



Cassandra Sethi Wants to Take Your Wardrobe to the Next Level

Her early success creating SoulCycle and Equinox's retail businesses proved that she understood what consumers wanted. So when she decided to pivot to personal styling, she quickly identified what clients needed: a service that would help successful professionals cultivate a sense of style that aligned with their values and systematized their wardrobes. Now the CEO of that business, Next Level Wardrobe, Cassandra shares the observations that allowed her

to re-imagine both brands' retail offerings, what it took to grow her client base, and her tips for building a closet that reflects who you are now.

Alicia Menendez: Cassandra Sethi has the incredible gift of knowing exactly what consumers want. That's a big part of her success creating SoulCycle and Equinox's retail businesses. Now she's using that gift to build her own business, Next Level Wardrobe, where she helps successful professionals cultivate a sense of style that aligns with their values and systematizes their wardrobes, so there's less guesswork and even fewer misses. Cassandra and I talk about how she made the pivot from merchandising to personal styling, how she learned to put a price on her time, and her advice for cultivating a wardrobe that reflects who you are now. Cassandra, thank you so much for being here.

Cassandra Sethi: Thank you for having me.

Menendez: Growing up in the Central Valley, did you know people like the type of people you now work with, meaning people who were entrepreneurs, who had big businesses, and were invested in their own image?

Sethi: No, absolutely not. No. My father owned his own business. He had his own automotive business. My mother was an elementary school teacher, and my great-grandmother immigrated from Mexico. So we were always small town folks. We would go to Target on the weekends, go hang out at the mall on the weekends. So no, I was not surrounded by the type of people I work with now.

Menendez: How did you even get the idea that what you do is a thing that people do?

Sethi: I always had a curiosity for life outside of the town that I grew up in. So I think that's one. Two, my parents always, always encouraged me to travel, to do these new experiences, to get out there and see the world outside of the town I grew up in. And I think that had a massive impact on where I am today as well.

Menendez: You go to college for fashion merchandising and you come out, and is the first job at Equinox?

Sethi: No. So I had an interesting path after college. I went to a community college in my hometown, because that's what we could afford and that's what scholarships paid for. So I went there for two years, then transferred to California State University at Long Beach. So I was there for two years, and then after, I decided, "I'm moving to London, I'm going to London and the UK," because I had visited there before, in high school, at the end of high

school, and I loved it. And I told myself, "After I graduate Long Beach, I am moving to London. I have no idea how I'm going to get there, but I'm going to make it happen." Went online, I bought some shady work visa. It must have been like \$65. I'm not kidding you. I have to go look it up to see if it exists. And I think I knew two people in London, and I went. I had no money. I was like, "What the hell am I going to do now?" And it worked out. So I started interning, met a lot of people. I did a postgraduate program at London College of Fashion, which is a part of Central Saint Martins, which is a very well known fashion, higher education facility.

And then after that I worked in John Lewis department store as a planning admin, and that is when my career really started. So I was in London for two and a half years. My visa was ending, and I wasn't high enough in my job to get sponsored. So then I had to make the decision to go back either to California to my hometown, or I was going to go to New York, and I decided to make that move. So I went to New York. Again, knew two people, had hardly any money, but I knew I was going to make it happen. And I ended up living in New York for 12 years. That is where I worked for Equinox, and I built SoulCycle's retail business too.

Menendez: Okay. When you say you built SoulCycle's retail business, pull back the curtain for us. What does that actually entail? What does that look like?

Sethi: Yes. So I was at Equinox as a planning assistant, and in that year, Equinox had just acquired SoulCycle. So they were always on the hunt for talent to go over to SoulCycle. I was approached to do it, and I was so nervous because I was an admin level and they wanted me to be a manager and basically create and run this whole new department that had massive potential. And I did it.

I remember my first meeting was with one of the founders of SoulCycle, and we walked into a studio, and I saw the clothing, and I just thought, "Gosh, there's so much potential, but this assortment is not good. It doesn't look good at all." And the light bulb went off in my head, and I'm like, "We have to do collections every month. We need new product every single month, because people are coming in so frequently, they want newness." So I presented it to the founder, to the team, and they were like, "Let's do it." And the business grew to multi-millions of dollars, and that is when you would see all the celebrities wearing SoulCycle leggings and t-shirts and hoodies and all the things. Yeah, it was a very, very fun time to be a part of that.

Menendez: You go from SoulCycle back to Equinox, what happens that lets you know that it is time to step out on your own?

Sethi: Yes, that was a very big decision. There had been a lot of changes going on internally at Equinox in the department I was in, but also in the fashion industry. I could see years ahead, and I felt at the time that my job did not have any growth potential. So in five years and 10 years, I actually thought my job would become obsolete. So I thought, "Okay, I need to be thinking of something else."

