' to a whole different level."

Leslie, you're essentially a lifetime cosmetics junkie. How did you get your start? What attracted you to beauty to begin with?

Recently, I found my diary from when I was 15, 16 years old. I realized a lot of who I am comes from that. I asked my diary to please make me pretty. I talked about the beauty products I used and how I wanted to achieve this confidence. For me, the cosmetics industry was a place where they could make me better. It wasn't a superficial thing. There were colors and it was fun and playful. I wasn't a stunning kid, but I felt better about myself when I had makeup on. It gave me the confidence to run for student council, to be the best in the kick line. I had this relationship with beauty products early on.

You studied cosmetics and fragrance marketing at the Fashion Institute of Technology and then went to work for Max Factor. How did your traditional marketing background help you later on when you were in charge?

Allan Kurtzman, [the former president of Max Factor], had a huge influence on me. He was so creative. He'd push us, in product innovation and storytelling. We'd have brainstorming meetings where we would all have a different part of popular culture that we'd have to report on. For me, it was music one year, when hip-hop was coming in. He expanded us into culture, what's happening in the world—like what you do on the weekends is important in the office. I thought it was great. We can be real people and apply that to our work.

There's a story you tell about not being able to sleep at night, so you'd watch television. The choices were either horror movies or QVC. What was it about QVC that was such a revelation to you? How did you know this could be the future?

TV has been a huge part of my life, ever since I was a little kid. All those stats on how many hours people spend watching TV—I was one of the bad ones. The fantasy of it is why I was always attracted to it, still am to this day. I was looking for comfort. I was scared because things weren't going well. When I saw QVC, I thought, how revolutionary to be live—this was before reality shows—to watch something literally live. The host is talking to me and I'm in my bathrobe. Jane Rudolph Treacy, who does it so well, was the host. She just basically gets into your head and says, "We're all the same." It was very calming for me.

How did you turn that into selling your products on television?

I made a purchase and it came in a cute little box. It looked exactly like what I saw on TV. Her promise was right there in front of me. Then it hit me. It wasn't something I was thinking about forever. It was, let's try a bunch of stuff, and this would be one of those things. The fact that it was nighttime actually was also nice. I liked the idea that not millions

were watching, but maybe thousands were, because I knew that I'd be doing this since we didn't have any money for marketing. It wasn't like I was going to hire a celebrity. I thought, you know what, I'm having a hard time selling this stuff. It had already been out in the stores for a year and wasn't working. I thought there had to be a better way. Everyone in my family are teachers. We can convince people to do anything. I know I can convince people to listen to me. I don't know about convincing them to buy. But if you listen to me, I might have something important to say that you might get something out of.

Did you have to get over any humps to make it a reality?

There was no hump. It was going on their Web site and getting an application and printing it out and mailing it. It was amazing that the buyer was in a good mood the day I went to present the brand. She turned down

“LEADERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT EMPATHY LOOKS LIKE.”

a lot of people. We had four months to pull the inventory together. I was petrified, absolutely petrified. But because I didn't tell anybody I knew, I felt I could fail and I wouldn't have to explain it to anyone.

How many pieces did you make?

Only about 1,500 units. They were three in a pack, and there was a brochure we printed that explained how to use it. This was before we knew the approachable sell was what would work. Once we learned that how I was talking and what I was saying—which was never scripted—worked, we started using my language in our materials.

How did you develop your selling style, your technique?

It was that first visit, and getting confirmation from this one person on the phone. Boy, that was fun. Then going online, going out to meet people in person and seeing them respond to me. Talking to employees, watching them respond. I'm able to see what's resonating. When I speak, I don't get to the point—it takes me 10 minutes to get to the point. But following that whole trail for some people is how they think too. That's why putting my story in a sentence in an ad was never going to work for me, because I had too much to say.

When you started, television was a sales medium

better known for selling pillowcases and stuff like that. Were people skeptical that you could sell a foundation on television?

