

DSOF CASE STUDY

CONNIE TANG: LEADING FEARLESSLY THROUGH CRISIS, CHANGE & GROWTH



KATHERINE KORMAN FREY
Entrepreneur in Residence, The George
Washington University School of Business







Connie boarded the plane headed for Houston. Waiting for takeoff, she scrolled down the Princess House Facebook page for the third time in an hour. Houston, Texas—the company’s second largest market—was devastated by Hurricane Harvey. The disaster forced Connie and her team into crisis management mode: “My sales team was preparing ahead of time,” Connie explained. “As the news started flowing, we stayed connected with our independent consultants through social media. The first question was: Is everyone okay, are they safe?” One of the Princess House influencers and partners, food blogger Vianney Rodriguez (sweetlifebake.com), was not. She broadcast to her 15,000 followers on Facebook that she had to evacuate and bid farewell to her uninhabitable home in Houston.

Connie and her team developed a plan (see Appendix 1), part of which involved a broadcast in English and Spanish to the predominantly Latina sales force (also known as Consultants). “We needed to let them know we were watching and were aware of what was happening. We wanted them to feel our love,” Connie noted. “We let them know how proud we were of them as they literally weathered the storm and such a scary situation. We wanted them to have the message, ‘You are not alone.’”

COMPANY AND DIRECT SELLING BACKGROUND

Princess House was founded in 1963 with hand-blown crystalware as its primary product. Today the company sells a range of products that

“Our products have always attracted fans and customers.”

—Connie Tang, Princess House CEO

support and promote healthy living, healthy eating, food preparation, and food storage with stainless steel cookware comprising the majority of sales (see Appendix 2). Eighty-five percent of Princess House’s business is from the Hispanic market, a demographic that accounted for 58 million people in the US (Source: 2016 [Pew Research](#)).

The Princess House independent Consultants started with a group of women who sold affordable crystal ware to other women in their communities. Some of the customers wanted the opportunity to earn an income as well as buy the products. They could do this through the role of Hostess: Hosting a healthy cooking demonstration attended by friends interested in learning about—and possibly purchasing—the product. As women continued to introduce others to the business, the numbers grew to more than 25,000 sales consultants in the US, and the company developed a special community and culture (see Appendices 3 and 4). Connie explained the growth:

Our products have always attracted fans and customers. Many become independent consultants because of that love and the opportunity to earn some supplemental income. It begins with the same premise: People say, “I love these products and want

to get them at a discount.” Then it morphs into, “You know I could use some extra income and it seems like everyone is always asking where I got this or that, and I share with them: It’s Princess House. Maybe I could give this a try and earn some extra money.”

What started off as products exclusively sold through home parties, grew to include one-on-one selling, catalogue selling, and online sales. The hosted party model involves a sales Consultant working with a hostess who throws a party (usually at her house) with her friends. A party attendee might watch a cooking demo or experiment with a healthy recipe at a Princess House healthy cooking demonstration. Hosted parties are the hallmark of the direct selling industry, which includes companies such as Avon, Amway, Mary Kay, and many others. The industry in the U.S. is nearly \$35 billion in size, and involves 18.6 million people. ([Source: Direct Selling Association 2018 Growth & Outlook Report: U. S. Direct Selling in 2017](#)).

CONNIE’S BACKGROUND

Before her days as President and CEO of Princess House, Connie came to the United States from Hong Kong with her parents when she was a young child. The family spoke no English and had very little money. They ultimately settled into an urban, low-income neighborhood in the Lower East Side of New York City.” We were the only Asian family on the block. People were often downstairs hovered over a metal drum with a trash fire to keep their hands warm. That was our neighborhood,” Connie recalled.

At the age of two Connie started learning to speak Spanish with the help of her neighbor and babysitter. Connie was proud of her mastery of a new language, but continued to struggle with adapting to Western culture including the homework in English. Her teachers recognized Connie’s strong work ethic, and became not only teachers but also mentors. Connie elaborated:





I was eight years-old, and really struggling with a book report. I couldn't go to my parents who didn't speak the language, yet I knew I had to improve my English academics somehow. So I went to one of my teachers. She was the first person who told me I could do something...that I could achieve something. She bestowed a lot of recognition on me and believed in me. This was a new and amazing feeling. I wanted her to be proud of me. That pushed me. It made me goal-oriented.

