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Luxury Education Foundation Discusses Leadership, Scouting Talent

LEF discusses its unique curriculum that fosters talent and leadership development in the luxury industry.

By TRACEY MEYERS

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and developing **leaders for the luxury industry**, polishes top talent until it sparkles and shines — for a growing and dynamic market that is ready.

Ketty Maisonrouge, president, LEF, told WWD, “LEF started in 2004 with one single program and has evolved into a transformative force for all levels of management. In a world where talent is increasingly key to any success, LEF has built a community of multi-generational leaders who help each other by promoting creative thinking, fostering connections between various areas of expertise as well as across company lines.”

Here, Maisonrouge talks to WWD about the ins and outs of LEF, its unique curriculum, and how the organization pivoted during the coronavirus pandemic.

WWD: How does LEF uniquely foster future talent?

Ketty Maisonrouge: First, LEF is a public nonprofit organization, funded solely by private donors, that partners with some of the world’s most prestigious universities — Columbia Business School, Parsons School of Design, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology — to create the only globally accredited curriculum on the business of **luxury**.

Secondly, the ongoing interaction between students and the ceo’s of the participating companies provide real-life insights and training that help carry the students forward in their careers. In this way, LEF has become a community with three groups of constituents: industry leaders, current students and alumni who have progressed in their careers and want to mentor the next generation.

WWD: What are the key components of the program?

KM: While the classroom setting is the foundation of the curriculum, it also involves internships, lectures and roundtable discussions with luxury industry leaders and immersive programs where students, and more recently alumni, work with individual companies to tackle issues confronting brands today and provide invaluable hands-on experience for the students and actionable insights for participating companies.

To highlight a few of these programs, the most notable to LEF are the Master Class, Block Week and Executive Workshop.

The Master Class brings together both business students and design students to work in an intimate class setting on case studies with the companies. Students learn the importance of how both design and business must integrate to allow for a successful luxury company. It is the one-on-one mentoring with the executives that gives these small student groups hands-on experience and guidance for their future careers.

The Block Week condenses this semester-long course to one week offered to MBA students and focuses on the luxury strategy approach yet offers the same mentoring experience with executives.

In the Executive Workshop, LEF integrates its accomplished network of alumni to mentor the students to develop creative solutions to companies with less bandwidth required.

WWD: How would you explain the two-way exchange between teachers and students?

K.M.: The most rewarding relationships are always those where both parties benefit. The challenges companies are faced with today are driven by technology and demographic shifts that are “trickling up” versus the traditional model of information “trickling down.”

The current students in the program are true digital natives, which creates a unique interchange of knowledge between the executives and students. The executives impart wisdom gleaned from years of business experience and students help the executives embrace and implement digital strategies that will connect storied brands to their customers.

WWD: What trends and/or changes have emerged in the luxury market during COVID-19?

K.M.: At the onset of COVID-19, LEF quickly shifted its programs to virtual and transformed the proven concept of the 2019 workshop model into a virtual academic program, providing new opportunities for mutually beneficial learning experiences to the students, companies and alumni. This flexible, concentrated real-life hands-on program has already yielded success for all involved, while creating a truly continuing education program for our alumni.

Maclaren became the first brand to take advantage of this format, and the chairman, Farzad Rastegar, not only enjoyed the sessions, but said he also “found great benefit in the workshop. The resulting presentation was somewhat similar to an ‘agency’ type presentation. This can be a very attractive program for companies only to be constrained by the amount of behind the scenes work and student/faculty time.”

Additionally, given the importance of the LEF Alumni network, LEF shifted several programs to be virtual such as the Alumni Think Tank, Alumni Networking Event and the already virtual Alumni International Exchange program to be more frequent. LEF wanted to ensure that our alumni around the world did not feel isolated or alone. All of these programs engage in peer to peer and peer to executive exchanges focusing on current industry trends.

WWD: What’s next for LEF?

