

Transcript

Swapping Lab Coats for Lip Gloss feat. Ashley Henry '22

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[00:00] **Intro:** Welcome to Owl Have You Know, a podcast from Rice Business. This episode is part of our Pivot series, where guests share stories of transformation in their lives and careers.

From chemistry to the beauty industry, Ashley Henry has never settled for anything in life. A first-generation American, she shares how memories of her parents' immigration journey, along with her mother's very first job in the States, instilled a drive in her to follow her passion, her dreams, and to always go after what you want. She talks about that moment, that turning point, when she knew she wanted more, and how Rice Business launched her to chase after those childhood dreams and find that fulfillment she'd been searching for.

Our guest today on Owl Have You Know is Full-Time MBA of 2022, Ashley Henry. Hey, Ashley, how are you?

[00:54] **Ashley:** Hi, Maya, I am wonderful. Thanks for having me.

[00:57] **Maya:** Oh, my gosh, so thrilled to have you. You have a truly fascinating story, a fascinating pivot story. And I can't wait to dive in to talk to you about this, because I really don't think I've ever met anybody like you.

[01:12] **Ashley:** Well, there's only one me, so...

[01:16] **Maya:** Absolutely, only one you, but your background and, you know, the arc of your life and where you are now is something that is very unique. You started out as a chemistry major at Howard University. So, I'm going to leave the big reveal for later, but I am going to say that you're based in New York. I mean, that's a hint, right? So, you're based in New York. How's New York?

[01:40] **Ashley:** Yes, ma'am. Cold. I love Brooklyn, though. I live in Brooklyn, work in Manhattan, or as on TikTok, people call it "Work Island" now, but yes, I'm from New Jersey. So,

I grew up... my dad worked in the city my whole life. So, this is like what my idea of adulthood was. I just took a little Houston detour for a while, which was cool.

[02:01] **Maya:** Yeah, we'll get to that. So, you grew up on the East Coast. Tell me about your family. Were... since you were a chemistry major at Howard, were your parents scientists as well?

[02:14] **Ashley:** No. So, both my parents are immigrants from Jamaica. They came to the U.S. My dad came in the '50s when he was 11 years old. My mom came when she was 18 in the '80s, and they lived and worked in New York. They met in New York, had kids, and moved to Jersey. My father does Q&A for... he worked for banks in the city. He still does Q&A now. My mother, she worked, sort of, like, secretarial jobs, and then she had us. And so, she, kind of, you know, as mothers do, kind of, had to put her career on the back burner. But she was always very... she was always working.

And what really, sort of, sparked my interest and passion for beauty and fashion was my mother working for a grocery store chain in the northeast called Wegmans. Well, they're, kind of, bigger than the northeast. She still works there.

[03:09] **Maya:** No, they were in New Orleans. They were in New Orleans. I, when I... I was actually an immigrant. And we immigrated to New Orleans, and there was a Wegmans there. That was our grocery store, so I know Wegmans. Yeah, I'm not sure if they're still there.

[03:21] **Ashley:** Really? Okay, yeah. So, she worked at Wegmans, and she still works there. She's worked there for over 20 years. When we were young, she worked in the health and beauty section. So, she would, you know, manage and organize all, put up all the displays in the health and beauty section. And they would have vendors from the brands come and, like, show, you know, "This is, these are the new things," and we would get... she would get tons of samples, and she would always bring those home for my sister and I to play with. And we would get nail polish everywhere.

But one thing I remember specifically is a lot of the samples didn't really match me and my sister's skin tone. So, we would like to be trying to play with these things. And I was like, "I wonder whose job it is to, like, decide what these products look like." And so, that was a seed that was in my mind from a very early age.

[04:07] **Maya:** So, in terms of entrepreneurship, you recognize that there was a gap and a need?

[04:13] **Ashley:** Yes, as a kid, which is strange.

[04:17] **Maya:** No, but I mean, that's the, that's what you, as a child, you know, those are some of the things that kids notice right away. Like, for me, for instance, my name, I could never find it personalized anywhere when I was little, because Maya, just, Maya is not, it was like Melissa, and, you know, Amanda, and all that, and Ashley, but there was never, like, a Maya. So, when I was younger, you know, I was like, "Wow, I really wish that there was something that could fit me." So, a bit similar. Growing up, you had that first experience with the beauty industry through your mom. And then, what sparked your curiosity about chemistry?