They were skeptical even after it worked. It was absurd. In fact, my friend just wrote a book, *Crazy is a Compliment*. For me, part of the reason for not talking about it to others is that I could have been easily swayed not to do it. I believed it was a good idea, and when I have really, really good ideas, I don't like to share. Because there's a part of me that does think that others are smarter than I am. But on this one, I knew not even to talk to anybody. 'Cause it was a nutty idea.

When people describe your first appearance on QVC, they use words like courage, that you had guts not to go to department stores. So courage and fearlessness is part of the narrative. But actually, you're often very nervous about speaking. How did you cope with that dichotomy?

That first visit, the first 24 hours, I remember so vividly. Lisa Robertson, the host, was fairly new. She came to our boutique at King of Prussia, and she was kind enough to meet with me for a bit. We had lunch, so a relationship was started. She now is my best friend. For me, it's about being comfortable. It wasn't about what kind of person am I going to be on air. It was more about just feeling comfortable. I have my own style of meditating, which is being alone, breathing, trying to tell myself I can do this and then just winging it and seeing what happens.

Where did you get the vision to appeal to a community?

When I went on air for the first time, I envisioned these women were me or I was them, that we were the same. That we had the same struggles. The fact that the community thing happened was by chance.

How did you develop such an incredible strong, personal touch?

It's natural for me. I need to know where people are in their life. I need to visualize where they are. I'm a servant, I think. If you're coming into my space and my home and my product, then I need to serve you in the best possible way. That means knowing who you are and what your needs are and then making it a perfect experience.

On the other side, I'm a friendly person to do that with. I'm not the expert. I don't know any more than you. I have experience, but I'm not an expert. So why don't you tell me what you know, I'll tell you what I know and I'm going to take care of you through the process. I want to be there through their tough times and their wonderful times. I want them to know they can come to me.

I have been a support for these people. You know how you are with your friends—if anyone messes with you, I have your butt, I've got your back. I want cus-

tomers to know if they have an issue with anything, they can call me, e-mail me, write me, and I am there.

In fact, I flew to two women's homes who needed me. I'm not going to do that all the time. But you learn from that. Who are these people? What do they need from a brand? Now, too much of the hard-core stuff can sometimes weigh me down. I have learned what to do with it now.

You learned how to control it?

I learned how to manage it. Empathy is one of my strong suits and I apply that to every aspect of my work. Leaders need to understand what empathy looks like. It's eye-opening and it wakes you up as a team in your company. When you hear really unbelievable stories about your brand, if you don't feel more connected, then man... It's not just about what this product did for our sales.

Take, for example, a woman who I was friends with, who our customers knew and loved. She lived in Southern California. She was 40 years old and went in for surgery; they find out that she's inoperable, and she died two days later. She was in a coma and the husband wants to talk to me. I called him in the hospital room with his wife. He wants me to talk to her. He holds the phone up to her ear. What do you say? I am talking to a customer who I know is not coming back. And I'm trying to sound positive. Nothing in life prepares you for that. Nothing.

How long did you know her?

Probably about six years prior. I'd met her a couple times. She met her best friends through the brand. Her husband said he's never going to throw out her collection of bareMinerals, because it means too much to him. These are the stories that you need to tell everyone in your company. You think you're coming to work and signing checks? That is not what we do here. This is life. When you have enough of those moments, and you share those stories throughout the company, you want more, you crave that. But by sharing it with others, I'm not carrying that burden, either. And it's not a burden, it's beautiful.

Why do women relate to you in such a personal way?

They see exactly who I am in my life. It's not a show. It's never been a show. We don't sit around and say, "How should we act today?" It's what feels right. So we try to bring the word *soul* into the brand now. The reason people like me is that I am sharing my life with you. When we talk about social media and sharing, this is how we built our brand. As we move into global markets, the trick is, how do you scale that? You train your team to be deeply caring, deeply believing. When someone comes to work that first day, look in their eyes, hold their arm, find something out about them. When you have relationships like that, sales will come.