Connie emerged as a language virtuoso. She spoke English in school, Cantonese at home and Spanish in her neighborhood. With a new elevated level of confidence, Connie sought out new experiences. She had a passion for music and performing. However, after she practiced, auditioned, and was accepted by a performing arts high school, her parents rejected the idea. It wasn't practical. Connie then mentally prepared herself to take the placement test for a very competitive specialized science and math public school known for its academic

rigor. She was accepted, and learned key lessons which would serve her later in her career:

Math and science weren't genuine interests of mine to start out, but I grew to relish the experience at this specialized school. I was academically challenged, and still able to feed my passion for music through participation in choirs and musicals. It taught me a great deal about the practice of discipline and being results-driven.

CONNIE'S DEFINING MOMENT

Years later in one of her first jobs during college, Connie's leadership skill set continued to develop in a surprising way. She was 20 years old, living in Brooklyn, and working as a translator for an orthopedic surgeon in Chinatown. While on the D train from Brooklyn heading to work early on a Saturday morning, she took notice of a man who got on the train and sat down next to the girl across from her.

I noticed that his hand, which was on his lap, started to move over closer to her leg. She



was napping. As we were bumping along, I knew what he was going to do. And at that moment, I felt so afraid. It wasn't happening to me, but I was shaking. Even today after all these years, I feel my heart coming back up in my throat when I recall that experience. I leaned forward and I said, "Don't you dare touch her! I know what you want to do!" Everybody stopped, and they looked. He recoiled and said, "Oh no no no, I wasn't..." The girl woke up and moved over. He got up, and got off at the next stop. I can tell you that for me, it was a defining moment. If I didn't say something at that moment, I would have regretted it. If I had done nothing, I believe I would be a different person today.

The experience was a turning point for Connie. She learned to harness fear from that moment on. She learned that doing nothing is a decision, and now encourages others, "You are stronger than you think, and you often don't know it in that moment. You don't realize it until later."

CONNIE AS A LEADER

The ability to take action, and move through fear, became a skill Connie employed throughout her career to avoid the "Nice Girl Trap." Connie described this as the fear of making a poor decision, making a mistake, "getting in trouble," or not being "nice or liked." Prior to her role as President and CEO of Princess House, Connie often had to make tough decisions. She recounted one of them:

I was in Taiwan, in my apartment at 3 a.m. for a budget variance review meeting. The decision was made by headquarters to streamline and reduce operating expenses to buffer the US business shortfall. It was very difficult. I was by myself. I was the only American employee there. For me there was a lot of emotional stress. But the next morning, I got up and was ready to work. There's no wallowing. You know what it is? It's because my parents had no pity for any of us in tough situations. It was expected that we, "Get up and do something about it." I needed to sit down with my finance person, look at payroll and organizational charts, and do the math. My task: State what I needed to accomplish, and discuss scenarios. And that is difficult when you're talking about people's lives. You have to be human too and do what is right for the business in the most compassionate manner. It's the hard discipline of doing things even when you don't want to ...It's the same process that applies to any other situation.

Connie's discipline and work ethic had served her well, but she often wondered about the impact on



other areas of her life. She thought a great deal about being there for her daughter. She described one of her biggest fears as follows: "I don't want to wake up one day and hear my daughter say, 'You were never there for me. You were always gone.' " Connie wondered what to do today to make sure that didn't happen. Connie's husband of 26 years has been a true partner in their home life. Additionally, she felt very lucky to have the ability to work bi-coastally, splitting her time between her family on the West Coast and Princess House in Massachusetts (see Appendix 5).

PRINCESS HOUSE AND TAKING ON THE NEXT CHALLENGE

As Connie's plane for Houston took flight, she looked back on her pattern of taking on challenges. In 2012, when she took over Princess House as the first female CEO, Connie was tasked with leading a brand and corporate revitalization (see Appendix 6). The company was almost 50 years old at the time. The objective was to transform the brand while honoring the heritage of Princess House. "The company had to attract new

business and lay the foundation for future growth," Connie explained. The focus ranged from brand strategy (company logo, iconography, and image), to product diversification, operational excellence and technological transformation.