[04:57] **Ashley:** As immigrant parents do, you only... you're going to be a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer. I was a good student. I was, kind of, good across the board. I enjoyed all subjects—history, science. But I had a few science professors that really stood out to me in early...in middle school. So, I ended up getting into a magnet school in Jersey, called the Academy of Allied Health and Science. It's a very, very small school. It was very rigorous programming, geared towards the health sciences.

And so, from high school, then going into college, I just assumed that I would be going into... I would pursue medical school. And so, I started out as a biology major in undergrad, as most pre-med kids do, but early on, I, probably, like, first semester, I had a professor that was like, "You're really great at chemistry, you should consider majoring in chemistry." And I was like, you know, the department was much smaller because the bio department, everyone that's pre-med is like, "I'm going to be a bio major." And I really enjoyed my interactions that I had in lab and with the professors in the chemistry department at that time. So, I was like, "Sure, why not?" So, that's, sort of, how I ended up majoring in chemistry.

[06:13] **Maya:** So, four years in chemistry, and then was that what you were going to do, you're going to be a doctor?

[06:17] **Ashley:** The plan was to go to medical school, but around my junior year, I knew that that's not what I wanted to pursue. I just couldn't bring myself to zone in and focus on studying and prepping for the MCAT. It just wasn't, the thing inside of me was missing to drive me to do it. So, I was like, "Really, what are the options that I have with this degree? What are the career

options for someone with a chemistry major? What are the career options for someone who has the interest in beauty and fashion that I do? Like, can I parlay this into something else?"

And I took a lot of... because I was a chemistry major, I took a lot of courses with engineers. So, I had a lot of engineer friends. And one particular friend of mine, he was like, "Oh, there's a career fair in the engineering school. You should come. You should come. You should come." And I was like, "Okay." I was pre-med, so I wasn't planning on, like, doing conventional interviewing like that. This was my first time going to a career fair. I think this was junior year or early senior year of college.

And I ended up, you know, making some connections and ended up interviewing with L'Oréal at the time. I ended up going pretty far in that process. I went up to, well, at the time, it was New Jersey, to interview, do the casing, and all those things.

I ended up not getting that opportunity, but that is where I saw the possibility, like, for someone with a chemistry major to work in beauty, and I learned what the name of the position is of the people who develop products in beauty. They're product developers. And beauty is a very niche industry. But I learned that information through that process. So, it was very valuable for me at the time, even though I ended up not getting that opportunity.

[08:01] **Maya:** But you did end up going to work for the CDC in epidemiology, which is fascinating. And you also, you were an investigator for the Texas Department of State and you were a quarantine public health officer here in Houston. So, tell me that chapter of your life.

[08:18] **Ashley:** Yes. So, because I had the pre-med background, because I was interested in public health, I was considering, you know, if I go back to school, what is it going to be? Maybe, I'll get my MPH. I was, like, thinking all these things. So, I actually ended up moving back home to Jersey for about two years after undergrad.

And side note, I also worked at Wegmans. It was my first job. I've worked there from when I was 14 all the way. I worked... I ended up getting a scholarship, so I had to go back during the summers in college and work there to get, like, a certain number of hours.

I ended up going back to Wegmans after undergrad, but as a pharmacy technician. So, it was, like, a brief period of time, while I was looking for an opportunity that was more aligned with what I had learned in school and just more robust, right? So, also, my parents were moving from New Jersey, were looking into moving from New Jersey at that time. And I didn't want to

move. They were looking at Virginia. I did not want to move to Virginia. But I was like, New Jersey is expensive to stay in on my fresh out of undergrad, working at Wegmans. Like, what am I going to do? And I ended up seeing the Public Health Associate Program that the CDC has. And I applied, and I ended up getting accepted to the program in 2015.

What they do is they station public health associates all over the country to, sort of, support local and state health departments in terms of people to work in public health and to provide, sort of, like, federal knowledge and things like that in these health departments. So, I was like, "Okay, where am I?" They let you pick the region that you want to be stationed in, but you can't pick exactly where you're going to end up. So, I was like, "Okay, I will pick the South." I was like, "Let me go somewhere that..." I really wanted New Orleans, or I was like, "Okay," or somewhere in Texas. So, I picked that region, and I ended up being assigned to Houston. I moved in 2015, the end of 2015, having never been to Houston before. I moved there.

