



INSIGHTS

Elaine Welteroth

EDITOR OF TEEN VOGUE

The dynamic magazine editor on her fear of “failure to launch,” our obligation for self-actualization, and why Gen Z will save us all



HOMETOWN

Newark, CA

CURRENT LOCATION

Brooklyn, NY

EDUCATION

BA in Media/Communications with a minor in Journalism—California State University, Sacramento

EXPERIENCE

- Beauty & Style Editor, *Ebony* magazine
- Senior Beauty Editor, *Glamour* magazine
- Beauty & Health Director, *Teen Vogue* magazine

WHAT KIND OF KID WAS ELAINE? Oh, man, I was energetic, opinionated, fun-loving, creative, and probably a pain in the ass! But no—I was very just interested in everything. I definitely thrived on being busy and being a big social butterfly. In school, I did every single sport. I was in the school choir. I was the Junior and Senior class president. I was just very *busy* [laughs].

I GREW UP IN THE BAY AREA IN A VERY LIBERAL

FAMILY. They were pretty much like: “No matter what you want to do, we’re going to support you and love you.” I’m the first

person in my family to graduate from college, so I felt like I had to figure out a lot of the professional climb on my own.

I WOULD BE THE KID WHO WOULD STAY UP UNTIL 3 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING WITH A FLASHLIGHT IN MY ROOM, PRETENDING TO BE SLEEPING BUT REALLY PUTTING TOGETHER LITTLE COLLAGES. I *loved* collages, I *loved* magazines. It's funny how those things that you spent your time obsessing over as a kid totally translate into a real-life passion that you can get paid for as an adult.

AT EVERY PARTY IN COLLEGE, I WAS THE PERSON WHO WAS IN A CORNER WITH SOMEONE I'D FIND, WHO WOULD TELL ME THEIR LIFE STORY. By the end we'd be hugging and crying, and having a therapy session. My mum always calls me "Little Baba Wawa," as in Barbara Walters, because I am always extracting all the facts from someone on their life. That's just the way I enjoy socializing! To this day that is the best part of my job—interviewing people.

MY NUMBER ONE PIECE OF ADVICE IS: DON'T FOLLOW THAT BOY TO COLLEGE! I chose my college for the absolute worst reason, which was to go wherever my high-school sweetheart was going. Ultimately, I don't think it was the best school choice for me, but I made the best of it. The experience taught me that: *Holy shit, it's really on you to figure out how to make your dreams come true.* No counselor is going to carve out that path for you, especially if you want to work in a creative industry.

MY WORST FEAR WAS BEING A FAILURE TO LAUNCH. I was like: "I have to figure out how to be great." As a first step, during my college winter intercession, I went to LA for an entertainment PR internship. While I was down there, I ended up getting this cool on-camera opportunity to interview musicians. That was the first time I remember tasting the intersection of vision and faith, and realizing that *that's* when the magic of life takes hold of you. I got addicted to that feeling.

MY NEXT GOAL WAS NEW YORK. I moved across the country for a summer internship in advertising. To be honest,

I hated it! But it was a great experience because it exposed me to new possibilities. I remember thinking, “Well, I hate doing this, but I love this New York thing. And if I can make it in New York doing something I don’t love, why don’t I try to make it to New York for something I do love?”

I ACCIDENTALLY TOOK TOO MANY CREDITS FOR A FEW SEMESTERS, SO I ENDED UP GRADUATING EARLIER THAN I’D EXPECTED.

That sent me into this anxiety-stricken period of my life, where I felt an urgency to figure my life out. I remember going home and rabidly looking through magazines, looking for inspiration to hit me. I picked up *Ebony* magazine and Alicia Keys was on the cover wearing a beautiful red gown. I read the cover story, and something told me to Google the author—I’d never done that before in my life—but something told me to, so I did. This woman’s name was Harriette Cole.

[HARRIETTE] HAD ESSENTIALLY CREATED A BRAND FOR HERSELF.

I read about how she leveraged a really successful career as a fashion editor at *Essence*, then became Editor in Chief of *Ebony* magazine. She parlayed that into an on-air role as a TV personality, and had a syndicated radio show and became a best-selling author. At the time, in my eyes, that was revolutionary. The only other person I knew of who’d done that was Oprah. This was all pre-social media where everyone has a “personal brand” now.

A LIGHTBULB WENT OFF INSIDE OF ME. I was like: *I want to be like this woman*. So I wrote her a letter that night, sent it snail mail, and followed up like *crazy*. I found the phone number for her office, and I called to say I would love to have 10 minutes to talk to Harriette. They kept saying, “No, she’s not available,” and I would say, “What if I come to New York and bring her coffee?” At some point, they must have been like, “Harriette better get on the phone with this crazy girl before she shows up at our office.”