What was it about mineral makeup when you first saw it that told you this was going to be big?

I came from product development. Max Factor was the leader in face products and foundation, and I was wearing pancake makeup 'cause that's what we sold, and I'm loyal.

I saw our mineral makeup in the store, and the people who had worked for the company for years kept showing it to me and explaining the five ingredients, and how it is so pure and healthy. I wasn't personally looking for it, because I thought I was happy with my liquid foundation. But I thought, you know, I'm buying bottled water already because we didn't trust the tap water. People were talking about organic food, here in California especially. I thought, why wouldn't a healthy alternative be something women want? I understood I had to explain why. I'm not about pushing people. I'm just showing you the options and you decide. So this is a healthy alternative: You might not think you want it, but let me tell you why it might be a good idea. There was no hard sell.

“ I PUSH PEOPLE. I LIKE FIGHTING. I WON A FISTFIGHT WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER.”

And the powder means there are no cracks or creases.

Yes, and it works with your face. But talk about a huge obstacle: Getting people to use their liquid is so easy. Then all of a sudden, now you have to teach them how to do this? There were no YouTube videos back then. It started with a VHS video. Every time I went on QVC, I would teach "swirl, tap, buff" to the point where everyone's singing it in their sleep. All of a sudden, we were all doing the ritual of swirl, tap, buff, another moment of, "We're in this together."

Was the technique another reason why the infomercial was a good idea?

We noticed that what worked so well at QVC was six to 10 minutes for an idea, and the models being there and chatting, girlfriend style. We knew we had to do infomercials because we knew the format worked. Direct to customer, that's the answer.

The whole company was predicated on the direct connection between the company and the customer.

Right. When people say, "Why didn't you go traditional?" I say, "First of all, selling on QVC was advertising, it was marketing and it was a wholesale sale." I wasn't pay-

ing for the airtime. But I was reaching five million women at a time on a Saturday morning. And I don't have to train everyone one-on-one at a department store.

Were you in department stores?

Not until years later. Our bigger rollout was in Sephora and Ulta, which were self-service. We were driving it through TV, so we preconditioned everybody. The customers knew what they wanted when they went in. The best part of being in the store was getting the perfect shade match. But we accomplished that. We started the whole kit movement. We gave you two foundations, so if one wasn't quite right, you had another that you could blend together. Kits became hugely popular after we launched. We did kits, we did TV, we did our infomercial, we did QVC. It was completely different than traditional. And, to me, easier.

But other companies had mineral makeup, too.

There was coffee before Starbucks. We took something that wasn't selling in the store and we made it easy to understand. We gave people a reason for it. I don't think if we sold it in a traditional way it would ever have taken off. It was too hard, too weird, too much effort. How are you going to explain in a print ad or a 30-second spot you have to swirl, tap, buff?

How do you see yourself? As a businessperson, a marketer, a product developer, a motivator?

The product development and the marketing, to me, is like dessert. I would eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. That's where I have my fun and that's what gives me my adrenaline. But I'm a businessperson. I don't want to launch a product that's going to suck.

I would never launch a product that didn't live up to its expectation and I wouldn't want an experience in the store to be mediocre.

Culture is important, too. If your team isn't aligned with where you're going and what you're doing, it's like carrying a load of bricks in bare feet. You're never going to get there. All of the things that I focused on were the right things to do. That's leadership—getting everyone inspired to move forward, to follow you because they believe in your mission.

I read that you tended to push people who you thought had potential. Do you think you need more patience?

Were you too tough on people?

I am toughest on people in the areas that I think I know a lot about. But I'm not doing it to be mean. I push people. I like fighting. I won a fistfight when I was a teenager. Our family were physically strong women and physical strength is very important. But that's nothing to do with this. I like the debate. I like people in the company who will tell me why I'm wrong. If I happen to think I'm right and you don't, you've gotta tell me why, you've gotta fight it out with me. I love that and I think a lot of great ideas happen. But if there's

not a trusting place in the beginning, if they are scared, then it doesn't always turn out well. I've had to bring flowers in, let's put it that way.

