

# Kaki, Inc.

## Managing a Supermodel/CEO Lifestyle

**I**N THE NEW MILLENNIUM, Kaki West has won half a dozen different beauty pageants and placed as a top runner-up in half a dozen more. The life of an international beauty queen would be busy and exciting enough, but Kaki is also a top model, aspiring actress, and the owner/CEO of the Miss Model USA Pageant.

With a mother and grandmother who were both models for the prestigious Ford Agency, Kaki's modeling career is clearly a case of designer genes. But she obviously inherited brains, ambition, and drive as well. Her father, Francis J. "Bing" West, was a Marine Corps infantry officer in Vietnam and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Reagan Administration. A former Woodrow Wilson Fellow at Princeton and a "true warrior-scholar" with several award-winning books, the elder West is now president of a firm that designs combat decision-making simulations.

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BY ERIK JAY



Kaki points to her “really hard-working Irish” heritage as being formative for her. “My grandfather was fully self-made,” she says, “and put himself through Harvard Medical School working as a movie usher.” Kaki recalls that her grandfather was quite fond of Thomas Edison’s observation that “genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration,” and is understandably proud that her father, who “didn’t get a cent from my grandfather,” is also a self-made man who worked his way through college.

#### EDUCATION WAS “NUMBER ONE”

“My mother had a little more of a debutante life than my father,” Kaki recalls, “but for both of them,

education was number one.” Growing up in New England, she was aware from an early age that “education and class go hand in hand,” and all of the West children (she’s the “baby of four”) had solid educations. For Kaki it meant Sacred Heart in Greenwich, Canterbury School in New Milford, and Vermont Academy, “one of the best boarding schools anywhere.”

Kaki admits to having been “a little bit wild” while at “heavily Catholic” Canterbury, but she matured quickly when she started modeling professionally in the mid-1990s, at age 14. From that point, life has been a big, bold blur on fast-forward: She graduated with honors from Vermont Academy, continued her modeling and acting career and an intense training regimen after moving to California, and got her degree in theater (with a minor in political science,



for dad) from Whittier College.

Whittier College, President Richard Nixon’s alma mater, was a good choice for a girl on the go, since “as a freshman you could get involved in theater,” as opposed to the programs at USC or Columbia where real participation didn’t begin until one’s junior year. Collegiate carousing left Kaki cold; “I’d already lived a full life by the time I entered college,” she says, so it was easy for her to focus on work. After graduation, she went on to win some top-line pageants and place in others; traveled the world from New York to Tokyo to Istanbul and back; “modeled full-time

and traveled some more”; and eventually returned to California to put down some roots.

#### FROM PAGEANT WINNER TO OWNER

“After winning the Miss Model USA Pageant,” recalls Kaki, “I decided to buy it, revamp it, and do it all over again, so that’s been my newest project.” The first pageant in June “was a big success,” and the second promises even greater things in June 2007. Kaki and her pageant staff are also “shopping it to be a reality-TV show” called “Who Wants to Be America’s Next Beauty Queen?” Clearly, Kaki says of her pageant firm, “We have a lot on the table.”

Just how does someone who’s a self-contained business conglomerate manage her life, her homes, her businesses? At her home in Beverly Hills, where she’s lived “going on

four years,” it’s “people in and out” all the time. “I have two personal assistants,” Kaki confides, “who help run my life as a model and actress, and one who just helps in the pageant aspect—besides having a full staff for the Miss Model USA Pageant.”

Business managers, financial advisors, corporate and personal attorneys, tax preparers, fashion consultants, makeup artists, clothiers, hairdressers, webmasters—Kaki, Inc.’s many diverse, disparate enterprises need a lot of good people to keep it “perking along,” as Kaki admits. With a quiet wisdom far beyond her years, this entrepreneurial powerhouse knows that people are the greatest resource of any business, and that character and integrity are what make those resources valuable.

#### BOOK SMART AND “STREET SMART”

“Intelligence would be number one” among the qualities that Kaki looks for in support personnel, whether personal or corporate. “I also look for people who aren’t just book smart,” she adds quickly, “but street smart, [people] who have their fingers on the pulse of things.

### “Kaki is clearly a beneficiary of designer genes.”

Plus honest, of course.” Finally, “especially for people who will work just for me,” Kaki has two additional requirements: “I look for loyalty and friendship.”

With a brother working for Goldman-Sachs, her legal and financial advisors are vetted veterans at the top of their respective fields, “Harvard and Stanford grads” for the most part. “And I only trust people out of New York City, to be honest,” Kaki remarks, “although I do have lawyers out of Beverly Hills who do my taxes and my Miss Model USA Pageant.”

Kaki is traveling to London in November for a two-week photo shoot, then it’s “back in December to Manhattan” for holidays with the

family. But Kaki won’t waste one moment worrying about her home in Beverly Hills while she’s away. “I’ve had the same housekeeper for the four years that I’ve lived in Beverly Hills,” says Kaki. “She does everything and is like a second mom to me.”

Like many CEOs, celebrities, and Forbes list folks, Kaki has a life that cannot be lived without a lot of support, and without entrusting areas of her proliferating public and private lives to others. She realizes that discernment and sensitivity are crucial to decisions about

who those people should be. Kaki’s success speaks volumes about the people she picks, the person she is, and the ever-brighter future shining down on her ever-broader horizons. ■

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