



Meet Annette. She's the force behind Esteez; dressing women, addressing souls.

By: Gitty

I was at my desk listening to and transcribing this interview. The woman working near me had too much excitement to contain and blurted out, “OMG this one is going to be so amazing! She’s so perfect!” Upon my asking how she knew who the interviewee was, she simply said “her laugh is so genuine and easy, it could only be one person.” Indeed, that is the only suitable introduction for Annette. While she runs a successful business, a tightly wound entrepreneurial executive with an ego to match, is quite the opposite of what you get with Annette. What you get, in fact, is what you see. She’s the woman rocking ten different lipstick shades by the time lunch comes-and no, they’re not all varying hues of pink. She’s the one singing in the car with her husband, Dayhan, on the way to work on a rainy Monday morning. And, most defining of all, you haven’t heard joy until you’ve heard Annette laugh. It’s the most cheerful, eye crinkling, soul warming laugh-just a big warm hug. Like Annette. To have a conversation with her is to gain infinite wisdom sprinkled with humor and unbridled, unchecked reality. Sure, she dresses women but Annette addresses souls.

Who is Annette the woman and the woman behind the brand?

“It’s a loaded question but I have a very simple answer; I’m a wife, mother, sister, friend and #girlboss. That sums up everything. As far as the Esteez brand, I’m the president of Esteez Canada, while my husband is the president of Esteez USA. Everything you see happening in the front lines, that’s me. So... what do I do? What do I not do?! I handle social media, advertising, marketing, designing, oversee customer service...”

Can you tell us what it was like growing up? Did you always aspire to be in the fashion industry?



“I really had no fashion dreams, but I did grow up surrounded by entrepreneurs. My parents emigrated to Canada from Israel with my brothers and I when I was three years old. My parents had no money, very little education and no plan. After working random jobs to make ends meet, my dad decided to open one of the first kosher restaurants in Montreal. While it was a success, the work involved was too intense and so they closed their shop and went on to open the only Kenwood service center in North America. That’s where I get my entrepreneurial spirit from. My brothers have always been in the fashion industry, so, I was surrounded by fashion and entrepreneurs my entire life and that definitely molded me into who I am now. I never had aspirations to be in the fashion industry, I just wanted to be a lawyer. I think I would make a really good one in theory, but in reality, I don’t have the heart for it.”

How did you come up with the concept for your brand?

“Dayhan and I decided to go into business because for me, it was a challenge to find modest affordable clothing; being that I have 4 daughters, I have to clothe a lot of people! I was in New York for a wedding and was trying to find a shell to put under a dress. I had to go into a bunch of stores to find the right color and fit. When I finally found the right one, I walked out saying ‘I got the best deal ever’ and when I told Dayhan how much I paid for the shell, he nearly fell off his chair. I was so proud and he’s like ‘you’re talking about t-shirts?! You paid what?! That’s a good deal?! Well, you know the fashion business you always talk about? It’s time to go into it.’ When we opened our brand, we were only selling shells. We were just a shell company (I’ve confirmed that the pun is indeed intended). That was five years ago and since then, opportunities arose allowing us to expand into where we are today.”

Your clothes are so ubiquitous-how do you manage to make everyone look good?

“You’re going to laugh but this is the actual process. I look in my closet and try to see what I’m lacking. Because I can’t draw to save my life, Dayhan and I put our heads together to design something our team will understand. Then, we bring it up at our next production meeting and my team puts something together. It’s a back and forth until I approve each and every piece.”

Was there a specific moment that everything clicked for you?

“Not really, it was all gradual. It started with shells and we had a very positive reaction from the consumer, so we just ran with it. People always say, ‘you’re so inspirational’ and it’s funny because it’s a boomerang-whatever I get from the consumer, I’m giving back. Many times, companies will get a negative DM or email, and they’ll feed off it whereas I will focus on feeding off the positivity. You have to remember that if you’re getting one negative comment, it’s one out of thousands of positive ones. Also, I rarely get any negativity from people, but if/when I do, I feel that I can always learn from it. Constructive criticism is what helps people grow. It’s about getting past the personal and figuring out the root of the comment.”

Why is your brand called Esteez and how many times a day do you get called “Estee”?

“Oh, EVERYBODY calls me Estee! It doesn’t annoy me because it’s totally understandable. It’s actually a play on words because when we started, we were just selling tee-shirts and I have a daughter Estee, so it just made sense. My other kids are totally cool with it, they don’t care-that’s the truth but, we actually just started naming some dresses using our daughters’ names. We based the styles off of what we thought they’d like, for example, the Tammee dress and the Judy dress.”

What’s your favorite/least favorite part of the job?