What do you mean, "trusting place?" You mean if they're afraid of you?

Yeah. I'm so bad because I'm intimidated by everybody. So the fact that people are intimidated by me, I should understand that. One woman, for instance, came and presented a few years ago. She wanted to launch a mascara and her goal was to be the number-three mascara. Why would you want to be the number-three mascara? How does that make any sense? So I'm not considered the nicest person in the world. But I don't think that's a weakness.

It's an aspect of your personality.

I think that people outside of the company think I'm this little softy and I'm goofy. I can be funny, but I'm also tough. I have made people very uncomfortable in meetings and in situations where I don't think they're trying hard enough. When I say I'm a servant to our customer, if I don't feel that you have that same dedication, then I don't think you deserve to be here.

You have such a personal connection with this business. Literally, your heart and soul has gone into it. Was it difficult to sell?

I was okay with selling. I didn't know the [Shiseido] people that well, but I had comfort in the aligned vision in wanting to serve women. I wasn't very involved for the first two years. It was my choice not to run it after we sold. I was a little burned out, and balance was not a strong suit of mine.

What is your role now?

For the last four years, I've been a student of life. Part of me would have loved to go back to school but I would stink at that. I'm a disciplined person, so my school is meeting everyone I can, reading everything I can, traveling, observing, talking to people. I'm advising companies now. I'm working with Tatcha and Julep. I have the perfect role because I interact with [Bare Escentuals ceo] Simon Cowell.

What do you do at Bare Escentuals?

I'm in the office three days a week, and very involved in product development, product pipeline, product strategy and front-end sales. I don't go to the retailer meetings. But where do we see ourselves in three to five years? What does direct-to-consumer look like? We're also doing a speaker series. One of the things that I miss is getting to know the people who work here. I have an apartment a couple of blocks away. I used to have cocktail parties at my house, but now I'm bringing in 10 people at a time from all different departments. In terms of the culture, I want to keep infusing what this brand stands for, getting to know the people here.



Blodgett in her early days behind the counter; as a young product development executive, and at the CEW Achiever Awards in 2006 with her son, Trent.

This is a fascinating time to be at Shiseido. I want to be part of this. Bare is in a great place. The first couple years with Shiseido and Bare, I don't even know what happened. I think they were either afraid to get involved or afraid they were going to mess it up if they got too involved.

Earlier this year, Uotani said they didn't have a strategy.

Together they didn't have a strategy. Bare had one. We were 85 percent North America and we were a huge majority in complexion. There was this great company that you can now take global but that didn't happen. Our goal was to be 50 percent global and build out the other categories and take our culture to these new markets.

They expected it somehow to happen on its own?

I think. There is a language barrier too. They brought consultants in, there was a lot of observing, there was some recommendations, but then nothing was executed.

When were they planning on getting going?

I don't think there was a plan to be honest. Here's the other part of it: A team is pretty important, right? But right before Simon took on the ceo role in 2012, he lost about 12 senior people. The year 2013 was about building a team. Meanwhile, with the Shiseido con-

sensus decision-making model, everyone has to agree before a decision is made. That takes forever.

Simon now is up and running. Now you see the double-digit comps, you see fuel pipeline in the back end, you see Uotani, who is a force. I can actually have a conversation with him on the telephone and he wants to come here four times a year. We are top priority. He has a whole differ-

ent way of looking at business. [Before, in Shiseido, there were three regions]. Domestic, which is Japan,

China, and international is everyone else. North America has to be its own region. That's what he recognizes. And then best practices. He has Nars, Shiseido, Bare. What can we do together? We're starting to bring the power of those brands together, which hadn't been done before.

How long do you want to stay?

