

Getting your foot in the door and on the runway



ISTOCK

► Toronto PR firm launches mentorship program for designers



Canadian public relations guru, John Mackay, founder of PR firm Mackay & Co., and his associate Joshua Norton, are fashion industry veterans who count Tiffany and Co. and Hermès among their clients.

As a way to give back to the community they love, the pair has launched an innovative mentorship program aimed at equipping up-and-coming designers with the communications skills necessary to make it in the fashion biz.

"Initially, we thought we'd do their PR for them free of charge," explains Mackay. "But then we thought, if they're going to build a business in Canada, they may never have the money to promote themselves effectively using agencies. They may have to do it themselves." And thus, the Mackay & Co. mentorship program was born.

Their first "student" is Chinese-born, Toronto-based womenswear designer Paris Li.

"They have helped me develop my marketing communications skills."

MACKAY & CO. STUDENT PARIS LI

"English is not my first language and sometimes I have found it difficult to express what I am trying to do in a business situation," says Li, adding that since beginning her mentorship with Mackay and Norton, her confidence has increased and she's more comfortable with buyers and the media.

"They have helped me develop my marketing communications skills, and also reinforced some things I knew but was not confident about," she explains.

Aside from helping designers develop communication skills with buyers, the press, retailers and banks, Mackay and Norton also work with them to execute unique public relations plans.

Mackay & Co. are currently searching for their second designer "student." For more information, go to mackayandco.com.

JOHN MACKAY'S TIPS

Top 5 tips for aspiring fashion designers:

1. Learn to be formal: You grew up in an informal world with texting, Facebook and other abbreviated communications. But business is business. Learn to write a great letter, an e-mail people will want to read, leave a great voicemail, etc. There are rules. Learn them.

2. Pick up a book on etiquette: Etiquette? That's the art of treating people well — and

politely. Doesn't matter how you live, what your style or how old you are, a little grace goes a long way.

3. Accuracy matters: When we get an e-mailed job letter or resumé with typos, we toss it. Take time to proof your communications.

4. Learn about me: "Me" being the company you're trying to get an interview or a job with. Think about the company you're applying to. Show them you really understand who they are and what they do.

5. Be relentless: Don't stop trying. Ever. If you want it with all your heart, you'll get it — or pretty darn close.



► John Mackay

● HEATHER BUCHAN

► Helping aspiring fashion designers get their start is the goal of John Mackay.

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