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Dr. Courtney
A.
Hammonds

Dr. Courtney A.
"Dean of Fashion"

Editors choice beauty meets Art and creativity

A man is sitting on a gold stool, wearing a bright orange suit jacket and matching pants. He is also wearing a black V-neck shirt, red socks, and black boots. On his head, he has a stack of several hats, with a red hat on top. He is wearing large, dark sunglasses and has his hand near his face in a thoughtful pose. The background is a simple room with a white wall and a decorative silver console table behind him.

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The "Dean of
fashion"

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A portrait of Dr. Courtney A. Hammonds, a bald man with a goatee, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a bright yellow blazer over a black shirt. He is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is dark and out of focus, with some warm, bokeh light spots.

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MEET
**DR. COURTNEY A.
HAMMONDS:**

CREATES CULTURE SHIFTING-MOMENTS.

Who is Dr. Courtney A. Hammonds? I consider myself a multidimensional storyteller who has built my career creating culture-shifting moments. Additionally, I'm a creative seditionary, design thinker, speaker, writer, and advisor. I began my foray into fashion by joining URUP designs boutique as advisory support, and then worked at Neiman Marcus as Assistant Human Resource Manager. Between 2010 and 2018, I served as Department Chair of the Fashion Program at The Art Institutes where he developed new academic programs including The Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fashion Design (BFA).

Please tell our readership what exactly it means to have a love for fashion and when you discovered that you had it. I am absorbed in what my (golden girls) my mother, her

two sisters and my maternal grandmother, Mattie Mae Hammonds, taught me about walking in my authenticity. In fact, I learned style and fashion from my grandmother and her friends (male and female) when they would wear their finest hats and clothes every Sunday at church. Also, the idea of a perfect day was to watch Style with Elsa Klensch. Equally, I always had a longstanding love of European culture and the cross-fertilization of fashion, art, poetry, and life. When I was five, I moved to Berlin, Germany with my mother and stepfather. This wasmy gateway to the world outside of the deep south. This move fostered my appreciation for what was happening in the world of fashion, what was happening in the world of art.

Who's your inspiration/influence?

One big influence on me, who you have heard of, was the late Andre' Leon Talley. I had the honor of meeting him on multiple occasions and becoming a student.

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People say to never meet your heroes because you are guaranteed to be disappointed, but that was not the case at all. He was kind, gracious, and was everything that I hoped he would be. When he passed away in Jan. 2022, I felt like a family member died. That sounds crazy to most people, but I've been following him for over 20 years and outside of my golden girls (my mom and two aunts), he played the largest role in leading me down the path of fashion. I owe a great deal to him, and I hope to honor his legacy through my work.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

Early in my career I started a blog called the fashion foodie. It was a creative playpen. My first cover story was on South Sudanese-British model Alek Wek, who

was and still is my favorite model/muse. Studying and Dining with Alek Wek is as good as it gets. Every detail was perfect: flowers, food, porcelain, silver, lighting and of course fashion. Fun Fact- Alek gave me one of her guest rooms, which welcomed me with an autograph copy of her book Alek: From Sudanese Refugee to International Supermodel. If that was not enough, she cooked dinner. It was Marvelous! Extraordinary! Over-the-top! I am still pinching myself!

What inspired you to pursue a doctorate?

Harking back to a time when these diplomas were reserved for a minuscule segment of the population, the doctoral degree is a seen as a prestige marker, the recognition of one's exceptional talents and the certificate of belonging to the intellectual elite.



A photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing sunglasses, a light blue dress shirt, a yellow patterned tie, and a colorful (blue, yellow, green, white, red) striped jacket. He is holding a tennis racket. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees. The word "LAMOUR" is written in white, serif, all-caps font in the top right corner of the image.

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Matthew 6:33-34 Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

When I remember this passage, I remember what is important in life. I realize anew what is the true key to success. What amount of human effort can ever be more effective than the help that God gives to anyone who seeks his kingdom?

Additionally, this scripture has been inspiration for me over the past years since beginning this study. Embarking on a doctorate was more than I had ever imagined. I needed divine inspiration to guide me as I experienced this in-depth and tumultuous study. During my undergraduate, graduate, and academic career, I noticed the scarcity of Black males who taught me and who worked in higher education and HR. Thus, this was the means that inspired me to begin and complete my doctoral studies.

You are a successful business leader. Which three-character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Despite all that I have beaten back and overcome, my deep knowledge of and passion for being a risk taker, my relatability and ability to lead with integrity are my proudest achievements/character traits.

Risk Taker. I consider myself to be a courageous leader who is not afraid to take risks. Such a character trait is evident in the fearless achievements I managed in my former role as the academic fashion director. Such developments included the expansion of new academic programs including The Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fashion Design (BFA). This signaled a pivotal direction for the institution as the fashion design program was at the forefront of recent programs and technologies in the southern region. Such kinds of developments depict me as a bold decision-maker and a prompt executor who understands what I want to do for organizations.

Relatability. This is key for forward thinking leadership.

Businesses are human systems, and you need to build connections and trust quickly. I am open and primarily positive. I enjoy hearing what people have to say and bringing myself to work. That brings vulnerability, of course, but it also builds loyalty and an environment of psychological safety where people can be creative, honest, and do not fear failure. Often overlooked in favor of other traits, integrity is one that I believe should be placed higher on the list of priorities for all humankind. Seeing it as something that is often agreed upon in theory but rarely exercised in practice, there is too much focus on the end result and not enough on how you get there. Entrepreneurs are thrust into leadership, where they are looked to as a source of inspiration, ideas, strategy, and exemplifier of culture. For this reason, presenting a strong moral code of conduct is crucial to seeing these reflected in your clients, employees, and your business.

