

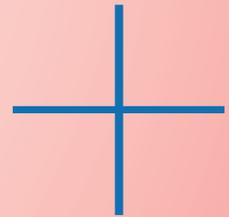
29 POWER HABITS

# SUCCESS

GET  
BETTER  
WITH AGE

**KATHY  
IRELAND**

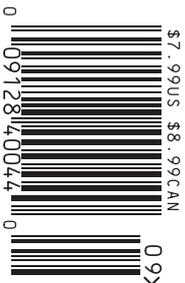
MODELING  
SUPER  
GROWTH



THE PERFECT  
MORNING  
ROUTINE

UNLEASH  
CREATIVITY  
INSIDE THE MIND OF  
**DJ STEVE AOKI**

SEPTEMBER/  
OCTOBER 2019  
DISPLAY UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30, 2019





# HER UNIVERSE IS CONSTANTLY EXPANDING



SUPERMODEL TURNED  
MODEL ENTREPRENEUR KATHY IRELAND  
EXEMPLIFIES CONSISTENT GROWTH.

BY JAMIE FRIEDLANDER

# It all started with a pair of socks.

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hen most people hear the name Kathy Ireland, they are bound to think of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. The former supermodel graced 13 consecutive issues, including three covers, and

her 1989 cover led to the all-time best-selling issue of the magazine.

The story goes well beyond that neon yellow bikini. Ireland's company, kathy ireland Worldwide (kiWW), is far from being a small passion project run by a former supermodel. It's a multibillion-dollar worldwide brand that has made Ireland, 56, one of the richest self-made women in the world.

The chair, CEO and chief designer of kiWW is believed to be the wealthiest supermodel in history, with a net worth estimated at \$500 million by *Harper's Bazaar*. On top of that, she's a major player in the licensing industry: She sells billions of dollars in licensed goods each year—more than Martha Stewart, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Bahama.

"We're under the radar," says Ireland, whose voice is warm, approachable and familiar. "As a private person owning a private company, I like that anonymity. I like being under the radar."



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Upon learning about kiWW, many people (myself included) are slightly confused. *Wait a second*, I found myself thinking countless times while researching for my interview with Ireland. *What exactly does kiWW sell?*

The list is beyond extensive. kiWW sells handbags, sunglasses, sleepwear for women and children, intimates, socks (obviously), luggage, men's suits, men's denim, flooring, complete bedding, diamond jewelry, acne treatments, at-home STI testing, furniture, lighting, rugs, pet accessories, adult and children's books, wall art, and as the saying goes, much, much more.

"While recognizing our strategy might not be clear to many, it's so intentional for us," Ireland says.

Ireland also works in the world of destination weddings and honeymoons through resorts owned by kiWW, including three in Hawaii and two in Palm Springs. The company does payment processing, and talent management: kiWW



managed Janet Jackson during the resurgence of her career, and a wholly owned subsidiary of kiWW recently signed singer Vanessa Williams as a client.

“I know you’ve dabbled in many different areas,” I tell Ireland before asking her if she has any advice for other entrepreneurs who might want to pivot their professional efforts.

“Respectfully, I don’t dabble,” she says. “I expand.”

By '93, Ireland had been modeling for a decade and was ready to switch careers. She was asked to model a pair of socks. She had a different idea in mind: Going into business with the company to make and sell Kathy Ireland branded socks.

Now, a quarter of a century later, kiWW sells over 17,000 different products.

The growth of kiWW hasn’t always been linear, or a sure thing. In its early years, the company primarily sold women’s clothing. It had one retail partner: Kmart. When Kmart filed

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## TOUGH SKIN

**AS A YOUNG MODEL, IRELAND FACED REJECTION ON A NEAR DAILY BASIS.** She says this helped shaped who she is as a businesswoman today.

"I really believe that rejection is a gift," she says. "I didn't recognize it and appreciate it at the time, but it would prepare me for the world of business. When people said no, when they laughed in my face ... these things did not destroy me. If anything, when somebody would say no, my response would be, Well, at least we're talking. I'll come back tomorrow; maybe your circumstances will have changed; maybe you'll be in a better mood."

When it comes to rejection, one particular moment stands out for Ireland.

"When I worked as a model, my job description was basically to shut up and pose," she says.

"When I had a rare opportunity to speak, a critic—very publicly—said I had a voice that could kill small animals. I was 25 years old and I couldn't order a pizza on the phone. I had this high, squeaky voice, and they thought I was a kid making a prank phone call."

The comment devastated Ireland, but it also opened her eyes. She was grateful for the critic's harsh words, as they helped her see that she'd have to present a more mature, professional version of herself to be taken more seriously.

For public figures like Ireland, criticism can be rampant. The key, she says, is not taking every comment at face value.

"We have to be able to discern: Is this just mean, nasty, unkind junk that needs to be thrown away? Or despite the nasty wrapping, is there some truth? Can I learn something from this?"

And remember: There's no point in surrounding yourself with people who will spend all of their time boosting your ego.

"Don't surround yourself with yes people," Ireland says. "Surround yourself with people who love you enough to tell you the truth and be painfully honest with you. If somebody believes in you, they'll critique you so that you can grow and reach your potential."