K.M.: As the world and the luxury business evolves at warp speed, LEF has led by example, listening to its constituents’ changing needs, adapting in real-time, creating new formats. As recently as this summer, LEF continues to demonstrate its ability to not only meet the challenges of the day but, by sharing its combined wisdom, ensures its long-term relevancy in a world where creativity, adaptability and flexibility will be ever more essential to success. We also hope to grow our corporate reach and community while reflecting the values of a modern, forward-thinking industry. In the end, LEF is and will always be about innovation and the future of luxury.

Luxury brands Hermès, Chanel, Tiffany & Co., 64Facets and Loro Piana share their individual educational experiences with LEF:

“As a founding member and chairman of the board of LEF, it has been inspiring to see the impact of the LEF programs over the past 15 years. Seeing the students learn, develop and flourish has been the greatest reward. We have also learned much from them, and they have brought so much to Hermès as well.

“We have seen products come to life thanks to their creativity, and in-store tools implemented thanks to their intuition. It is a real joy to work with and learn from all the students in so many programs.”

— **Robert Chavez, chairman of the Luxury Education Foundation and president and ceo, Hermès of Paris Inc.**

“Last year, Chanel had the great opportunity to host an Executive Workshop with Columbia Business School students. Our team was fascinated by the insights drawn by the students and the program spurred conversations that led to actionable solutions.”

– **Joyce Green, general manager of fashion, Chanel**

“I have had the honor and privilege of being an LEF member for over 12 years. I was invited to an intimate breakfast with a [senior vice president] of strategy and business development at Tiffany & Co. I had been interested in a role within this group and just happened to have my first-round interview with him scheduled for the following day.

“As you can imagine, I was able to leverage the lively discussions from that LEF breakfast meeting to best position myself during the interview. I was hired shortly after and was able to eventually parlay my strategy experience into my dream role within global brand management at one of the world’s most beloved and iconic luxury brands. I know that I have LEF to thank for making this dream come true.”

– **Monisha Agrawal, senior director of Global Marketing Analytics & Insights, Tiffany & Co.**

“LEF has been a comprehensive resource for me over the past five years. When I signed up for the LEF master class in fall 2015, I was dreaming of launching my family’s jewelry business as a brand in the U.S. The lessons learned in and out of the classroom and the credibility gained from associations with the top brass of the luxury industry, helped me realize my dreams.

“I can proudly say that LEF deserves a lot of credit for the success of 64Facets. Ever since, I have relied on counsel from LEF members on important business decisions and have always come out with the desired outcomes. I’m an LEF lifer!”

– **Gourav Soni, ceo Americas, 64Facets**

“In January 2020, Loro Piana participated in the LEF CBS Block Week. We were incredibly impressed with the dedication and insights of the students and found the experience to be very thought-provoking. When I learned about the Virtual Executive Workshop, I was eager to participate, and I look forward to benefiting once again from the talent and knowledge of these bright minds.”

– **Claudia Cividino, North America ceo, Luxury Division, Loro Piana**

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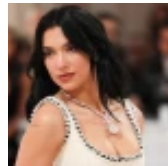


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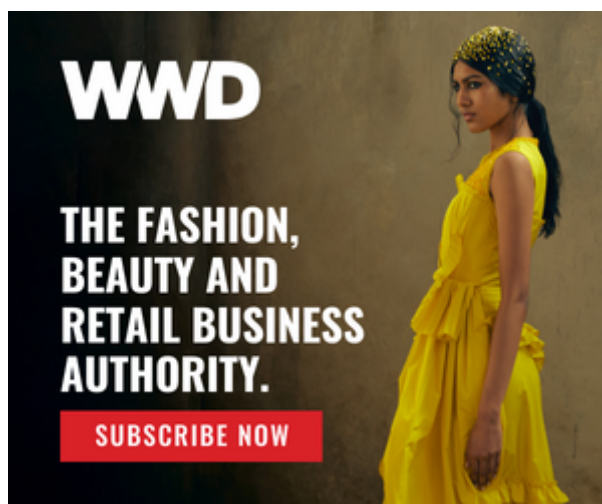
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