EVENTUALLY I LOCKED IN A PHONE CALL. It was supposed to be just 15 minutes but there was so much synergy that we ended up on the line for 45 minutes. At the end of the call, I said, “If there’s ever an opportunity to work with you,

We all have an obligation to self-actualize. That is your singular goal on this planet: If you feel like you are meant to be here for a certain reason, you have to follow that. No boy can get in the way; no sexy job title that you're not excited about; no amount of money can keep you from that pursuit.

please keep me in mind.” We hung up, and I thought, “She’s definitely going to forget about me.” But in a magical turn of events, four months later, Harriette offered me a role at *Ebony*. I moved to NYC to start as her intern and then—in another bold-ass move that I would not recommend!—the three-month internship ended and I was still there, so I changed my title in my email signature to Production Assistant! Somehow I got away with that [laughs]. I worked my way up from there, and eventually I started the Beauty and Style department at *Ebony*. I learned so much through those years that has helped me throughout my entire career. After that, I went to Condé Nast to work at *Glamour* magazine for a year as Senior Beauty Editor.

THEN, AT 25, I WAS OFFERED THE GAME-CHANGING ROLE OF MY CAREER: BEAUTY AND HEALTH DIRECTOR AT TEEN VOGUE.

I was in that role for about four years and I wore a lot of different hats. I ended up taking on cover stories when I could, and I wrote some features. I have to give a lot of credit to Amy Astley, who was the founding Editor in Chief, because she gave all of us the opportunity to have our voices heard. She wasn’t a micromanager: She was someone who allowed you to spread your wings and really fly.

WHEN ANNA [WINTOUR] CALLED ME INTO HER OFFICE TO OFFER ME THE POSITION OF EDITOR OF TEEN VOGUE, IT WAS A HUGE HONOR.

It also felt like a very seamless transition. I didn’t really feel the need to make a huge statement about the direction of the magazine when I took the job: Internally, we had been working together as a team to shift what *Teen Vogue* could mean to our audience. There was evolution underway—I really wanted to go beyond beauty and fashion to be more intentional about sending messages of empowerment and telling stories that would provoke more compelling political conversations.

I WORK REALLY CLOSELY WITH OUR DIGITAL EDITORIAL DIRECTOR AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR. We call ourselves the dream team; we share the same vision of being a progressive voice for young, conscious people. We’re all about using fashion and beauty as lenses to have larger conversations

about the importance of diversity, empowerment, and self-expression—and we aren't afraid to dive into the political issues that matter to young people. It's our responsibility. And we don't take that lightly.

GEN Z IS GOING TO SAVE ALL OF US. We have a very woke team. I have to say that, and I have to shout out our digital team, because they're leading the charge in the political conversation that *Teen Vogue* is getting a lot of credit for right now. I think that it's a combination of our personal passions meeting the right political climate, and these incredible opportunities to lead this very important brand for young people.

THE YOUTH HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY. I feel immensely fortunate to help lead the charge in capturing the consciousness of young people today. I see myself, and I see *Teen Vogue* as a conduit for those voices that are already doing, thinking, saying the things the world needs to hear more of right now. We are a platform for them, we're here to amplify their voices. Our readers and the young thought leaders that we lend our pages to are a consistent source of hope to me.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD I GIVE MY 18-YEAR-OLD SELF? Go fearlessly in the direction of your dream. I think a lot about that period of just feeling really hopeless about the future. Fear could easily have kept me from sending that letter out to Harriette and incessantly following up, but ultimately those actions formed the tipping point that launched me into the seat I'm in right now.

WE ALL HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO SELF-ACTUALIZE. That is your singular goal on this planet: If you feel like you are meant to be here for a certain reason, you *have* to follow that. No boy can get in the way; no sexy job title that you're not excited about; no amount of money can keep you from that pursuit. When you feel that passion inside of you, you have to follow it. You just *have* to.



INSIGHTS

Sandy Liang

DESIGNER, SANDY LIANG

The clothing designer and native New Yorker on the importance of a good coat, living life outside the bubble, and creating clothes that make people smile



HOMETOWN

New York, NY

CURRENT LOCATION

New York, NY

EDUCATION

BFA in Fashion Design—Parsons School of Design, NY

EXPERIENCE

- Press internship, 3.1 Phillip Lim
- Design internship, Opening Ceremony
- Design internship, Richard Chai

I'M A FASHION DESIGNER, BUT I DON'T REALLY SEE MYSELF AS ONE. I present when I have to present, I do sales when I have to do sales, but I just make the clothes. A lot of that has to do with the fact that I'm not a big company, where we have market research to figure out what people want to buy. It's really just me making what I want to wear right now; what my friends want to wear right now (or next season, rather).

I DID MY FIRST COLLECTION WHEN I WAS 22. I had just graduated from fashion school and my dad suggested that I should

get a job and gain some experience for at least a couple of years before even thinking about doing my own thing. But I was so stubborn, and I was high off this energy. I really believed in myself.

I SAID TO MY DAD, “I’M GOING TO FUCK UP SO MANY TIMES AND MAKE SO MANY MISTAKES, ANYWAY. WHY CAN’T I DO IT NOW?” Start everything now, and just figure it out along the way. There’s never going to be a right time to start something like this, right?