An additional challenge was presented by the industry itself. "When you're in the durable goods industry, sustainability can be a challenge if you don't have a customer and sales force development strategy," Connie explained. "There's no typical reorder cycle like with vitamins or toothpaste. However, growth can still be achieved with focus, goal clarity, and—of course—excellent execution." With the help of more than 25,000 sales Consultants and a committed and talented team of employees, Princess House celebrated seven consecutive years of growth in 2017.

Would that growth be impacted by the devastation in Houston? What would be the plan for supporting their team both personally and professionally? Connie opened her laptop and began to map out some ideas.



APPENDIX 1

PRINCESS HOUSE TEAM MEETING NOTES: HOUSTON AND HURRICANE HARVEY

1. SALES TEAM:

- Identify consultants in impacted zip codes/declared natural disaster zones
- Outreach to top field leaders with teams in Houston
- Check-ins; safe and accounted for
- Pull business reports by individual consultant. (Important because many consultants are working towards achieving something).
 - a) How does business interruption affect their qualification for achieving the incentive trip to Alaska next year, earning their quarterly bonuses, etc.?
- Start putting together post-hurricane recovery plans
 - b) Support, tools, business aids needed for leaders and consultants
 - c) Meetings/corporate presence, Region Sales Manager support

2. COMMUNICATIONS TEAM:

- Message points to consultants, leaders and public
 - ♦ Public Facebook page
 - ♦ Consultants & organizers Facebook Page
 - ♦ Connie Facebook Live (2 separate, in English and Spanish) script, timing, logistics
 - ♦ Any messaging in Hot News? Consultant's Corner? Other?

3. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EFFORTS:

- Leadership to discuss, e.g., donation to American Red Cross? Call-out to employees to support?
- Marketing: Explore options to launch product offer with proceeds earmarked for relief efforts, etc.
- Connie: Reach out to ownership and their family foundation—opportunity to support or match our efforts?

4. HR: CONFIRM NO EMPLOYEE FAMILY IMPACT

APPENDIX 2

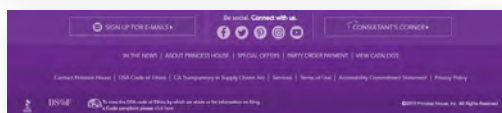
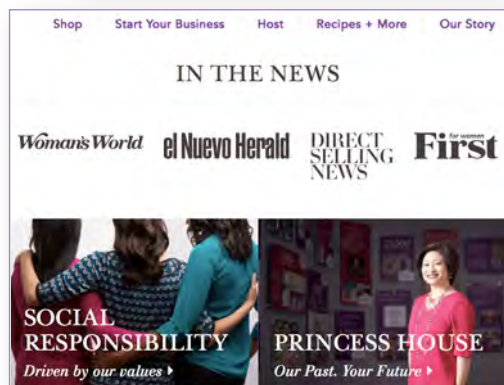
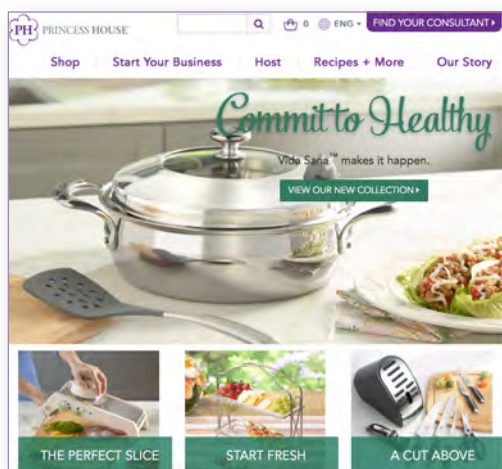
PRINCESS HOUSE WEBSITE SCREENSHOTS FROM PRINCESSHOUSE.COM + KEY FACTS

25,000+ Independent Consultants in US.