On the more personal side, I wanted to challenge myself more. I was ready for it, and that's ultimately one of the reasons that led me to start Next Level Wardrobe. I will be honest and say, I did not have the confidence then. If you would've asked me when I was a teenager, "Cassandra, will you ever own your own business?" I'd have been like, "What? No way. I will never do that. That seems so tough." Because I didn't have the confidence, I didn't believe in myself.

But all these kind of serendipitous moments happened that led me to finally quitting Equinox. And I had two clients, and that was it. And then I'm like, "It's so easy to get clients. I can do it on my own." I left and then I thought, "Oh, it's actually hard to get clients. It's really hard."

Menendez: How did you get those first two clients?

Sethi: What I did was I talked to my network, I talked to friends. My boyfriend at the time, now husband, we went to a friend's wedding, and he said, "You should actually explore styling. You're really good at putting outfits together." And so I would always encourage people to ask their friends or partners, "What do you think I'm good at?" Because sometimes you can't see it yourself. So simply asking that question I think will reveal a lot. So my boyfriend said that to me.

So when we went to the wedding, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to pitch my stylist service." I did not have a website. I did not know how to do an invoice, nothing. Okay, pitched the service, I got my first client. And he was a friend, but he paid full price. Then a few weeks later, I got another client who was a friend, and he paid full price. And so I thought, "Okay, this is a boost of confidence that I need to do it. I'm ready to do it. All the signs are pointing to me doing this now."

Menendez: And after those first two, once you realize it's hard, how do you build that client base?

Sethi: Oh yeah, okay. So that was the honeymoon phase. You get this rush and you're like, "Yes, I'm going to do it." As a business owner now looking back on that time, you have to be so highly resilient throughout this whole process, because there are going to be tough moments, like it was for me in the first one and a half years, where it was really hard for me to get clients. I will be honest about that.

I was asking friends, asking family, "Do you need styling service?" Anyone and everyone, I would ask, "What do you need help with styling?" I would sell my services for a fraction of what I sell them now, just because I needed that experience to get my foot in the door. I remember going on Yelp and cold emailing personal trainers because I thought personal trainers have access to people that are working on themselves and are hitting fitness goals, and they probably want to look good in their clothes too. So you just have to be very creative, very, very highly resilient in order to go through that. But as long as you're consistent, it will happen.

Menendez: I want to know what's on the mind of men. Just give me one little bit, what is a thing that comes up all the time?

Sethi: The thing I hear often from men is, "I do not want to look like I'm trying too hard." That is the number one thing I hear from men. "I don't want to be that guy that looks like he's trying too hard." I hardly hear that from women.

Menendez: What do you hear from women?

Sethi: From women, we hear more about specific body changes that have happened to them. Kids, moving, taking care of families, being these uber successful women that are traveling all the time. We hear more about their life and their day-to-day and specific body changes than men. I think our women naturally just open up to us more throughout the process, and especially when we're going through their closet, because it is a very personal experience. They reveal to us a lot in the closet edit, which I love because I feel like we have to forge that connection. They have to be open and honest with us in order for us to create a style that is authentic to them, because that is what great style is. They're wearing the stuff, we are not wearing the stuff at the end of the day, they are.

Menendez: Cassandra, how did you figure out how to price your services?

Sethi: Yes. Coming from a luxury background with Equinox and SoulCycle and other retailers I had worked with and other brands, I knew I wanted to be at a luxury price point. So we are at the higher end, probably one of the most expensive styling services out there, and it was a lot of trial and error as well. And so year one I charged very differently than what we charge now. And so it's a lot of testing, a lot of pivoting, a lot of being okay if it doesn't work out as well and saying, "Okay, I learned from this. How am I going to make changes and move forward?" So pricing is one of those things. I'm still testing it.

Menendez: Do people try to bargain with you?

Sethi: Not anymore, no. You know why? Because it goes back to confidence. And I say that because year one of my business, I was so nervous to sell my services at the price point that we were at. And with the confidence of building the business, of growing a team, of having over 70 5-star Google Business reviews online, I literally write down all these wins in my journal, and I look at them weekly, whenever I have those self-doubts, because I'm like, "This is my achievement list here. This is what's going to show me what to keep doing, what to keep going, and it motivates me," versus getting that inner critic in your head where you're like, "You can't do this, you can't do that." I shut that inner critic up and I read that list. I'm like, "No, I can do that actually, because look at the proof. I have the proof here."

Menendez: Cassandra, what are the biggest mistakes you watch people make when it comes to putting together an outfit?