[10:24] **Maya:** How was that? What'd you think when you got here?

[10:27] **Ashley:** It was very different. What's interesting, though, is it's, sort of, like, the standardization of America, right? Like, America's America. Like, things are, like, driving on the road, same rules, like, all these things. But very different, weather-wise. Also, I wanted to run away from the cold at that point in time. I was tired of the snow.

[10:47] **Maya:** You did that, for sure, by coming to Texas.

[10:50] **Ashley:** Yes, but I came to a whole host of other weather things. But I came to Houston. I had a few friends from undergrad, engineer friends, because a lot of them ended up working in oil and gas and moving to this part of the country, and a few friends from college, but really not really knowing anyone, not having any close family. I ended up spending a lot of time at work, obviously. But I, also, I had been doing Muay Thai or kickboxing back in Jersey, so I found a really cool gym in Houston that I joined. Did that, did jujitsu. So, I'd, like, go to work all day.

I joined, sort of, at the downslope of the Ebola crisis, also. So, there was, like, sort of... there was, like, robust programming that they were doing at the time that the associate before me had established certain things that I was putting a bow on. But my main function was the foodborne illness investigation.

And then, in my second year, I switched. They put... they give you two different experiences each year. So, my second year, I was a quarantine public health officer at George Bush Airport, which is very interesting. The CDC regulates a lot of really interesting things when it comes to international travel. And that particular quarantine public health office was in charge of all ports of entry in that region. So, we would, like, cruise ships coming into Galveston and in Louisiana and the airports all in that region would report to us. When Customs and Border Protection has someone come in with an illness, we would have to assess, like, okay, what are the signs of an, of an infectious illness, right? Like, do they have fever? Do they have X, Y, Z? And tell them, you know, sort of, how to handle the situation.

[12:38] **Maya:** That's a lot in two years to experience. Was it then that you were like, "You know, maybe, I want to go after my passion?" It was, it was...

[12:50] **Ashley:** Definitely, definitely.

[12:51] **Maya:** Right? Okay. So, what was that spark for you?

[12:55] **Ashley:** I've always been gifted at doing hair. In the Black community, it's, sort of, something that we learn, and there's always, like, someone in the family or someone who's, like, really good at doing it. And that was always me. I was like, "Okay, I want to get a second job." While I was working at the CDC, I was like, "I want to get a weekend job, something that I can do that I enjoy." So, I'm like, "If I'm going to have to work two jobs, it might as well be something that I like."

You know, I looked up all of, like, the rules and regulations around licensure for, like, being able to do hair in Texas. And it turns out there's a qualification in the state of Texas that you can be qualified as a hair braider, because we... I didn't use any chemicals. It was just braiding and twisting and washing and caring for hair. I ended up connecting with a stylist who had a one-chair salon. And she wanted to, you know, bring on another stylist, expand her operation. And when we connected, I worked on the weekends, sort of, my, during my second year at the CDC. And when the contract was up, I was, sort of, like...

[13:57] **Maya:** "Peace out! I'm leaving!"

[14:01] **Ashley:** I was like, "Let me go do something else. Let me see what it would be like to do this thing that I enjoy and I'm good at full-time." And so, the woman who I worked with, she really gave me... I was always good at doing hair, but she gave me, like, that polish, that

providing a service, that understanding consumer needs, like, the attention to detail, and just getting my reps in around doing certain styles and the intricacies of braiding and these sort of things. I was able to really build up a roster of clientele. And a lot of my clients were professional Black women in Houston who wanted an elevated experience to care for their natural hair, meaning, their hair with no chemicals, no chemical straightening, just their curls and kinks. So, I ended up doing that for... all the way until I went to business school, so, from 2017 until 2020.

[15:00] **Maya:** So, when you stepped foot on campus for the first time, what did you think?

[15:06] **Ashley:** I knew that I could cut it. It was just a matter of where I wanted to be, right? I was... once again, I didn't grow up in Houston, right? So, I didn't really have that association with the university that Houstonians would. But at that time, I had spent quite a bit of time. And I was like, "Okay, let me go see the campus. Let me go drive around, see what this will be like. Let me speak to some people." I ended up speaking to... she no longer works there, but Margaret Kazibwe, who was phenomenal in the admissions department at Rice. And she, sort of, was like, "Yeah, you would be great here, XYZ. These are all the things that you, these are the experiences you can have. These are the things you can do."