THERE’S NEVER A START POINT OR END POINT TO THE INSPIRATION FOR THE SEASON. It has a lot to do with my personal life and whatever I am going through at that time.

I LIKE THINGS WITH DUALITY. I’m really, really into old Range Rovers, pre-2001 models: I like how they’re regal and associated with the English countryside, but at the same time, American hip-hop culture has made them into this whole other *thing*. They’re cool because they’re meant to get dirty, they’re not meant to look pretty and polished.

I THINK THAT APPLIES TO MY CLOTHES AS WELL. I don’t think they should ever be too polished. That’s just not my girl, that’s just not me.

HOW DID I START MY LABEL? First off, by getting all the legal stuff out of the way. I found a lawyer and formed an LLC. I had no idea how to do anything, but I figured it out. I’m really big on making lists: I think that helps me a lot.

AT THE TIME, I WAS RUNNING ON CRAZY ENERGY. I was literally taking the train from my apartment to midtown to the sample rooms a couple times a day, over and over and over again. It was fucking cold, too!

I GUESS I REALLY BELIEVED IN WHAT I HAD TO SAY. I felt like there was something missing, and I didn’t like how serious fashion was. I sort of wanted to make fun of it, and be like: “It’s not serious, it’s just clothes, and I want to make things that make people smile.”

ANOTHER ISSUE OF MINE WAS THAT A LOT OF THE BIGGER NAME DESIGNERS AND CREATIVE HEADS WERE MEN.

And I was just like, “How do you know what I want to wear as a woman? You can’t possibly know.” I don’t want to wear a really tight shift dress. I would never want to wear that. I don’t want to wear the same leather jacket as everyone else. So how do I make it so it’s like me?

AS A NEW YORKER, I KNOW WHAT A COAT MEANS.

It’s a relationship. It’s like your boyfriend. You live with it for years. I love coats so much; they’re like a second skin. There’s also the budget factor. I’m not a big shopper, but when I shop it’s going to be for a coat.

I’M FROM NEW YORK: I GREW UP IN QUEENS.

But my dad and my grandparents have always worked around the Lower East Side. My dad has a business on Allen and Delancey, and my grandparents live on Rivington Street. I named the Delancey Leather Moto jacket after the street that I sort of grew up on. And then I have all these puffers, I think they’re so cool. Grandpas in Chinatown are really big into the puffers, and when I was making this collection I would take all these photos of grandpas.

GROWING UP, MY MOM WAS VERY ANTI-FASHION.

She was like, “It’s a waste of money, you need to study and focus on good values.” She made me feel like it was a bad thing to care about the way you looked, because then you’re diverting your attention from what’s important.

AS A KID, I SAW FASHION AS THIS UNATTAINABLE

THING. And because it was all so unattainable it became that much more precious to me. I think that’s what drove me to really fixate on clothes: because I couldn’t have those glittery Gap jeans when I was 12!

MY SENSE OF STYLE NOW IS ABOUT PRACTICALITY AND WHAT I THINK IS ELEGANT.

When I’m designing my collection it’s not like, “Oh, I went to this museum and saw this painting.” It’s really just whatever I observe around me. It’s my neighborhood, it’s my friends.

OF COURSE, ANYTHING WORTH DOING IS GOING TO BE STRESSFUL. My mentality is: Take everything one day at a time. At the end of day, you leave your office, you walk around, you go home, and it's not a big deal. It's not so serious, no one's dying. We're making clothing, and my clothes aren't serious to begin with. It's not like this is life or death.

OBVIOUSLY IT'S A BUSINESS, AND I WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL. I'm extremely competitive to the point where I want to be the best, but at the same time I'm going at my own pace, I'm confident that what I'm communicating to everybody through the clothes is the message that I want to relay. I let the clothes sort of speak for themselves.

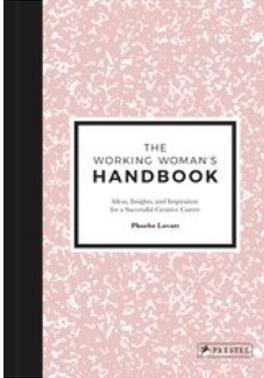
I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS. In the short amount of time that I've been doing this, so many people have been so supportive of me, and I'm forever grateful for those people. That makes me want to help out whoever needs my help, too.

WHEN I DON'T WORK, I DON'T WORK. I don't want to look at a skirt, I don't want to look at a jacket! I'm just watching TV, hanging out with my dog. Most of my close friends are not in the fashion-related industries at all, and I love that because it makes me feel like a real person.

MY DEFINITION OF SUCCESS IS GOING TO WORK EVERY MORNING AND FEELING HAPPY TO BE THERE. Also, not being bored. One of my biggest fears after graduating college was, "Oh my gosh, am I going to get a job where I just do the same thing every day for the rest of my life until I retire, and I'm bored?" And I'm not. I'm so happy. I mean, I'm fucking stressed out half the time! But I'm still really happy.

WORK IT!





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