Sethi: Number one mistake is people are so focused on the outfit, they're never focused on what's actually in their closet. And great style begins and ends with what is in your closet. So I always say, "Imagine yourself as a chef, and you are a chef that wants to cook a beautiful margherita pizza, and you walk to your kitchen, aka your closet, every day, and you have ingredients for a freaking Shake Shack burger in there. It is going to be impossible for you to put together that pizza." So you need to think about your closet in that way. Spend time in the closet editing the closet, being ruthless with what takes space in there as well, and making sure you are assessing gaps, buying the right items, and getting that foundation really, really strong in your closet, in order to put together outfits. But we find most people will go into the store, they will panic shop, so they'll be like, "Oh, I have an e-vite on my calendar." They rush to their closet, "I have nothing to wear." They run to the store, they buy something on a mannequin, or they panic buy because it's on sale or it's good enough. They get home and maybe they don't even wear it, they wear it once, and that's it, and it dies in their closet. So again, focusing on what's actually in your closet to begin with, will eliminate the panic buys, the over-packing, the feeling bored with your closet. It just funnels into your life in so many ways.

Menendez: Well, and also I think we live in a moment where that push for newness is very real, where people feel like every photo they take has to have a new outfit, that they're not allowed to repeat outfits. And I think we got to just reckon with that, period.

Sethi: Yes, I agree. I agree. And we do have that conversation with clients, because sometimes clients will be like, "Well, I have to wear a new outfit if I'm speaking, or if I'm doing a video or date night," or whatever it is. And I look at them, and I said, "Says who? Who says you have to wear a new outfit all the time?" And they pause and they think, and they're like, "You're right. I don't have to wear a new outfit every time."

And one of the main concerns of our clients is that they want to build a long-lasting wardrobe. They want to make sure they're investing in the right pieces, they get outfits, and it all goes together, and they love everything in there. Well, one of the most sustainable things you can do for your wardrobe and for the environment is buy the right items and wear them for a long time too.

Menendez: Listen, I'm going to be honest. There are going to be a lot of our listeners who can't afford services like yours. So I do want to take some things from your brain if you are willing, which is, when someone's sitting down, and I understand the tactical part of like, "I'm missing black pants, I'm missing a black skirt," their core colors, their core pieces, there's also just, "Who do I want to be in the world?" What are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves to get to that vision of what it is stylistically that we're going for?

Sethi: One exercise that I recommend your community to do is to create a Pinterest board. You can call it my new style. You mentally take yourself to a place where style is fun again for you. And so it gives you an opportunity and a space to dream. And so before that, you can answer these questions. What is my work environment like? What do I want people to think about me before I even say a word? And how do I want to feel in my clothing? So that's step one.

Step two is create the Pinterest board. You spend 30 minutes on the Pinterest board, you can time yourself. Uninterrupted time, and you go on there and you literally pin jackets you like, outfit combinations, color combinations. Let yourself dream a little bit, right? The only rule is you cannot say, "I cannot wear that outfit because," fill in the blank. "My arms are too long," or, "I have this or that." Because when you start putting those rules style doesn't become fun anymore. So you're going to pin, pin, pin, pin, pin, and then after the 30 minutes you're going to, you can even ask a friend, and you can look. Your responses to those questions, do they align with what you actually pinned on the board?

Menendez: Cassandra, you've built an incredible business at what is a fairly young age. I wonder what you have sacrificed to get to this moment.

Sethi: I'm in a hyper-growth phase of the business right now, where I have to devote a lot of time to building out my team and mentoring them, and making sure they're developing, while sourcing new clients, and doing podcasts and everything else. And I think one of the things that I have sacrificed is time. So there have been moments when I've had to work, versus maybe spending time with loved ones. And I've had to sacrifice that.

But I know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel, because as I build the business, my team are going to be rock stars. They already are. They'll be even better. And I can start to step away a little bit to enjoy time with my parents or time with grandparents and family and really be present. I will also say that even though I've sacrificed time, I have gained so much and I have learned so much about myself as a business owner over the past five years since I started Next Level Wardrobe. And the lessons I have learned, invaluable.

Menendez: Cassandra, thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Sethi: Thank you for having me.

Menendez: Thank you as always for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua, and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro mixed this episode.

We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at [LatinatoLatina](https://twitter.com/LatinatoLatina). Check out our merchandise at latinatolatina.com/shop.

Remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you are listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "Cassandra Sethi Wants to Take Your Wardrobe to the Next Level." *Latina to Latina*, LWC Studios. February 13, 2023. LatinaToLatina.com.

Produced by:

