

LAUNCHING ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES WITHIN A FAMILY BUSINESS: IAN ROSEN OF HARRY ROSEN, INC.

When Ian Rosen decided to return to the family business in 2018, Harry Rosen Inc., Canada's leading luxury men's clothing retailer, was only doing 2-4 percent of their business online. In the months before COVID-19 hit, Rosen and his team were creating a thoughtful plan on how to stay relevant in the e-commerce space. When stay-at-home orders shuttered all of Harry Rosen's retail stores, the launch of their digital platform became trial-by-fire.

How did Harry Rosen Inc. stay relevant to the changing marketplace and to the founder's family? How did the founder's legacy become a steadfast value of a successful company? Listen to the grandson of the founder, Ian Rosen share his leadership story as he reflects on what changes and what stays the same over the generations in business.

Ian Rosen:

We were at this point heading into 2019, 3, 4, 5% of our sales were online. Our stores were going to be mandated to be shut down, and that was, I believe, at that point, 17 or 18 doors. So, that was going to really cut off a huge percentage of our business, the second that the severity of the moment with respect to COVID came together, we just had to put our foot on the gas pedal. It wasn't, "Let's come up with a plan." It was, "Let's start executing."

Esther Choy:

What was it exactly that needed to be stepped on the gas pedal so quickly? And by whom?

Covid and the pandemic have affected everyone in the world – but not in the same way. If your family enterprise is well known in your country as the go-to high end, traditional brick and mortar retail business with only 3% of your sales being online, how are you supposed to adjust IMMEDIATELY to the reality of having ALL your stores shut down?

And. Just as your family enterprise is figuring out how to make this dramatic shift to stay relevant to the market condition, how do you also make sure that the family enterprise itself stay relevant to the family, to the next generation?

Hi, My name is Esther Choy, the executive producer and your host of the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises' own podcast series: Family IN Business. A podcast that features stories of leaders, their families, and the family enterprises they transformed.

In the first episode of this season, our guest and serial entrepreneur Kartik Wahi strongly advised us to leverage the assets that took a lifetime or generations of lifetime to create, while giving the next generation the room to explore, and to be entrepreneur themselves. That sounds great. But how do you do that?

So in this episode, we will get to listen to a 3rd generation family business leader and entrepreneur Ian Rosen, and how he found his own career calling that also happened to land him back in his family business while launching a venture, a business within his family business, just in the nick of time. All the while, his story also illustrates a fundamental question that all successful multi-generational family IN business must answer. How do we make sure that our enterprises stay relevant not only to the marketplace, but to the family IN business together?

So, let's get to know Ian's story right away. But first, who is Ian?

Ian Rosen:

My name is Ian Rosen. I am the president and chief operating officer of Harry Rosen Inc. Harry Rosen is Canada's leading player in luxury menswear. We were founded by our namesake founder, my grandfather, in 1954 out of 500 square feet in Toronto's Cabbagetown, which is on a street called Parliament Street. It's where a lot of made to measure and men's shops popped up in the mid-1950s and definitely not downtown, but in and about where the Denizens of Toronto were spending time.

So, Harry Rosen and his brother Lou started the business in 1954. And probably the most novel part of this business venture is they had no inventory. They took a bunch of old fabric bolts and old garments and hung them up to make it look like they were in business. But they just had a supply chain, like they had a way of manufacturing suits and a few garments and the ability to measure people. And they just worked and built the business one customer at a time.

He threw out these incredible ads into the paper that were monikered under the tagline, Ask Harry. So, it was any question you could ask about menswear, Harry would have the answer. How wide should the cuff be on my pants? How much shirt should I show at the sleeve of my cuff? Which tie knot should I wear with this specific type of suit? Ask Harry, Ask Harry, Ask Harry. And he put these really provocative gripping ads into all the papers around Toronto and started to become kind of that go-to guy when it came to men's wear.

My grandfather decided he was going to become a marketer, and Harry is just this big, bold entrepreneur.

Esther Choy:

So that's how the family business started by the founder, Ian's grandfather, Harry Rosen and his brother Lou Rosen. But the way that the second and third generation grew up in the business were quite different.