The conversation with her was, really, the impetus for me to apply. I ended up applying 2020, round three, COVID time. It was like my life changed in the matter of, like, a couple months. I put in the application. And I ended up hearing back in May. And then, I was a Consortium fellow. So, the Consortium things start in June, and then classes started in August. Like, everything just went from there.

[16:15] **Maya:** August. Boom, boom, boom, boom.

[16:18] **Ashley:** Exactly.

[16:19] **Maya:** Yeah. Well, we were there at the same time, part of that cohort. You know, you were the full-time cohort. I was, because we both graduated in '22, so we were there at the same time. Were you focusing on entrepreneurship? Or, was there a different program that really sparked your desire to go after, for your MBA?

[16:36] **Ashley:** I didn't know what to expect, because as a chemistry major, they don't teach you anything about business, right? My experience and understanding of business was in this entrepreneurial sense, but, sort of, in a very unique niche industry.

And so, when I came in, started learning, started taking courses, I was like, “Wow, there's a lot of theory in this. There's a lot of squishiness to business that I didn't know existed.” And it, sort of, made... it opened up an entire new way of looking at the world, an entire new way of understanding what's going on around me.

And I loved science and history growing up. Those are my favorite subjects, because they both explain why the world is the way that it is, right? But business, this gave me another lens to look at the world and to understand how things work. And so, what really piqued my interest at Rice were the strategy courses. Balaji, that first course that you take with him.

[17:36] **Maya:** Oh, Balaji. Oh, my gosh! So much energy! One of... I mean, that... so, you had Balaji, too?

[17:45] **Ashley:** Yep, yep, awesome. And that strategy really, really spoke to me because you can look at... it, sort of, is like a global perspective, or, like, you can look at the competitive landscape, you can look at an industry, and think about all these different ways to approach what you're doing with all of these, just from this different frame of mind that I didn't know existed. So, I loved the strategy courses at Rice. I also enjoyed pricing with Utpal.

[18:14] **Maya:** Well, that's the thing about Rice. Time after time, I have the opportunity to talk to alumni and to friends that I went to school with. It's always, it permeates over you and you never see the world the same way, you know. And that's one of the most magical experiences of Rice Business.

So, you graduated in '22. Okay, and so, now, the big reveal. So, after you graduated, where did you go?

[18:46] **Ashley:** So, the seeds for that, sort of, were planted in my recruiting while I was still in school. So, I ended up, right now, I'm a global product development manager at Fresh Beauty, which is an LVMH perfume and cosmetics brand.

[19:00] **Maya:** Like, one of the biggest firms on the planet.

[19:03] **Ashley:** Yes. I knew that I wanted to work for one of the big boys in beauty, which is Estee Lauder, L'Oréal, LVMH, right? I knew that I wanted to go into product development. I knew I wanted to move back to the East Coast.

So, when it came to my recruiting in business school, I was very... everyone that was in school with me, I was, first of all, an alien. I was, like, the only person that's like, "I'm going to go into beauty and move to New York." All these oil and gas people are looking at me, like, "Okay?" And then, right, like, I'm a hairstylist. So, I would come, my hair would be different all the time. I'd be coming in presenting myself in this very different way, and then people would be, like, "Okay," which is funny, I ended up winning best hair, which was great.

[19:46] **Maya:** Oh, really?

[19:48] **Ashley:** Yeah, my class voted me best hair.

[19:51] **Maya:** Yeah. You guys had votes for best of? We didn't do that.

[19:55] **Ashley:** Yeah. We had, we had superlatives at the end of second year.

[19:59] **Maya:** Best hair, that's a good one!

[20:01] **Ashley:** Yeah, I put that on the little extra section on my resume.

[20:06] **Maya:** Nice!

[20:08] **Ashley:** But I knew that when, in recruiting, I wanted to approach it in a very specific way. You know, they tell you, in business school, you only have a certain amount of time. It's either you're going to... it's the social, the academic, or recruiting. And you only have, you can only be good at two at a time and all these things that they tell you, right?

