

From Fashion to Finance: Execs Get Brand-Building Insights at Schneps Connects

By Long Island Press

Executives from across Long Island gathered on August 25 at The Heritage Club at Bethpage in Farmingdale for the latest Schneps Connects Breakfast, where conversation centered on building strong brands, growing businesses and creating meaningful connections. Roni Hirshberg, co-founder and CEO of Generation Love, spoke about her journey, building and growing a woman-owned fashion brand. She met attendees and talked about how she and partner Audrey Bressa created a company that recently expanded with a Westhampton Beach store, as well as designs in retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. Josh Schneps, CEO of Schneps Media, interviewed Hirshberg on "Building a Fashion Brand from Vision to Reality." "I wanted more out of my life. That drove me to start a business," Hirshberg, who launched her business at age 24, said, noting she wants clothes to fit people's style, not just size. "How does my client feel when she walks into a room? I want her to feel beautiful and powerful." Hirshberg said brands need to remain resilient, although that can include changing course, at times. "There are challenges every single day," Hirshberg said. "I think it's just being resilient, problem solving, being confident and staying positive." She said good partnerships and connections, such as those that can come out of networking events, help. "They can be one way. I can be another way," Hirshberg said of competitors. "And that's the beauty." In addition to listening to Hirshberg's experiences, many on hand were busy building their own brand at the event, making connections and getting information from each other. Anne Marie Foley, Spa director at the Spa and Salon at East Wind, in Wading River, said Schneps Connects events help build brands. "Connections are really important," Foley said. "Events like this create that space. You can make business connections." She said positive energy is important in networking and in life in general, noting a good attitude makes good things more likely. "The law of attraction is a real thing," Foley added. "That in combination with determination is the driving force of something becoming a success." Dr. Nicola Beckles, who runs Balance with Intent Psychology, said events like the Schneps Connects breakfast are exercises in brand building through networking. "I'm trying to build my brand," she said. "Instead of seeing patients every week, once a week, every other week, or once a month. I want to do more workshops." TD Bank Business Banker and Schneps Connects member Ryan Koutsogainnis said not only companies, but individuals, need to build their own "personal brand," which can be helped by networking, such as these events. "I believe my brand is my relationships," he said. "I'm a relationship builder more than anything else. I'm not a salesperson. I'm in the business of trying to grow the business for TD Bank. What I'm really out there doing is getting to know my business customers and finding out how I can be a better resource for them." Koutsogainnis said he believes your behavior and service are how you build your "personal" brand. He said he answers his phone at 8 p.m. on a Sunday, so even if he can't solve a problem immediately, he can help take it off someone else's plate. "That's the brand I built," Koutsogainnis said. "It's not just about opening a bank account and doing a loan. How can I provide additional value?" He believes in "connecting" his customers to his own connections, inviting several people to this event, where they could also benefit. "These breakfasts are one of those ways," Koutsogainnis added. "It's great to have the ability to share this with clients as well and give them additional exposure." Kelly Dolce, a mortgage loan officer at Four Leaf Federal Credit Union, noted the importance of networking and meeting new people. "I'm networking," she said, noting the credit union recently rebranded from Bethpage to Four Leaf. "I want to see if people might need my help or I can help them." Koutsogainnis said in addition to networking, he enjoyed hearing branding tips from someone in the fashion industry with some connections to finance. "I'm always open to listening to how people brand themselves," he said. "I love the networking piece, and I enjoy listening to the speakers. Every speaker brings a different set of skills I can apply to

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my business." He added that at meetings he often paraphrases things speakers said at these breakfasts, such as Tilray CEO Irwin Simon, who at another Schneps Connects event talked about not retiring from something you love, but modifying your work. "That's come up a lot of times in conversations with clients," Koutsogainnis said. "A lot of my clients have a hard time throwing in the towel. They know it's time to slow down. You don't have to stop. Find out about what you've always enjoyed about the job and focus on that." The next Schneps Connects breakfast will be held on September 24, where Dr. Maria Conzatti, Chief Administrative Officer of Nassau Community College and Dr. Robert S. Prezant, President of Farmingdale State College, will discuss Building Long Island's Future Through Education. Tickets and club membership information are available at SchnepsConnects.com.

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