“We’re under the radar. As a private person owning a private company, I like that anonymity.”



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## INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

**IRELAND'S FIRST "JOB" WAS AT 4 YEARS OLD, WHEN SHE SOLD PAINTED ROCKS WITH HER SISTER, MARY.**

"I had a neighbor say, 'You're an entrepreneur,' and I had no idea what that meant," Ireland says, laughing. "I didn't know if she was saying something nice or unkind."

Her next taste of entrepreneurship came at age 7, when she made handbags and jewelry to coordinate with the handmade halter dresses her mother sold at beach fairs.

After that, Ireland took a job at 11 delivering newspapers. She saw an ad in the paper that said, "Are you the boy for the job?" and she thought, *No, but I'm the girl for the job.* One man yelled at her, incredulous that she was peddling papers as a young girl. She didn't let his comment—or any others that would come later in life—stop her.

"I saw at a young age that my hard work could bring about some great results, and that encouraged me," she says.

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for bankruptcy in 2002, it was the largest retail bankruptcy in history.

"People thought we were done," Ireland says.

Kmart's bankruptcy taught Ireland a lot about business. She learned that it was important not to put all of her eggs in one basket, especially because she had 37 employees and their families on the payroll.

She also learned the importance of being resilient. Eventually, kiWW persisted and pivoted by entering the home furnishing business. "At that time, there weren't people who were known for 'other careers designing home

furnishings,'" she says. "We were laughed at and had doors slammed in our faces."

But her vision was spot on, as home furnishings is one of kiWW's biggest markets today.

"To be a successful entrepreneur... if you don't hear no every day, you're not trying hard enough," she says. "You have to be willing, not to gamble, but to take an educated risk. When you're betrayed by people you trust, when you're kicked to the curb and failure looks certain, you find your resilience."

It has paid off. In 2015 alone, Forbes reported \$2.5 billion in retail revenue for kiWW.

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## LEARNING FROM THE BEST

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MENTORSHIP HAS PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN

IRELAND'S LIFE, in large part because she's been

mentored by some of the most influential minds of the past century, including Warren Buffett and Elizabeth Taylor.

Although she admires her mentors greatly, Ireland says it's always good to remember that we're all capable of making mistakes. "It's so important that we don't put our mentors on a pedestal," she says. "We're all failed humans."

**Here are Ireland's top mentors.**

"From Day 1, the key for us has been listening to our customer and really learning from her," Ireland says. "Even though we're in our 25th year, we're a baby brand. We're just getting started."

That mindset is as true for Ireland personally as it is for kiWW. In both cases, she believes there is always more to learn and experience to create growth opportunities. Ireland doesn't have any more than a high school diploma. But that doesn't mean she's not well educated.

"There are no limits for the ways you can educate yourself," says Ireland, who makes it a goal to learn one new thing each day. "The smartest people I know never stop learning."

In 2012, Ireland was given an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters from California State University Channel Islands for using her influence to help others.

Ireland has attempted to instill her children with her philanthropic sense, as well as her streak for independence.

She lives in Santa Barbara, California, where she grew up, with her husband, ER physician Greg Olsen. They have three children: Erik, 25, Lily, 20, and Chloe, 16. She says raising her children with Olsen is her single greatest accomplishment in life.

"They're discerning," she says. "And when they hear something, they don't necessarily accept it as truth just because they heard it from say a professor or an esteemed person. They really check it, vet it for themselves, and think independently."



### ELIZABETH TAYLOR

**WHEN ASKED ABOUT ELIZABETH TAYLOR, IRELAND IS ON THE BRINK OF SPEECHLESSNESS.** "What a gift to be mentored by Elizabeth," she says after a long pause. "She became family."

Taylor inspired and mentored Ireland in many ways—she even gave her one of her Oscars, the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award. But one profound impact the former actress had on Ireland was in the world of philanthropy. Taylor made giving back a priority—she founded the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation to raise both awareness and money for HIV/AIDS during a time when many people were turning a blind eye.

"I loved Elizabeth's tenacity," Ireland says. "She fought through, she battled and she had conviction for her beliefs."

Ireland's private nature may come partly from Taylor, who quietly sold off many of her expensive diamonds to finance medical care to people in Africa. "She did so much quietly," Ireland remembers.

Ireland has followed in Taylor's footsteps, with philanthropic efforts in nearly every facet of women's health and beyond. UCLA recently named Ireland one of the top 10 leading health advocates for women. She's also an ambassador for the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation; has opened several neonatal intensive care units in the U.S.; and is the only layperson to be a member of the American Society of Gastroenterologists.

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If kiWW has been under the radar, it is largely because Ireland prefers it that way. She always knew slow, steady progress would be the key to her success. It's one of the reason Ireland has always intended to keep her company privately owned.

"There are a lot of decisions that I make that would not fly on Wall Street," she says. "Wall Street wants to see results—needs to see results. Every 90 days, they're looking for

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**IRV BLUMKIN**

**IRV BLUMKIN, THE CEO OF NEBRASKA FURNITURE MART, WAS IRELAND'S FIRST CUSTOMER** when she entered the retail furniture business. (Blumkin also introduced Ireland to another mentor of hers: Warren Buffett.)