I knew. I was like, "I'm not interviewing if this company doesn't have...if it's not beauty, I'm not, I'm not doing it." People were doing all these interviews to practice and da da da. I was practicing, like, with my mentor and things like that, but I wasn't spending my energy interviewing somewhere that I knew I didn't want to end up, which it makes sense, but I don't think everyone approaches it that way.

And I was very focused. Now, business school is a time for you to explore and figure out what you want to do if you want to transition and if you're a career switcher. But I knew...

[20:58] **Maya:** You knew what you wanted.

[20:59] **Ashley:** Exactly, what I wanted.

[21:00] **Maya:** And you were going to go after it. Yes.

[21:03] **Ashley:** Exactly. So, we had, at a consortium fellow, we had a conference before our first year started. There was no beauty companies there except Johnson & Johnson. And I was like, “Okay, they have Neutrogena. So, maybe, I can, like, ask for what I want. Closed mouths don't get fed.” So, I was like, “I'm going to ask them. I want to... you know, if I'm going to be an intern here, this is what I want to do, X, Y, Z,” you know, like, “Oh, they're trying to steer me towards, like, Johnson's Baby, X, Y, Z.” I was like, “No.” And then, I was like, “Okay, how can I get in touch with these people in the beauty industry on the East Coast all the way from here?” So, I was like, “Okay, my undergrad network is huge, right?” Howard University's network is huge and robust.

And so, I started... I was on LinkedIn, just messaging people that I saw who worked at one of these companies. I ended up having some really great conversations with Howard alum that work at Estee Lauder and L'Oréal. And I was like, “Maybe, I don't want to be... I don't know what... I don't know.” So, I ended up going to the, which, our year, it was virtual, right? The National Black MBA Conference.

[22:03] **Maya:** Yes.

[22:04] **Ashley:** And it was virtual. Virtual conferences were so weird, but all you had was, like, your pitch that the career office worked with us to develop, and, like, these big chat rooms where recruiters were just perusing and seeing what was being dropped in. And I was like, well, I wrote my pitch. I made whatever, I dropped it in the chat. And LVMH was at the National Black MBA Conference, and a recruiter from Fresh, a recruiter from a few LVMH brands just latched on to my...

[22:33] **Maya:** I bet they did, and that was probably an amazing pitch.

[22:39] **Ashley:** It was pretty good. It was pretty good. I worked really hard on it. It was, like, at that time, you were just, like, perfecting those things, right, like, your elevator pitch and all these things. So, they ended up biting. I put my reel out. They ended up taking a bite. And from the beginning, the recruiter from Fresh, which is the brand that I work for, was very, very

interested in me and my story. And they didn't have MBA interns at Fresh at all. They had never had an MBA intern before.

[23:05] **Maya:** Could you tell me about Fresh?

[23:06] **Ashley:** Sure. So, Fresh is a skincare, body, and lifestyle brand that... and fragrance is a big part of what we do at Fresh, too. But they were founded in 1991 by Lev Glazman and Alina Roytberg in Boston. And so, basically, we are sold in Sephora. We're sold globally, Sephora and Ulta in the U.S.

[23:28] **Maya:** My child has, like, there's deodorant and there's, like, perfume and there's all of these amazing... and she has to have all of them. There's, like, a new fragrance that just came out that's, like, lavender, that, you know, she was sitting there pitching to me.

[23:40] **Ashley:** Lily Jasmine.

[23:41] **Maya:** Yes! Then, she was like, "Mom, it's new, and I need it." And I was like, "Did you bring your money?"

[23:46] **Ashley:** I worked on developing that, so you should get it for her. I'm going to have to get your address. I'll send you some goodies later on.

[23:52] **Maya:** I will give it to you, no problem. And maybe, now, I can get some of those things that you were able to get when you were a kid, and then my kid could get them. It's, like, you know...

[24:02] **Ashley:** Exactly, you never know. But so, and Fresh is a very sensorial brand. Masking is a big... we have wonderful masks and some really, really great skincare. I work on ultra-premium skincare and fragrance product development, specifically. So, fragrance is something that's really interesting, because fragrance product development is its own world. You work with fragrance houses.

[24:22] **Maya:** Chemistry.

[24:23] **Ashley:** Yes, yes! And it all, it all applies. In skin care, that's really where a lot of, like, the health and the science background comes in as well, because we, sort of, have to

communicate skin science. We're picking our ingredients for certain efficacy on the skin. We have to substantiate that with testing and all of these things.