I will stay for as long as our visions are aligned. I would like Shiseido and Bare to be the number-one brand in the world. That's a fun thing to work on, and I'll do what I need to do to get there. I am

not going to overstep my boundaries, but I have a lot to offer and I have good ideas and I am fun and energetic and I can get a team excited. Let me make people feel really good about what they do here. I can help build from the inside out.

What is the key thing that's needed in order to really make a marriage work with Shiseido?

Communication is the number-one thing. How do we communicate and what's important? Once we're on the same page, what resources do they have and do we have to make this a global brand?

You're at a point in your life when you could do what you want. What keeps you involved?

Maybe I'm unusual, but I love this place. I love this brand. I'm extremely attached to it. I still want to be part of this, but have time to do other things, too. I like to win, I like playing games, I like winning games. I'm a competitor. And I know I can be helpful here.

You spoke of balance. Can you have balance now?

Well, I'm done with balance. That was two years ago. I got antsy. My drive is being around people and creating things. I am able to do that back here. I'm also able to help invest in other companies and get that energy from them. But that's not it for me. My son is out of the house. I am not raising anybody anymore. I'm still only 60, 70 percent at full speed. I have more to do.

What might that be?

I'm doing a Ted X talk in December. I've been asked to

speak, as a ceo, [on] what does balance look like? My talk is with my sister, who lives 45 minutes from me. She chose to raise her kids full time and not have a career. We have taken completely different paths and we have probably only spent four days together in the last 15 years. We were [very] close growing up. I never talk about my sister. She never ended up in any article, I never brought her into anything. It was a huge mistake.

When people ask me about balance, my new thing is, “What about your family beyond?” At Ted, she and I are going to talk about what sisterhood looks like. What happens to siblings when you are on your path? What does success look like without your family? I think we could start a sister movement. Everyone I meet has a sister or a brother. Why does it have to happen when you hit 50 that you say, “Oh my God, I have a sister who I’d like to know before I die?” [Laughs] I really do believe that there is a conversation that needs to happen around being so driven at work and then being there for the kid, what happens to that extended family?

Balance should be redefined depending on your circumstance?

Nobody has balance. That is just a misnomer, a myth. My sister, who is a full-time mother, doesn’t have balance. Me, running a company, didn’t have balance. She wants to be respected by people like me. She’s like, “I’m at your PTA meetings while you guys are off doing whatever. I’m the one in the classroom helping the kids, I’m volunteering with cupcakes and the Girl Scout leader and I don’t get respect from you powerful women.” That’s one message. The other one is, “How do you make room for more people in your life when you are so driven?”

What’s your advice for avoiding regret?

You have quarterly meetings with your team on how business is doing and where you want to go. Why don’t you do the same at home? Check in with the spouse and the kid, get your review and do an annual review at the end of the year. How are we all doing on the happiness scale from one to 10, what’s missing here? Self-awareness is the trick in life. Don’t be in denial, don’t be defensive, don’t think you know everything. Teach your child self-awareness. That stress you’re feeling right now is nothing compared to what the world is feeling.

Where do you see creativity coming from today? Is it from industry categories like indie brands or geographies like Korea?

Innovative products will be around forever. How you get them in front of a consumer is changing every sin-



Blodgett on an early Bare Escentuals bus tour and receiving an honorary degree from her alma mater, The Fashion Institute of Technology.

gle day. There have been great products in the past that have never made it because they didn’t actually know where to go to do it. But brands like Julep and Stella & Dot have built-in communities and have figured out the community model. Indie brands that are thinking about how people shop will always be winners.

I think about how home shopping has changed, in that now you’re home shopping on the street. You’re not at home anymore. You’re on your phone. Then you go into a store and you do that whole thing where you’re checking the prices and you go home and you buy it and still get it the next day. And speed: Everyone is testing same-day service. How is a retailer going to compete with price and speed? Now everyone needs to see a review. Marketing is all ratings and reviews now, and you have no control over that.