Ian Rosen:

Larry, my father who joined as the business was just growing like a rocket ship, jumped into pretty much every major function and played a contributing role. He was a buyer, he helped run stores, he helped

oversee our marketing function, and that was really his walkabout, his tour around the business and helped them gain and grow credibility throughout it. Because he helped form a lot of those departments in the way that things ought to be done. Because the business was just being established at a different scale than it was in the past. Now for myself, I'm jumping aboard a more established ship and I'm asking it to change the way it does its established business. It's a much different challenge, and it requires a bit of a different scoping in terms of introduction to the business.

Ian Rosen:

I did an undergraduate degree in business and political science. And like anybody who has no idea what they want to do once they graduate, I went into management consulting I joined one of Canada's largest strategy boutique firms. It was called SECORE Consulting. Decided after that I'd seen a lot of good industries, but I definitely ultimately fell in love with consumer as a business.

At that point, I decided to apply to business school. I was really happy to be accepted at Kellogg. I focused a lot of my education there in general management, trying to shore up places where maybe I wasn't as strong as I wanted to be. So, I concentrated in finance, although that's probably not something that I thought I would ever do.

Took a lot of the entrepreneurship classes, was very heavily involved in the family business club there and wasn't a 100% sure if I wanted to join Harry Rosen yet. And again, punted the decision down the road and joined Bain & Company in their Chicago office, trying to focus as much as possible on retail and technology-oriented cases.

Esther Choy

In 2018, two years after graduating from Kellogg and having spent more time as a management consultant, Ian found his career calling AND direction.

Ian Rosen:

It's kind of the most interesting time in consumer in my opinion, because digital was proliferating at such a fast pace and so many companies were making a decision on what their direct-to-consumer strategy was going to be. How big could this online thing be? Should I or should I not have an Amazon business? How should I manage that?

Carter Cast:

I wouldn't assume you have to do e-commerce just because everybody else is. Some businesses, they're not really built to be e-commerce businesses.

Esther's narration

That's Carter Cast.

Carter Cast:

I'm a clinical professor of strategy at Kellogg School of Management. I'm also an operating partner at Pritzker Group Venture Capital, and a senior advisor at Pritzker Group Private Capital.

Esther Choy:

He's also the author of the book: The Right and Wrong Stuff: How Brilliant Careers Are Made and Unmade. We've invited Carter to join us for this episode because of his experience as the former CEO of Walmart.com Yes, Walmart is different, very opposite of Harry Rosen in its size, price point, customer services, well just about everything. However, launching online business, one that fully integrates with the mothership carries a lot of parallels.

Carter Cast:

First of all, understand your customer, and understand their buying modalities. Do they prefer to buy this direct? Do they prefer to have a salesperson explain it to them? How do they prefer to buy? If the answer is, "I'd like to buy this from the comfort of my home with information to guide me," well then by all means, it sounds like there's an e-commerce or an internet opportunity available for you.

Esther Choy:

As a leading player in luxury menswear, should Harry Rosen really have an ecommerce division? Or, was it more because... well everyone is doing it, so we couldn't be left behind too? Is this necessary a way to stay relevant to the market?

Turns out Harry Rosen had a dire need for a thriving e-commerce business that was beyond anyone's ability to predict. E though timing of events worked in their favor, it was still an arduous journey and one that couldn't lead to success without everyone at the company really understanding their customers including their buying modalities.

Let's get back to Ian's journey of joining his family business.

Back in 2018, the starting point was really well-timed.

Ian Rosen:

So I started talking to my father, Larry, who has been the CEO of our business for 20 plus years. but we started talking about what the business might need and where my interests lie, and was just lucky enough to have this really strong interest to help a company rebuild its digital presence, as well as build a profitable E-commerce business. And that's exactly what Harry Rosen was hoping to do.

Online was definitely a store when I joined, but it represented I think two to 3% of sales, so nothing material, and was kind of tasked with a vision of, "Hey, turn this into our biggest store, but also help us invest in technology in a way that will help us transform the way we deliver what we do best across all of our stores."