So, the skill sets are, sort of, coming together in a bow in this role that I'm doing while also allowing me to be creative and, sort of, explore in a way that is really important to me. So, the recruiter from Fresh was, sort of, like, "Okay. Well, what do you want to do?" And I was like, "Well, I need an MBA internship. You do your MBA internship, then you get an offer, and then you go finish your last year and you come back."

And she was like, "Okay. We don't have MBA interns, but we really like you. So, what would the pay look like? What would you need to be able to come up here, XYZ?" And then, at that time, it was, sort of, like, "We don't know if you're going to be able to come up here, because it was COVID." And so, they were, sort of, like, touch-and-go. But I ended up being able to go to New York for the summer of 2021. I worked on a really awesome project, met some really great people. And I ended up doing well. They offered me full time at the end of that summer, so I came back to Houston. I, sort of, felt like plucked out of my new New York City life to go back and finish my second year.

But I went back, finished my second year, and graduated in May. I moved, like, right after graduation, and I started full-time the first week in June of 2022. And I've been there ever since.

[25:49] **Maya:** I mean, you obviously love it.

[25:51] **Ashley:** Yeah, I enjoy the beauty industry. I enjoy all the things that I've learned. And I recently spoke at Emily Prinsloo's course at Rice in the new product development and management course and just shared some of my experience from industry. And it was just so cool to be... I'm like, "I wish I had this course when I was there." But it was so cool to be able to bridge that gap for some students and share the knowledge and the perspective, because, you know, Rice isn't... I'm, sort of, like, the connection to people who want to go into this industry for, as far as alum. I'm, sort of, the connection for people. So, whenever Rice asks me to come and speak and share, I will, because I know if I saw me when I was there, it would have been really, really helpful, someone doing something out of the box.

[26:39] **Maya:** The mentee becomes the mentor, right? And that's, and that's the way to give back. Speaking of pivoting, if, you know, someone's considering this and there's this tug, right, because you had that tug, what advice would you give those folks?

[26:54] **Ashley:** So much, because now I'm in my 30s and I feel like I spent my 20s so, sort of, fraught with letting go of, like, pursuing medical school and, like, not knowing what I wanted to do and, like, feeling all of this pressure. But one thing I will say is you don't need to know what you're going to do for the rest of your life. You just need to know what you want to do next. That takes a ton of pressure off of it. That frame, if I had heard that statement 10 years ago, 15 years ago, that would have been really, really great for me.

The number one thing that I think business school taught me was the power and the importance of telling your story in a way that resonates with people. Pay attention in Janet's classes, pay attention in comms, pay attention and leverage those things, and think about your story. Think about the transferable skills. Think about how you can connect the dots in a way that resonates with your audience.

So, I went into those interviews with these beauty brands, knowing how I was able to transition from pre-med, chemistry, public health, hair care entrepreneur into where I was going. And I was able to draw that throughline for them and paint that picture for them. So, the power of storytelling... and your pitch is a story, right? It's a short story, but it's a story. And when you're in an interview, it's a story. It's your opportunity to tell about yourself and your journey and to connect with the person across from you. So, that was an important skill that I learned in business school that I still leverage every single day.

And don't be afraid. Fake it till you make it. Even if you feel like, "Oh, there's this person that I'm really intimidated to speak to." Remember that they are just a human. They put their pants on the same way you do. And even if it were Beyonce in the room, and this is the other thing, business school allows me... gave me the opportunity to get my reps in on talking to people. Because I used to think networking was such, like, a superficial, artificial thing. I'm like, "Oh, you're only talking to someone because you want something from them." But business school, you have to break out of that quickly and you have to be able to see someone, go, talk to them, and tell your story in a way that would grab their attention, and be able to add value to them. And even though they may be working at X, Y, Z of a company and they're the ones that have something that you "need," you also have to remember that you have things that they need. There's only one you. And there's things that you can share about yourself that will be interesting to this person. They've never met you before.

Sometimes, we get so... we see ourselves every day, right? But we don't know how interesting or captivating we're going to be to someone who sees us for the first time. So, those are things

that I always think about, even now, when I network and try to make connections in the industry. And it's really really given me, it's really helped set me apart, I think.