“Social media is my fave! Especially the customer interactions-there’s nothing I love more. I love talking to people and hearing from them, I sometimes find that I’ve turned into a psychiatrist as I get many women asking me for advice, or some just want to vent about their lives. I am a people person so I welcome it with love. Least favorite part... taxes and accounting! But Dayhan has taken that over so I’m a very happy camper now.”

Do you think social media plays a role in your success? What’s your overall opinion of social media?

“I think social media definitely plays a role. It’s given business owners the opportunity to connect directly with our customers. Growing up, if I wanted to connect with a company, I wouldn’t be



able to. I think the fact that we can now communicate one on one with our consumer, that's huge because I hear directly what they want and what they don't. With marketing as well, you used to hope you got ranked high on Google. Now, if I want to show everyone what I'm launching tomorrow, well, here it is!"

"As far as my opinion on social media... I think every positive comes with a negative and you have to be sure to focus on the positive. People always ask if my kids are allowed on social media. My older kids are because we've educated them on what's good and what's not and the little ones are not really on social media besides for being featured on my stories- which is something I can control completely. I definitely think the positives outweigh the negatives."

What is your life like when you're not on camera?

"It's basically the same! There are certain things I don't share unless I could help someone by doing so. And it's funny that

you're asking this question because a lot of times when I'll meet Instagram people, they'll say, 'Oh my Gd, you guys are exactly the same on camera!' And I'll reply 'yeah, I don't have an act.' Even in real life, what you see is what you get. For instance, a friend will ask me, 'are you mad at me?' and my answer will always be the same: 'if I was mad at you, you would know.' I totally wear my heart on my sleeve."

You've established yourself as not just a brand, but a woman who is relatable and real. Can you tell us more about that?

"I think that just like everyone else, I'm a simple girl working to make a living and trying to enjoy life at the same time. One of the things that gets me through the day is remembering that life could always be worse. So, I thank Hashem (Gd) every day for what I have and for what I don't have. Being relatable is easy when life is not all about buying Prada purses and Louis Vuitton bags every day."

Do you find that it's done you a disservice, being so real in a world where it's so common for people to have some sort of act they're playing?

"I do pick up the catty vibe within our world of entrepreneurs, but I stay as far away from that as I can. Not too long ago, I put together a giveaway to include all the fashion companies-my competitors! I figured that if we could get together as a group and show the world love and unity, maybe we could change the cattiness. We were 18 businesses who have the same target market and

we all shouted each other out in this giveaway. It was a beautiful, empowering thing because the perception is that it's dog eat dog but we're saying, 'no, we're not about that. There's enough business for everyone.' When I was working with all these women, I shared with them one of the things I truly believe in. Every woman has a wardrobe yet there's not one woman that's going to have only one brand. So, my job is to make sure that my brand is represented and sitting side by side with yours. Y'know what, no one wants to buy just one brand! I don't feel fear. If a business calls us for advice, we'll give it candidly because I believe that Gd takes care of everyone and there's enough business to go around."

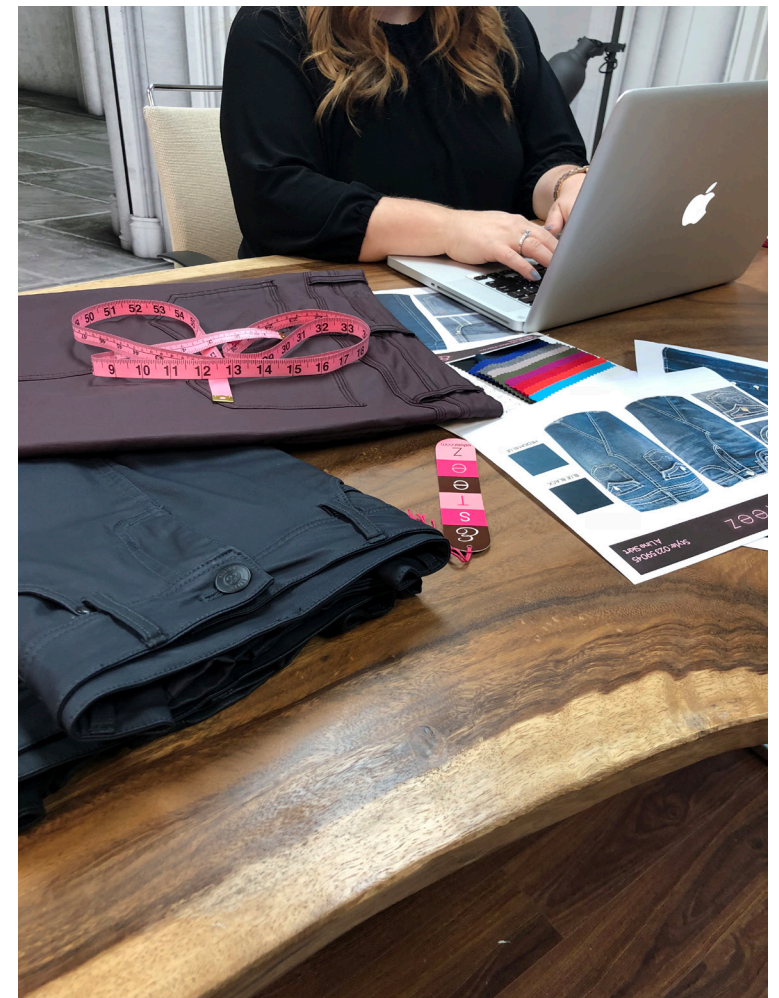
You work with your husband. Any advice on how to keep your marriage healthy as well as the business?

