

See Yourself

An Interview with Tina Perry, President, OWN TV Network and OTT Streaming

EDITORS' NOTE Named President of OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network in 2019, Tina Perry oversees all operation and creative areas of the network, reporting to OWN Chairman and CEO Oprah Winfrey. Her leadership is a driving force behind the network's ongoing evolution to become the leading destination for Black audiences. She also oversees OWN's robust digital division including the network's TVE Everywhere product WatchOWN; award-winning website Oprah.com;



Tina Perry

flourishing podcast business; and OWN on d+, Discovery's direct-to-consumer streaming service. Perry was instrumental in OWN's successful launch into scripted programming with popular drama series Queen Sugar, Cherish the Day, Greenleaf, The Haves and the Have Nots, the Peabody Award-winning David Makes Man, The Kings of Napa, and All Rise as well as the annual holiday movies on OWN. She oversees the continuing success of the network's lineup of unscripted hits that includes, Love and Marriage: Huntsville, Ready to Love, Belle Collective, Family or Fiancé, Black Love, and Put A Ring On It, in addition to the Daytime Emmy-award winning Super Soul Sunday. She has also shepherded the creation of special OWN Spotlight programming that tackles important issues including Oprah's two-night town hall on racism in America, Where Do We Go From Here? and the premiers of Time of Essence and Rebuilding Black Wall Street. Perry is a champion of OWN's social good initiatives including OWN's award-winning, get-out-the-vote and registration campaign OWN Your Vote, OWN Your Health, and most recently OWN Your Shine, launched along with OWN's first-ever Juneteenth activation. She is a passionate advocate for the nuanced representation of Black women in media, spearheading OWN's collaboration with the ANA's SeeHer. Perry serves on the OWN Board of Directors, The Paley Center for Media's Los Angeles Board of Governors, the Television Academy Foundation's Board of Directors, the Board of Directors of The Friends of the Saban Community Clinic, the Board of the Hollywood Radio and Television Society (HRTS), and in 2021 was elected to the Board of Directors of Blucora. Perry was recognized with the Center for Communication's

Stanton Award in 2021, was named to Ebony magazine's Power 100 list, was honored at the Multichannel News Wonder Woman Awards in 2020, as one of the Cablefax 2020 Most Powerful Women "Wavemakers," and received the Women in Cable Telecommunication's LEA Award in 2019. Perry holds a JD degree from Harvard Law School, an MS degree in comparative social policy from the University of Oxford, and graduated with Honors from Stanford University.

Will you discuss the history of OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network and how you define OWN's mission?

As one of the only cable television networks named after a person, the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) was first launched on January 1, 2011 to celebrate life and to inspire and entertain viewers to live their best lives. It is a joint venture between Warner Bros. Discovery and Harpo Studios with Oprah as the CEO and north star of the business. The network has grown over the years to air original scripted and unscripted content, propel digital properties and podcasts, support several national social good campaigns, and showcase its content on MAX, WBD's direct-to consumer streaming service.

Today, OWN's brand promise to our viewers, African-American women between the ages of 25-54, is to "See Yourself." In support of

this promise, our mission is to provide authentic and accurate representations of Black women while entertaining and inspiring our audience.

What interested you in leading OWN and made you feel it was the right fit?

I first joined as part of the OWN Business and Legal Affairs (BALA) team. From there, I was promoted to lead the BALA team, given more responsibility, joined the OWN board and in January 2019, I was elevated to president of the network.

I was always interested in the entertainment business because of the impact it has on society and culture. Through storytelling, media can educate, encourage empathy, and expose people to new cultures, races, ethnicities, and sexual preferences all while entertaining an audience. So, when the opportunity presented itself to be part of a multi-platform media brand and work closely with Oprah Winfrey, a visionary, hyper-creative, and intentional leader with a sharp business acumen, I jumped at it.

