

the promotion people.ca

Lesley Diana heads the publicity firm The Promotion People. The renowned firm located in Vancouver provides unique boutique-style services, primarily in North America. Lesley Diana is a friendly, hardworking individual whose roots go back to Saskatchewan, where she spent part of her life as a teacher. Her outgoing personality and likeability took her to television, where she herself hosted a number of shows. Eventually, she ended up in the publicity business where she represents the celebrities of the present and future. Emmanuelle Vaugier, she fondly remembers, was her first client, and is still with her today- now that she represents over 150 individuals and numerous entertainment projects. She is also the facilitator for the Vancouver International Film Festival and the Canadian Country Music Awards.

Interview by Hank Leis

You have your Bachelor of Education degree, so presumably your plans were to become a teacher. What made you decide to leave this very safe job and environment into what appears to be a much more competitive and potentially precarious one?

Growing up I wanted to be a teacher and got my first teaching job at 19 while finishing my Bachelor of Education. I loved teaching physical education, which led to an audition for a fitness and talk show on CTV in Saskatoon; that's when the entrepreneur in me emerged. I took a gamble and it paid off. The television show ran for eleven years, during that time I opened a fitness studio with spa facilities, wrote a fitness book and opened four fashion boutiques. I took advantage of the opportunities that the television show gave me, which would have never been possible if I had stayed teaching.

You have been or currently are a reporter, writer, a television producer/host, the President of a fitness studio and in Media Relations. How were you able to transit from one to the other and how did your career path evolve?

So many of the opportunities just happened! Others happened because I had the courage to ask. Being in the right place at the right time and/or knowing the right person also opened doors for me. Once the door was opened I was committed to doing the best job that I could. It wasn't about the money. I really enjoyed the new experiences. I did have set backs along the way but I tried to use those times to reflect and learn. I found it was important not to be hard on myself. I got into publicity by accident. My fashion boutiques, Lesley's, received significant press from which I

created into press kits and distributed. Almost immediately international fashion designers and shopping centers contacted me and became my first clients. A close friend then recommended me to a movie director in need of a publicist. His movie *Stag* launched my new career as a publicist in the entertainment industry.

It takes a great deal of courage to be able to move from one career to another. Could you tell us about your personal resolve to move on and decide on your next big challenge?

It does take courage, passion, desire and belief in yourself. I must say that I have been blessed with many good ideas and took the opportunity to make them happen. I started with very little money but thankfully I had the inspiration for the entrepreneurial ventures. I have had such excitement with my various career paths. Having joy for what I do and being able to help people is a driving force.

You provide publicity for feature films, television series, and documentaries and as well you are a publicist for actors, talent agencies and talk show hosts. When taking on a client, what do you look for and what are you expected to do? In other words, describe your business.

I have been fortunate that most clients have come to me by word of mouth. When actors approach me I familiarize myself with their body of work and upcoming productions. I don't take a client if the timing isn't right in their career, as I don't want to waste their money. Film and television clients hire me when they are in production and again when the movie or television series is being released. As publicists we are the connection between the press and



Lesley Diana

production to inform and encourage the public to go the movie or watch the tv series that we are promoting. Actors need publicity to advance their careers. We are an important part of the process. Social media and online publications have opened so many new outlets so we are continually researching new venues to spread the word. It is a win-win situation. The press needs stories and our clients need their stories to be told.

The entertainment business allows you to access often very accomplished and well known people. What are you able to do for them? What are the challenges in this regard?

My job is to get their story out to the public and in turn put people in seats and viewers watching their television series. For our actor clients our goal is to create interest from producers, directors, and the public in their performances. Each client is unique which makes my job even more interesting. I meet such fascinating people that I would have never been able to meet if I weren't a publicist. It is my pleasure to tell their story and brag about them, which is much easier coming from someone else. Canadian actors also need to compile press clippings to work in the USA which is another reason clients need The Promotion People.