85% Latina salesforce, mix of part- and full-time

2012 Sales approaching **\$110 million**

2016 Sales approaching **\$180 million**



APPENDIX 3

PRINCESS HOUSE PURPOSE STATEMENT



APPENDIX 4

PRINCESS HOUSE CULTURE AND COMMUNITY



Pictured above: Connie's Challenge:
30,000 Consultant Goal



Pictured above: Princess House 55th
Anniversary Incentive Trip to Alaska

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w5j7d25tGc>



Pictured above: Princess House 2016
National Conference in Las Vegas

APPENDIX 5

A WORKDAY IN THE LIFE OF CONNIE TANG (A BI-COASTAL WORK SET UP)

| EAST COAST (ACTUAL SAMPLE FROM AUGUST 30, 2017) | |
|---|--|
| 5:30 AM | Wake Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protein shake/vitamins • CNN • Check Email, alerts, Facebook notifications, etc. |
| 6:45 AM | Leave for Office |
| 7:20 AM | Arrive Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee • Start checking emails • Review last version of Board Presentation for duplication/mailing |
| 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM | Weekly one-on-one update and SMART Objectives Review w. Sales Strategy & Development VP |
| 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM | Review Facebook Live Messaging for Hurricane Harvey |
| 11:00 AM - 12:00 AM | Calls to Houston-area Top Leaders to check-in; quick snack at desk |
| 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM | Weekly one-on-one update and SMART Objectives Review w. IT/IS VP |
| 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM | Weekly one-on-one update and SMART Objectives Review w. Marketing Strategy & Solutions VP |
| 3:30 PM - 4:00 PM | Prep and set-up for Facebook Live event for Fearless Living Book |
| 4:15 PM - 4:45 PM | Facebook Live Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record Future Fearless Living Blog video |
| 4:45 PM - 5:15 PM | Facebook Live Event for Hurricane Harvey English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook Live Event for Hurricane Harvey Spanish |
| 5:15 PM - 6:30 PM | Continue Houston-area Top Leader calls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emails, reading Review Final Board Book Leave office approx. 6:40pm |
| 7:20 PM | Home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dinner • TV • Reading • Email (personal/business) • Social Media (personal/business) |
| 12:30 AM | Bed |

APPENDIX 5 (CONT.)

| WEST COAST (ACTUAL SAMPLE FROM AUGUST 9, 2017) | |
|--|--|
| 3:40 AM | Wake Up |
| 4:20 AM Home office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee • CNN on iPad • Start checking emails • Reading, Content curation/selection for PH Connects! • Unpack/set-up new microphone/equipment for Podcast Interview later |
| 6:00 AM - 7:00 AM | Weekly one-on-one update w. Finance VP |
| 7:00 AM - 8:00 AM | Technology Implementation Project Update Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT/IS • Sales • Marketing / Communications • Ops • Finance • Customer Satisfaction • HR |
| 8:00 AM | Breakfast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protein shake/vitamins • Coffee |
| 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM | Prep for Forbes/LeadX.org Interview & Podcast recording <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview questions/topics sent ahead of time • Background research for: interviewer, Kevin Kruse; his book, his Podcast/followers, past shows, past guests |
| 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM | Emails, Coffee, Water, Check-in with Assistant |
| 10:30 PM - 11:45 PM | Forbes/LeadX.org Interview & Podcast recording with Kevin Kruse |
| 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM | Late lunch at desk |
| 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM | Weekly one-on-one update w. Director of Human Resources |
| 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM | Emails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading, content curation for PH Connects! |
| 2:30 PM | Leave to pick-up daughter from school |
| 4:45 PM | Daughter to Kung Fu |
| 6:30 PM | Home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family time • Dinner • TV |
| 10:00 PM'ish | Bedtime |



APPENDIX 6

CONNIE TANG SELECTED PODCASTS AND PRESS

Women's PowerCircle Podcast with Connie Tang (50 minutes)

Lessons from a Mature Party Plan in Growth Mode

This podcast details the roadmap Connie used upon taking over at Princess House. The goal: To begin revitalizing the brand and place the company back on a growth trend.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/wmshj3qbk5fdhd/6054753215-910126-49.mp3?dl=0>

Q & A with Connie Tang, World of Direct Selling

<https://www.worldofdirectselling.com/exec-qa-connie-tang-princess-house/>

Interview with Connie Tang, President & CEO at Princess House, USA Weekly

<http://usaweekly.com/2018/01/interview-with-connie-tang-president-and-ceo-at-princess-house/>

Fearless Living Press

Around Connie's Book: *Fearless Living: 8 Life-Changing Values to Breakthrough Success*

<https://www.8fearlessvalues.com/in-the-press/>





info@dsef.org | www.dsef.org

Phone: (202) 452-8866

Fax: (202) 452-9015

1667 K Street NW, Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20006

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