"Irv was tough, he was really tough," Ireland says. "He made sure I knew our products. But my goodness, we got to know each other, and we've become family."

The feeling is mutual.

"She's a very energetic, engaging and authentic person—what you see is what you get," Blumkin says. "She's coming from the heart. She tells it honestly like it is, and she has unbelievable integrity. I felt that from the very beginning. You could tell she cared and she had the passion and the focus to want to be successful."



**WARREN BUFFETT**

**ENTREPRENEURS LIKE IRELAND COULD SPEND DAYS LISTING THE LESSONS THEY'VE LEARNED FROM SOMEONE AS INFLUENTIAL AS WARREN BUFFETT.** Ireland's favorite lesson from the famed investor at the head of Berkshire Hathaway? Do 10 things for someone before you ask them for something.

"I think that's something we can all learn from," Ireland says. "So often, people can get a little bit greedy and they just want, want, want."

Ireland says it might seem counterintuitive, but kiWW always considers how they can help potential partners—not the other way around.

"When we're looking at a professional relationship, the first question we ask ourselves is, 'This partner or this person or this company—how will we elevate them and help them?'" Ireland says. "They're wonderful already, how will we help them grow even more? What can we bring to the table?"

But that doesn't mean she's willing to risk her bottom line in order to help someone else.

"Of course, we need to be successful too," she says. "We need that for sustainability. I've learned when we do things for the right reasons, when we do them well and our eyes are not on ourselves, but on others, the money comes."

**JOHN AND BARBARA IRELAND**

**IRELAND'S FATHER, JOHN, WORKED IN LABOR RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE LIKE CESAR CHAVEZ AND DELORES HUERTA,** with his daughter picketing alongside them as a girl. The experience has influenced Ireland as a business owner. Not only did it make avoiding blood diamonds in the jewelry she sells a priority, but it also led to a decades-long emphasis on making sure all kiWW workers are treated fairly.

"That was something that was in my heart and mind when we began this work, because of growing up as a child with my dad working in labor relations," she says. "[We took] many trips to Tijuana as kids, and seeing firsthand the exploitation of human beings really shaped the way I approached business."

On a simpler level, she says her father was just downright supportive—the kind of father every young child hopes to have.

"He just always believed in me and my sisters and that we could do anything," Ireland says. "When I had a paper route, he told me, 'Give 110 percent to the customer. They expect the paper on the driveway; put it on the front porch.' That was the foundation of my learning to under-promise and over-deliver."

Ireland also says her mother, Barbara, was a great role model.

"Mom—the ultimate entrepreneur," Ireland says with admiration teeming in her voice. Her mother did everything from manage her own day care and housekeeping business to design her own dresses to sell at fairs.



“There are no limits for the ways you can educate yourself.”



“When you’re betrayed by people you trust... you find your resilience.”

When Ireland initially launched her brand, she says most other companies in the space were buying brand awareness through advertisements. But Ireland knew independent retailers didn’t typically have large ad budgets, so she focused on building her brand by growing sustainable relationships with people she knew she wanted to work with, many of whom she still works with to this day.

Today, furniture is one of kiWW’s biggest markets. Ireland has worked closely with both furniture designer Michael Amini and Nebraska Furniture Mart CEO Irv Blumkin.

“She deals with people honestly and fairly, and she has these personal relationships where people want to help her succeed,” says Blumkin, who has known Ireland for over 20 years. “She’s involved and she’s engaged. She loves what she does, she’s passionate and she leads her team to make sure they accomplish their goals.”

Amini hasn’t known Ireland for nearly as long as Blumkin—just two years—but he agrees.

“She is the most caring, kind and likable individual that you will meet in your life,” Amini says. “I do business with many, many people. I am a very lucky and fortunate individual not only because I love what I do, but because I’m involved with such wonderful people, and one of those people I can tell stands out is Kathy Ireland. She has the touch that not everybody has.”

Her strong relationships with Amini, Blumkin and countless others have proved invaluable in growing her business.

“I don’t judge success in terms of dollars, but rather sense—common sense,” she says. “How we treat others determines our success.” ♦

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FRIEDLANDER IS A FREELANCE WRITER BASED IN CHICAGO.

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results. And oftentimes, we make decisions [that are] much more long-term.”

Though many companies the size of kiWW would have long ago opted to go public, taking on shareholder and media scrutiny, Ireland likes to play things closer to the vest.

“I’m a private person owning a private company,” she says. “If we’re a private company, I have to ask: Why would we want people to know everything? We don’t.”

One reason for the steady approach to growth has been the care Ireland pays to choosing the right business partners. She does her best to make sure she takes the time and consideration necessary to carefully vet each potential partner, ensuring they were working toward the same goals.

“There have been some who have criticized that we’ve grown too slowly,” Ireland says. “My response is we’ve grown at a pace I’m comfortable with.”

One way Ireland has been able to quietly and effectively grow her business at her own pace is by prioritizing her professional relationships over all else.