

Building Brands

An Interview with Twila True, Co-Founder, True Family Enterprises

EDITORS' NOTE Twila True is also the Co-Founder, Chief Executive Officer, and President of True Investments, LLC, which she co-founded with her husband, Alan True. She is responsible for the firm's overall strategy, finances, operations, and culture, with a focus on growing assets under management and scaling processes. Together with her husband, True managed True Innovations, a multinational consumer products licensing and manufacturing business based in



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Asia that employed more than 4,000 people. Prior to scaling the True Innovations business, she was Chief Executive Officer of Synthane Taylor, a circuit board manufacturer with 300 employees. For the past 15 years, True has assembled an extensive private portfolio of real estate in multiple asset classes throughout Asia and North America. True Investment Partners, LP was the first venture that she led

that deployed an outside investor's capital. This real estate private equity fund is executing its business plan and is investing in single family residential rentals in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. In addition to being a disciplined corporate leader, True is a dedicated philanthropist. She and her husband co-founded True Children's Home in 2006. The charity's mission is to save orphaned children's lives, fund corrective surgery, provide post-surgical care,

place children with foster families, and facilitate adoption. True Children's Home merged with Love Without Boundaries in 2011. True also founded the True Sioux Hope Foundation, which provides resources to the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation, which is the poorest reservation in the United States, and the reservation that she is a member of.

FIRM BRIEF True Family Enterprises (truefamilyenterprises.com) is a privately held investment firm developed to create and manage its own companies. With more than 50 companies in its portfolio, several of the core businesses include: TrueLane Homes, a real estate investment firm, which owns and operates more than 300 single family rental homes across the U.S., providing quality affordable rental housing for working class tenants; Twila True Fine Jewelry, based in Newport Beach, California, which offers fine jewelry, bridal, watches, and accessories and whose new store was recently opened in Las Vegas at Resorts World; and a full-service brand incubator and global retail and e-commerce marketplace for trendsetting indie brands, Twila True Collaborations, which develops, manufactures, and launches the latest trending beauty and consumer products to meet the needs of today.

You are involved in a number of businesses. Will you highlight your work and do you look at the different areas that you are involved in as interrelated?

We're a family office, operating different verticals and investing in companies in niche markets to disrupt the white space. I have experienced that the growth of an asset often arises when different areas are interrelated. Real Estate – single family residential homes – is a consistent asset class that does well in its own silo.

Our Entertainment Brands – licensing consumer goods products through content integration, distributed directly to consumers and in retail locations, keeps me on my toes as the buying trends are ever-evolving.

Entertainment Complexes is our fastest growing global vertical including Volume recording studios, publishing with up-and-coming artists in the top 25; and a music school, founded by Grammy Award winners James Fauntleroy and Larrance Dopson – 1500 Sound Academy – takes a unique and disruptive approach to world-class music education.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own businesses?

I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to build my own businesses. I really didn't know what career path I wanted at the beginning – I just wanted to not be poor. I didn't want to have to marry for my financial security, and I wanted to be independent. It

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seemed to me that if I could read a financial statement, understand what I was doing and how it affected the profitability of a company, I could build my own empire.

Do you feel that entrepreneurship can be taught or is it a skill and ability that a person is born with?

I feel that entrepreneurship can be taught to those who have a passion in starting their own businesses – those who are born with the ability to start on their own if they surround themselves with the right leaders who are honest and work just as hard as they do. Regardless of your circumstances, if you work hard and believe, you will get the opportunities to succeed.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

The keys to effective leadership are being transparent and trusting in the team around you. Having an open line of communication with the ability to delegate tasks, and the authority required to successfully deliver the final product, is the secret to success.

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

Absolutely. The more diverse, the better the company with new ideas, different ways of thinking, and perspectives from a woman's viewpoint can impact the success of any company. It's not easy, and could seem like a constant uphill battle, but view failure as part of the journey. I failed enough times at something that I could have almost given up. Once you overcome those challenges, as a woman, you realize that your impact is larger than anyone could imagine.

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You often speak about the importance for young women to find role models and mentors in their careers. Did you have mentors early in your career and do you see it as a responsibility for women in leadership positions today to give their time and expertise to the next generation of women leaders?

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Where did your passion for philanthropy develop and what was your vision for creating the True Sioux Hope Foundation?

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You have built successful businesses and impacted many lives through your philanthropic work. Do you take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished or are you always looking at what is next?

I am fortunate to be someone with enormous influence. If I can inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to people, it is humility for those of us who supposedly 'made it' – kindness, not because of credit or recognition – just because you can.

A life lesson quote is my favorite Maya Angelou poem, "Phenomenal Woman." I read this consistently in my 20s. It helped me to understand my currency, my elegance. It gave me confidence, while understanding of the gift of humility – the grace and gentle strength of a woman. ●