The other issue is that Amazon is obviously a threat in beauty. But what Amazon has been doing is recommending products that they think you will like based on what you buy. I think what’s missing is actually showing the customer what they might not think they would like, but something they just want to show them that is unrelated to what they just bought. Because we’re getting sick of “You’ll like this ‘cause you bought that.” Something that I’m bringing to Bare is, how do we shake that up? How do you leapfrog over “I think you’ll like this” to “Here’s something you never would buy and here’s why you might like it.”

So creativity is at the point of sale now and it’s digital essentially?

I read an article about how the brand doesn’t mat-

ter so much anymore. It’s about what have you done for me lately in your last product and how does that compare to the last product or not? Ratings are drivers for sales and it doesn’t matter how much they loved your brand before. Retailers want you to think it’s not about brand because they are in it for the product, but if you don’t have a strong brand, people aren’t going to even look at your ratings. For us, being direct to customer early on and staying true to the evolving customer [is important]. That way, we can take advice from retailers. But they don’t have all the answers.

How do you unhook yourself from the retailer?

For many years in the early days, you had to have a gift-with-purchase, they said. But what if you don’t want a gift-with-purchase? What if you want to do what’s right for the brand? We had to train some of the retail behavior based on what was right for the brand and not necessarily what had been done before, like with the kit model rather than gift-with-purchase.

Why was it better for the retailer to do it your way?

We had to have proof that it worked, which is what the infomercial did. The proof was, people are buying kits at \$60. A lot of times we had to test our own ideas before we would bring it. Now it’s so competitive, in between the different retailers and retail styles, that they need to differentiate themselves from each other and they have a certain model that they want to hold everyone else to. My advice to the smaller brands is make sure you know what’s right for your brand before you follow the vision of a retailer who has their own plan in place that might not be what you want. I don’t know if there’s enough long-term thinking with retailers and brands. It’s very short term with smaller companies—how do I make this year? Where do you want to be five years from now?

There’s also been such diversity in retail channels.

It’s the department stores versus the specialty chains versus TV versus the Internet. Do you have to be in two or three channels to get full impact?

Yes, but you start out in one. My advice would be start out direct to consumer, learn everything you can about the customer and what works and what your pricing strategy is and what products they like; get that data and then move into your next one. If you start with a retailer, you might be led down a path that might not ultimately be where you want to go.

In other words, telling the retailer what you’re going to propose, rather than asking the retailer what they think you should do?

You always ask the retailer what they think because that’s part of collaboration. But I think you automati-

cally know what works best for your brand—like Stella & Dot getting into beauty. They’re doing this on their own with their community and they don’t have to look outside to a retailer to make this happen.

How do you feel about department stores and their importance in the retail landscape now?

Brick-and-mortar is never going away. It’s now just a blend of how customers shop, where they are shopping and how to engage them and get them excited. I see that people are moving back into cities again and malls are having a tough time in suburbia. People are retiring into cities, when it used to be you retired and you moved out. When you move to a city, it’s usually smaller living quarters, so where you go outside of those living quarters is important. Shopping is a form of entertainment. I just read that 75 percent of Americans spend at least eight hours a day sitting. We’re going to find that that’s really unhealthy. How do we get people out of their home and into a place, and what are they going to do when they get there?

Is there a retail format right now that excites you?

I like our new Prince Street store. We have a second story that’s just for parties and engaging the community. We’ve organized the store by shade family, which has never been done before, instead of by product. So if you’re very fair, just go here. You don’t have to walk around the store for all these different things.

What is Bare 3.0? What comes after mineral makeup?

We stand for good-for-you and healthy. We won’t change that, and it could come in any form, on any part of the body. I don’t ever want to be that company that will launch a product that somebody else launched. That’s a great strategy for certain companies but that makes my skin crawl. There’s no ingenuity. Why can’t we always be the innovators?

What do you see as an effective bridge from Baby Boomers to Millennials?

