



DEIRDRE QUINN  
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO  
LAFAYETTE 148

# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

**WF: When did you first get inspired to go into the business of fashion and how did you know that it would be your calling?**

**DEIRDRE:** In fourth grade, my mom insisted that I take sewing lessons, and I fell passionately in love with making something out of a piece of fabric. I was lucky enough to discover at that early age what I wanted to do with my life. I went to design school, started out in a garment factory and then worked for Liz Claiborne, Donna Karan and Escada. You have to work for great companies to know what great is.

**WF: How did you get your idea or concept for Lafayette 148?**

**DEIRDRE:** After working for many years at big companies—and traveling to over seventy countries for work—I was ready to move on. I met my business partners, Mr. Siu and his wife Mrs. Siu, when I oversaw production for Liz Claiborne, and they made clothes for us. They had their own factory in downtown Manhattan where they manufactured garments for top brands like Burberry and Anne Klein. We had this incredible bond from the get-go. And then Mr. Siu asked me out for lunch and the rest is history.

We had a vision from the start of being a vertical brand. We manufactured right here in New York City, and then after 9/11 decimated the manufacturing district in New York, we built our own state-of-the-art factory from the ground up in Mr. Siu's hometown in China.

When it came to naming the company, we didn't want to use our own names. We wanted the company to be bigger than any one person, so we decided to go with the address of the building. This was a time when designers were all using their names for branding, so we were doing something unique. It just suited the company and it's timeless.

From the start, we were a true mix of East and West. I'm a born and bred New Yorker, and then we had Mr. Siu and Mrs. Siu who were Chinese, and our company really reflects that. Today our team is a union between China and the United States. We're truly a global company. Even though we had big dreams for Lafayette 148, we never imagined how much we would grow or the kind of success we'd experience.

**WF: What is unique about your business?**

**DEIRDRE:** One thing that makes us unique is we're a company led by women, for women. Eighty percent of our team at the executive level are women, and that's something I'm really proud of. So women are really at the center of everything we do. That's reflected in our leadership, but also in the way we treat our community and our customers, and even the design of our garments. We cut fifty-eight sizes, and we're committed to

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creating clothing for accomplished women everywhere, regardless of size or shape. We don't say, if you're not young and skinny we don't want to dress you. We embrace all women. It's part of our philosophy of putting women first.

The other big differentiator for us is being vertically integrated. It's very rare outside of the big European fashion houses. But it allows us to meet women's needs in a way we couldn't otherwise. We could never offer fifty-eight sizes if we didn't own our own factory.

## **WF: What are your responsibilities as Co-Founder and CEO of Lafayette 148?**

**DEIRDRE:** As Co-Founder and CEO, the buck stops with me. I'm responsible for a lot of people, and their families too. And I take that very seriously.

Sometimes I'm referee, sometimes I'm cheerleader. But I'm always the leader of the band, making sure we're all playing our parts, working in unison, with a clear focus on where we're going. That said, the band itself is critical, and the team that supports me is awesome. I could never do this alone—I get to be the leader, but it's all the musicians that trust me that make the music and the magic happen.

## **WF: Can you tell us your most memorable experience in your career thus far?**

**DEIRDRE:** No one has ever asked me that question, actually. I'd say the most memorable experience was also the most challenging, and that would be losing my business partner Mr. Siu seven years ago. I was always happy being second in command. But in the years that followed I learned to work in his honor, persevere and prove to myself that I was capable of leading the company. Rising to that challenge that has been the most rewarding part of my career.

## **WF: Were there any sacrifices you had to make in the creation of Lafayette 148?**

**DEIRDRE:** There's a fine line between success and failure, and I walk that fine line. Of course there are a lot of sacrifices and I don't recommend it for everybody. But if you love what you do then it's worth it, and I love my job. Of course I have good and bad days, but the fact is that doing this work is just part of my DNA. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

## **WF: To what do you attribute your success?**

**DEIRDRE:** Surrounding myself with great people. I don't consider myself successful, I consider *us* successful.

Also, I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit. You have to be willing to take risks to build a company. It was a risk to move our headquarters to the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 2018 after twenty years in SoHo, but it's been amazing for our business, and has really helped us weather the pandemic. I think that entrepreneurs are people that figure things out and meet each new challenge that presents itself while pivoting and changing quickly.

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You need to be open-minded enough to keep evolving. That's served me well through the good times and the challenges.

**WF: What are some tips or advice that you would give to other female entrepreneurs who are just starting out?**

**DEIRDRE:** I think it's about building your business with kindness, intelligence and integrity. Also building a place where you want to work and surrounding yourself with people who share your vision. We're a women-led company of women dressing women. My team gets women and they're devoting to lifting them up and giving them confidence so they can win in their own worlds each day.

As women entrepreneurs, it's also so important that we walk the talk and support each other. I have a strong support network of women, and I think it's critical for success.

And finally, you have to be passionate about what you do, and be driven by it. I like to say that starting out you need passion, you need patience, and you need to be focused to persevere. There are always setbacks and challenges—the important thing is to learn from them and keep building. That's our motto at Lafayette 148—keep building.

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