What are the greatest lessons you've learned from these individuals and who comes to mind as being interesting? My job is full of surprises! I get to work with people of all ages and productions from all genres from horror to reality to comedy to drama. You soon learn how to treat each individual client. Many I have worked with on and off for 15 years, others for a specific project. My client Nicole Oliver is a talented actor and does voice over for cartoons and commercials and now I get to see her son William Ainscough star in a movie with Donald Sutherland at 12 years old. I have been working on the television series *Highway Thru Hell* for four years. I am still amazed at Jamie Davis and his towing crew when I see them rescue semi trailers off the road in all kinds of winter weather.



Nicole Oliver

I have had the privilege of observing the career of award winning writer/director/actor/coach Ben Ratner since 2000. I had so much fun working with Cameron Mathison on *Game of Homes* and now to see him as the co-host on *Entertainment Tonight Weekend* is a thrill. Clients have become dear friends such as Gabrielle Miller of *Corner Gas*. Over the years I have watched so many clients succeed which is extremely satisfying. The lesson I have learned is that what I do does make a difference.

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Do you find that spending so much of your time with so many people the demands sometimes become overwhelming? What do you do for quiet time?

Although my work is very demanding I enjoy all the people that I work with and the work that I do. I get just as excited as my clients do when we get good press results and that energizes me to do more. I get quite animated when the interviews come in. I have always enjoyed being physically active which pays off. I know how much better I feel when I participate in a fitness class or go for a long walk. I relax by watching the television shows and movies I promote which is an added benefit.

What questions do you ask your clients to serve their wants and needs?

Each client is individual. I ask my clients questions to find out what they would like to accomplish through publicity then do my best to make it happen.

What are the most exciting projects you have been engaged in?

Early on in my career one day I got to interview Rodney Dangerfield (*Caddyshack*, *Meet Wally Sparks*) on Seymour Mountain, then off to the Sutton Hotel to interview Jerry Stiller (*Seinfeld*, *The King of Queens*) then to a tennis club to interview Andrew Dice Clay (*Entourage*, *Blue Jasmine*) for the My Five Wives Electronic Press Kit.



Emmanuelle Vaugier

Emmanuelle Vaugier (*Two and A Half Men*, *CSI: New York*, *Lost Girl*) and I have had many great times. We have worked together for over fifteen years. Emmanuelle was the first actor to ask me to be her personal publicist which opened the door to well over 150 actor clients since. Together we have done TIFF, film junkets in New York and had so much fun in Las Vegas that we actually wanted to tell everyone!

Last year, Bruce Springsteen inducted my client David Sancious of the original E Street Band into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I was there to see him receive his award with back stage passes, limo rides and all. I have also met Sting, Eric Clapton and Seal back stage at concerts as David has played keyboard for all of them and many more.

Every year I coordinate VIFF Red Carpets for Brightlight Pictures and Lighthouse Pictures with hosts from *ET Canada* and the best and brightest talent in the entertainment industry. It is very exciting seeing all the press and talent on the Red Carpet - it is most definitely the party that everyone wants to attend.



The Travel Guys have filmed over 200 television episodes. I traveled to London England, Newcastle, Hawaii and Kelowna with them as their publicist, which was an amazing experience. I am so blessed!

Where would you like to be in terms of your business five years from now?

I have worked two jobs most of my career. I am at the stage where I want to live a more balanced life. With all the experiences my career has offered I am fortunate to have many opportunities that I never would have had if I hadn't taken chances and had the belief in myself that I can make things happen. I also realize that at many times, both my family and health may have suffered. I have had four retail leases for over \$15,000 per month, 35 staff to pay and hundreds of thousand dollars in inventory so I know that bigger is not always better.

I am going to give myself some time and attention just like I do for all my clients! I get great satisfaction in seeing careers develop by getting them interviews, magazine covers, new roles and opportunities by working all hours to make this happen. I love what I do. I hope to spend more time on my spirituality, eating more nutritious food and adding variety to my work out routine through fitness classes, swimming and walks in nature. I am going to work smarter, not harder and take all the joy I have had helping others by taking a little more time for myself.

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