[29:42] **Maya:** Well, and you said something that resonated with me that I will never forget, which is, "Closed mouths don't get fed."

[29:51] **Ashley:** Yep. You have to ask for what you want, and you have to ask for what you want in this life. No one's going to know what you want if you don't speak up for yourself, and you're going to suffer if you just swallow all of those things and just take what you're given in life. People who know what they want and who are clear on what they want... which takes work, right? The clarity is the work that you have to do within yourself to understand, what exactly do I want, right, in whatever area of life.

[30:17] **Maya:** And what I don't want, the things that you don't want are also really, really important. Like, "I am not... I don't want this, and I don't want to work here anymore, and this isn't working for me." So, that's a really... you know, to not be complacent.

[30:31] **Ashley:** Exactly, exactly. And follow your ease, right? When you're clear on what you want and when you've done the mental exercise of understanding, and you've had the experiences, right, to, sort of, navigate you and show you what you don't want, when you have that clarity, it becomes easy to pursue the area that you know that you want. It comes easy. Sorry, I'm not sure if you hear the sirens. It's New York City.

[30:58] **Maya:** It's New York City. That's part of it, you know.

[31:01] **Ashley:** It becomes easy to, sort of, follow and be laser-focused on what you want because the blinders are on. All the, all the noise around you is not important. You know what you want. And everything, sort of, flows from there. I felt like I had so much. I had been applying to things on the East Coast while in Houston. I had been trying so hard, so hard, so hard to get into beauty, to do these things. And then, I was just like, being in business school, really, was the bridge for me. That was the thing. People are so open to you when you're a student and so open to having the conversation. And once I, sort of, leaned into, "I want to do this beauty thing, this has been a seed inside of me from when I was young, I want to do this," once I stopped fighting that, that's when everything, sort of, just started happening. It's very weird.

[31:50] **Maya:** No, it's manifestation. So, you were talking about what you want. What do you want in the next five years for yourself?

[32:00] **Ashley:** So, for myself, I definitely want to spend more time in Jamaica. We have family land. We have things. I have family back there. I want to be able to establish myself there in a stronger sense and spend more time with my family and on our family land, right? I want to explore the fragrance industry more. I want to go into, sort of, more of a robust, whether that looks like fragrance development, whether that looks like fragrance marketing, but just the fragrance industry is so captivating to me. It really is this invisible art. So, that is definitely a direction that I want to go in.

And entrepreneurship is still always in the back of my mind. I'm, sort of, getting an industry, learning, getting my feet wet, networking, learning, right? Learning this new function and networking, meeting people, and gaining my knowledge, so that, when the time comes, when I have, when I want to bring an idea to life, and when I potentially meet people who could be great partners in an endeavor, that's something I would love to pursue as well.

[33:08] **Maya:** Okay. Final question, if you are stranded on an island, what one beauty product would you bring?

[33:16] **Ashley:** Lip gloss. Easy, lip gloss! I'm a gloss girl.

[33:21] **Maya:** What color? What brand? What's it called? I need to run out and get it.

[33:26] **Ashley:** Oh, my gosh. Well, I have a few right now I'm really obsessed. This is the Milk Odyssey Butter. This one is an Odyssey Lip Oil and Gloss, but my absolute favorite, favorite gloss is the Fenty Beauty Gloss Bomb in Hot Chocolate. For chocolate girls, it is a great color, but the Fenty Beauty Lip Glosses are an amazing formula.

One more, the Summer Fridays Lip in a Tube, I really like that one as well.

[33:53] **Maya:** Okay. Well, I've got a 16-year-old daughter, and she's all about it. I am so lucky to have had a chance to talk with you today. And really, it's been amazing. I love your story. And we can't wait to continue to watch what you do next. It's been so inspirational. And we're going to stalk you, going forward.

[34:14] **Ashley:** Please, do. Please, do. Big things on the horizon. This is just the beginning. And thank you, Maya, for this conversation. Thank you, Rice Business, for being part of my solid foundation. And, you know, onward and upward.

[34:27] **Maya:** Onward and upward with open mouths. Thank you so much, Ashley.

[34:31] **Ashley:** Thank you.

[34:34] **Outro:** Thanks for listening. This has been Owl Have You Know, a production of Rice Business. You can find more information about our guests, hosts, and announcements on our website, business.rice.edu.

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