"I get this question all the time. To keep a marriage healthy, I could talk about that for a hundred years but in short, I'll say this-communication is key. Being understanding of each other, love and respect each other. Those four are the most important things for a relationship, in my opinion. If you communicate properly, there are no issues because if you're angry about something, you discuss it and move forward. Understanding. You're not the same person, you're two different people with two different mindsets so if you can just understand each other and sometimes agree to disagree, you're good. And respect and love, obviously. Put your spouse on a golden pedestal!"

"And then to keep the business healthy. So, we divide our business tasks according to our strengths. For example, his strength is production, logistics, finances and all that. My strength is advertising, marketing, design... So as long as I do my job and he does his job, it works. The most important thing if you're working with a spouse is to remember that in the office, you're business partners and the minute you walk out, you're spouses again. Don't bring your home to work. We knew we were in this for the long haul so we established these guidelines and it's become natural."

What's your family like?

"As Dayhan likes to say, follow us on Instagram to find out! We are a fun-loving, crazy bunch. There is something actually very important to us, I know some families can't do it but at the very beginning of our marriage, it was something we decided on: every single day, we are going to have dinner as a family and talk about our day. Some of us whine, some of us wine and dine. We're a



very close-knit family and we make an effort to always stay happy. Sunday is family day-a certain part of the day is reserved for quality time whether it is for shopping as a family or visiting savta (grandmother).”

How do you keep your life under control between kids, housework and business?

“I have a friend who once told me that she truly believes I have 36 hours in the day! Firstly, it’s time management. I’m very good at that and I will get things done in the time I allot myself. Also, I have a lot of help. I’m not referring to paid help, but my kids are older and my husband is very hands on. Without the effort of each family member, life would be pretty tough. Dayhan makes dinner every night-not because he’s pressured to do it, but because he actually enjoys it and kicks me out of ‘his’ kitchen. One of the main concerns for women, is going to work and then thinking about dinner and general housework but thank Gd I don’t have that concern. As a matter of fact, when someone asks my husband if he doesn’t mind cooking, his answer is always the same: ‘my wife works, so cooking is both our responsibilities.’ Most people are in a situation where they need two incomes to pay the bills and I think that if both spouses work, they should share the household responsibilities. Also, as I mentioned earlier, my kids aren’t toddlers anymore. Every night we have ‘dishes duty’. The kids clear off the table as a team, and each night a different child is responsible for dishes. They don’t love it, but they get it done. If I want to raise children who are going to have families, they can’t suddenly start learning responsibility when they get married. Generally speaking, I have fantastic kids and I thank Gd every day for that.”



Is there a message you’d like to leave us with?

“Yes! It’s short but this is my motto in life: Stay humble, stay original and stay real.”

How many lipsticks do you have?

In the 70’s

Favorite place to visit?

Miami beach

Which movie made you cry?

I’m really not a movie girl-the last movie I watched was probably Forrest Gump

If there was one person you could get coffee with (alive, dead or fictional) who would it be and why?

Larry David, the creator of Seinfeld. He’s crazy, funny and OCD like me. If I get a coffee with him where our cars are parked perfectly, none of us are late and we got our coffee and put them on the table exactly where they go... That would be perfect.

Which song is currently on repeat?

Shir Lama’lot by Alon de Loco and Itzik Orlev. It’s on our Spotify list and it’s on REPEAT.

Cocktail order?

Pina Colada

Do you have any hidden talents?

I just discovered at my last paint night with the girls that this girl can paint!

What is a pet peeve of yours?

Oy. Double parking, cutting in line, people who are late, gosh, so many. It just boils down to not being a mensch.

If you weren’t running Esteez you would be?

A real estate broker. I was one for 11 years and Dayhan swept me off my real estate feet.

If you were an article of clothing, you’d be?

Definitely a red dress. It would have to be a comfortable one that doesn’t look like it is.