As icing on the cake, the brand has an elasticity that allows for the production of specialized programming that focuses on timely social and/or cultural issues affecting Black women and important social good campaigns.

Will you highlight the network's ongoing evolution to become the leading destination for Black audiences?

Early on at the network we noticed there was a Black female demographic that was underserved in the cable television landscape. We identified this specific viewer because she

“Today, OWN’s brand promise to our viewers, African-American women between the ages of 25-54, is to ‘See Yourself.’ In support of this promise, our mission is to provide authentic and accurate representations of Black women while entertaining and inspiring our audience.”



OWN President Tina Perry speaks at the Television Critics Association Tour in Beverly Hills

was watching Black docuseries such as *Sweetie Pies*, *Iyanla*, and *Fix My Life* and coming in for this unscripted programming in large numbers. So, we decided to continue to develop and produce more of this programming, and she continued to show up.

In 2013, we entered an exclusive deal with Tyler Perry to produce, write, and direct scripted programming specifically for this target audience. Starting in 2016, we decided to super-serve this audience with rich premium scripted series like *Greenleaf*, *Queen Sugar*, *David Makes Man*, *Cherish The Day*, and *All Rise*. Right now, OWN is the #1 non-sports destination for Black viewers every Saturday night, thanks to our hit unscripted series *Love & Marriage: Huntsville*.

Will you provide an overview of OWN's robust digital division and where you see opportunities for growth in this area?

Our digital division consists of OWN on Max (WBD's direct to consumer business), the network's TVE Everywhere product (WatchOWN), a robust podcast business, the award-winning website Oprah.com, and a newsletter business. I'm very excited by the growth opportunity of OWN on Max. The ability to share our content directly to consumers provides incredible reach.

Also, over the last several years we launched two extremely successful social campaigns: OWN Your Vote, our non-partisan get out the vote campaign, and OWN Your Health, a multi-faceted campaign which aims

“I think Oprah and I both know there is only one way to run a successful business and that is with intention. When facing any key decision, the narrative of ‘what is our intention’ is something we both discuss.”

to bring awareness and resources to promote health and wellness among Black women. These campaigns each thrive via strong digital components and present many digital growth opportunities for the business, particularly as brands are excited to partner with us on these initiatives.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

My management style is highly democratic as I trust my team implicitly. I also encourage group feedback and have actively worked to foster an environment that supports innovation and transformation. As an executive, collaboration, empathy, self-awareness, and integrity are prime cornerstones and very important to me in my leadership role.

What has made the working relationship between you and Oprah work so well?

I think Oprah and I both know there is only one way to run a successful business and that is with intention. When facing any key decision, the narrative of “what is our intention” is something we both discuss. I think our relationship works well as we both believe in healthy debate, being malleable, and never forgetting that there is a clear delineation between understanding big picture and wallowing in the weeds.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

Absolutely. In entertainment, business-women have made enormous strides. Although the television industry is male dominated, we have seen tremendous women lead with aplomb and garner tremendous successes. I have been personally inspired by Debra Lee, Kathleen Finch, Dana Walden and then, of course, Oprah Winfrey.

One of the things I really admire is when women get behind other women and one of the most inspiring examples I personally witnessed was when Ava Duvernay was creating *Queen Sugar*. Right at the beginning, she made the decision to only hire women directors. That pledge ultimately led to the enlistment of 41 female directors and all the more impressive at the time, she was a relative newcomer to television herself having directed just one episode of *Scandal* before Oprah tapped her to lead *Queen Sugar*.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

I'd say first off, learn to be a good listener. Truly listening to others is a very specific skill, and it's something one must work at just like every other professional skill. I'm not saying everything one hears should be taken for gospel. However, as a leader, it is imperative to be open-minded and to embrace others' opinions via active listening. Listening will ultimately help you advance in your career as you will be more informed and prepared for key decision-making. I believe firmly that this skill will benefit one's personal life as well, and a well-rounded work/personal balance is truly quite important. ●