What are key themes You Need to Lead a Successful Fashion Brand.?" Please share a story or example for each?

Wise brands create niches. One of the fundamental principles of effective branding is for fashion brands to diligently select a profitable segment that they can then target through an enticing positioning. Although this general principle is universally applicable, luxury brands are substantively different from other brands. For example, the Comme des Garçons brand is known for embodying avant-garde fashion, with many of her wildly creative outfits looking like dynamic sculptures. Items include fringed blazers, mini dresses made of black taffeta, and wool sweaters with the brand's Play logo, which is a heart with eyes. Although the brand began by specifically targeting the ultra-high end, mobile professionals that cared for a high-quality product, over the years, it has gradually expanded its brand architecture scope with different products and slightly broader customer segments. Recently, Comme des Garçons announced that it would launch ready-to-wear items. You can find them in a handful of stores worldwide or through other outlets, such as Nordstrom and Net-a-Porter. As such, it becomes even more important to an aspiring luxury brand.

Positioning based on high levels of differentiation. As fashion brands strategize their competitive moves, they

are likely to either follow a cost leadership strategy or a differentiation strategy. Most fashion brands follow a differentiation strategy. However, unlike differentiation on mere product attributes, emerging brands should aggressively differentiate their brand experience.

For example, Bang & Olufsen, the iconic Danish luxury brand in design and electronics, is globally acknowledged as a leading luxury brand in its industry as the bases of its differentiation highlight primarily the symbolic value and appeal to customers' psychological need to associate themselves with brands that are high on the social hierarchy. In this context, Bang & Olufsen does not only compete with similar brands in the same industry category, but they also compete with other luxury brands.

Emphasizing the symbolic value. The principal element of creating a Fashion brand is the brand's ability to create and communicate symbolic value for its customers. Brands usually offer two types of value — functional value and symbolic value. Functional value emanates from the features and the potential uses of the brand. Functional value highlights the base line value that customers expect when they buy a brand over a commodity or a store brand because of its underlying promise of quality, reliability, and trust. As such, it directly reflects the tangible ability of the brand for the customers.

One particularly good example is the Ralph Lauren brand. Starting out with making rags into ties, the American label is truly the rags-to-riches American Dream personified. As Ralph Lauren once said, "I don't design clothes, I design dreams."

Generating perceptions of exclusivity. What makes a fashion brand to be perceived as having symbolic value? Among others, a key factor is the perception of exclusivity. Most fashion brands, specifically luxury brands strive to create a sense of exclusivity for their consumers. Perceptions of exclusivity can be in terms of unattainable price, limited geographic availability, barriers to possession, or even limited supply. These mechanisms of creating perceived exclusivity not only create a pseudo sense of demand for the brand in the eyes of the observer but also enables those who

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patronize the brand to have a sense of special status. Consider the example of Neiman Marcus. The feeling of exclusivity around the brand is a result of its philosophy and aim to always remain “ultra-premium luxury.” Such innovative strategies can help aspiring brands to create successful luxury brands.

Building a luxury brand is a journey. Building a fashion brand today amidst other longstanding brands in the current market landscape may seem daunting. However, with a clear plan to identify a niche customer segment and emphasize the brand’s symbolic value, there is enormous potential for brand managers to differentiate and position new, iconic fashion brands in the market.

Some recent examples are www.keenaBela.com and , a luxury leisure fashion brand offering high-quality products with a contemporary twist on traditional loungewear.

Every industry constantly evolves and seeks improvement. How do you think the fashion industry can improve itself? Can you give an example?

We need more transparency from the fashion industry. Transparency involves openness, communication, and accountability. Taking on more responsibility and more accountability is the only way to ensure that a company, in whatever part of the fashion industry it works, is having a positive social and environmental impact. This strengthens the call for regulating the fashion industry.



We cannot simply rely on voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility policy as a driver of change.

In short, I believe that we can make positive change happen by thinking and speaking differently about fashion and by demanding better.

What resources are available for others who want to follow you?

Rule number one? There are no short cuts to success and no secret formulas. This is a journey that you must make a commitment to enjoy. In reality, shortcuts usually lead to disappointments rather than quicker success. The key to any long-term success is to take the necessary steps to steadily progress rather than skip any of them. Likewise, although it is wise to get proper coaching, instruction and mentoring for your goals, these are not considered shortcuts. They are just more efficient ways to learn the skills required for success. However, time with a coach or instructor does not replace the steps one must take to be successful. You still must do your part of the work whether it's designing a new collection, creating your fashion blog, or perfecting your fashion photography skills. The bottom line is that there are no true shortcuts to real success.

Also, you can't go toward the future without some sense of the past. Everything in life goes in cycles, and you cannot have any strength if you don't know what the masters did.

If there is anything that you think we should share but did not ask, please feel free to let us know. Also, based on your answers, there may be follow up questions.

I was never known for silencing my own voice, but there remain details about my life that many still don't know. Here are a few fun facts.

FUN FACT 1. I share a birthday with iconic American essayist, activist, and novelist, James Baldwin. Like Baldwin, I also discovered my passion for writing, advocacy, and spirituality at an early age.

FUN FACT 2. I was a blogger for the American reality television series Project Accessory and Project Runway. Between 2011-2012, I covered both shows, in partnership with the blogging project runway platform. I had some incredible moments with the blog and the Facebook group over the years. Thanks Laura Kluvo, proprietor of The Original Project Runway Fan Blog for the opportunity!





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