The Baby Boomers are raising Millennials. The Boomers have had amazing skin products that they’ve grown up with and they’re teaching their kids about that. Sunscreen is being used by people every day. They’re learning much earlier on that their skin is very important to them. They’re coming in with much more knowledge. They’re also extremely more obsessed about it because they’re taking pictures every second of the day, and when you take your picture you see everything that’s wrong with you. Millennials are more educated on beauty than any other generation before them. They are going online and getting their recommendations from real people. I

don’t think celebrities are as important anymore in our business.

What do you think gives you such incredible drive?

I’m a competitor. I also have this need to please people.

Where does all the energy come from?

Caffeine. [Laughs] But when I’m hiking or running on the mountain is when all the ideas come to me. But it’s frustrating, because I don’t necessarily have a pad and pen with me so I have to try and remember them.

Is there any place you look for inspiration?

A lot of places. I’m very disciplined in what I do with my time. Because I figure I have X amount of hours in my life, which is a gazillion, but I want to make sure I use them wisely. I follow technology, because that’s not something I was brought up with, so I have to learn how the thought leaders are thinking. I read a lot of

“INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS WILL BE AROUND FOREVER. HOW YOU GET THEM IN FRONT OF THE CONSUMER IS CHANGING EVERY DAY.”

Fast Company-type magazines. I also meet strangers and talk to them constantly. I read Nora Ephron, David Sedaris and Mark Twain.

Why are you drawn to those authors?

Mark Twain understood how to use humor to get people to follow him. He was known across the globe—and it took a week for a story to actually get printed then. He knew how to get followers. He was also a brilliant marketer—he writes his autobiography and then doesn’t let it be released for a hundred years after his death. He knew that would be a way to keep us excited about him. I’m obsessed with the man.

Nora Ephron, to me, was able to take everyday stupid things and make them brilliant. In one book, she has an essay about forgetting things. She can’t remember people’s names. She was in a mall and a woman’s coming up to her and she can’t place her name. It was her sister. How many people admit that stuff? I love that.

Just showing your vulnerability in that way, I think, is attractive to other people. As a brand, being vulner-

able with humor is attractive. That’s where I get a lot of my inspiration.

Do you have an icon in business or personal life?

Of course, any of the female founders. I met Estée Lauder at Bloomingdale’s. She was very kind to me. I’ve also read a lot about Coco Chanel in the early days. I like these people in the early days. I obsess about everyone—a woman who started a company in the early days, what did that look like? I’m not as obsessed with the people who take over a large company and keep it working. That’s a special artist, too, and that’s a special businessperson. But I’m always interested to see how you take nothing and make it something powerful.

When you look at all you’ve accomplished, what makes you the most proud?

That we’ve touched so many people and had a huge impact on them. We have 4,000 employees globally, most of them in stores. The customers, I know, number in the millions. The fact that we’ve made them a little happier—that’s what I’m most proud of.

How would you like to be remembered?

What do you consider to be the most important thing that you’ve accomplished?

Venture capital firms that I’ve never even talked to before call me and talk about companies that they’re pursuing. The reason they’re calling is because they’re seeing people’s presentations on their brands that want funding. And we’re mentioned in all of their PowerPoint presentations as a brand that they’d like to be like, even if they’re not in beauty. We’re known as the company that created community and heard the voices of real women and used that. It was like crowdsourcing before there

was a name for it. Women actually inquired on what the brand should be and we went with it. And we used our customers—we sent them samples, and they went and handed out samples for us; now companies are hired to do that. It’s just so flattering to hear that we’ve been recognized by people outside of our industry as a company that understands people.

What’s the one thing that you’ve done that you want to be known for?

I could talk about the business model and the distribution strategy. But, literally, I think we brought a true love into beauty. We’ve made it truly emotional, we touch people. Beauty has always touched people’s faces, which is extremely intimate. We took that intimacy from literally holding their face into giving you goose bumps. For me, the legacy of the brand is that we made true love happen, whether it was through online or in person. It’s not a superficial thing. It’s relationships. It’s truly believing that a relationship, that a connection you feel to a person in real life, can be business. ■