I joined the business in the summer of 2018. My first role at the company was executive vice president of digital and corporate strategy. Digital was a new role, and that's sometimes a family business' no, no, especially for a family member, but it was such a profound and obvious need for our business. So, I had the E-commerce P&L reporting into myself the digital/development budget for E-commerce technology. I had our analytics function, strategy function, and then I had to learn how to mobilize a whole lot of other functions to help support the ambition that we were going to build.

Esther Choy:

Why is building an e-commerce business such a complex and all-encompassing endeavor? Here's Carter recounting his experience integrating Walmart's online business into its main stores business.

Carter Cast:

It's very different. You can say you're in retail, but being really good in e-commerce, being the world's number one retailer in a physical store sense is very different. Walmart, at that time, was good at shipping truckloads to stores. Now, they had to ship boxes to homes. The entire supply chain was very different than what they were used to. So, the amount of innovation and the amount of new work that had to be done was tremendous to get to be competent at operating in a direct to consumer environment when they were used to operating in a store environment.

Esther Choy:

How long did that take to build the internal infrastructure in order to realize your dream and goals to have that online presence and footprint?

Ian Rosen:

It's a good question and probably better to just take a step back. And when I joined in the summer of 2018 I had to really hold myself back and commit to understanding how the business worked, not only in the little vertical that I was going to be a part of, but how did the stores work, why did we do things the way we did them?

And there was so much that I learned in terms of the way that the organization had thought, grew, solving a number of problems, and that helped inform a lot of the solution design that we ended up coming up with was primarily to help the business benefit from what it had thought through already, but also do it with a view to being a much more digitally forward company. But it took probably six to eight months to understand, four months to pull together a pretty informed recommendation. And then by the middle of 2019 we were starting to build a plan relating to how much could we invest and should we invest in solving these problems? What was the return on investment case? What resourcing was required? How do we need to get this on everybody's priority list?

So, my first daughter was born on December 29th, 2019, and on December 28th I signed our final contract with respect to our digital software infrastructure partners.

Esther Choy:

Of course, while Ian was focusing on listening and learning about the company before attempting to

design, plan and build the digital channel in 2018 and 2019, something seismic was about to grind down the world economy in 2020. But no one knew that yet.

Ian Rosen:

Yeah, just to take a step back, COVID and the pandemic as it started to unfold impacted our business disproportionately more than most others. Our core and historical category that we've been dominant in is tailored clothing. If anybody needs a wedding suit or a business suit, Harry Rosen is definitely top of the list. Demand for suiting dried up almost overnight.

The second is, we were at this point heading into 2019, 3, 4, 5% of our sales were online. Our stores were going to be mandated to be shut down, and at that point, 17 or 18 doors. So, that was going to really cut off a huge percentage of our business, and we're very lucky that we spent 2019 building pretty well thought through plan for how we were going to execute, because the second that the severity of the moment with respect to COVID came together, we just had to put our foot on the gas pedal. It wasn't, "Let's come up with a plan." It was, "Let's start executing."

Esther Choy:

So, Ian and his team took their time to study the company, carefully designed and planned the execution methodically. But at the point of execution, they really didn't have the luxury of slow and steady win the race anymore. How did it end up working?

Ian Rosen:

Well, firstly, we made that cut over to an entirely new tech stack, which isn't the norm, usually do it piece by piece, but we really had to get rid of what was behind us and really just drive forward. Scorched earth.

So, that was the go live approach. And we had to help people understand that there was a vision here, right? Because it was quite an underwhelming launch because the features that were in the website were pretty boilerplate. Your coffee shop that was running a Shopify website probably had very similar features to us, and we needed to demonstrate that we built on a foundation that would allow us to accelerate the types of features that we were bringing into market, but also the speed at which we were bringing features into market. So, we had two or three quarters where we were releasing one or two features a week. And I think that was a great credibility builder

The centralized vision that I was trying to build with the team was this idea that our website, which also serves as a commerce experience, a shop for us, it should be like the big boards at the airport where everybody's looking at their flight information. There's so many people gathered in front of it, and each and every person standing in front of that board has a different direction that they're taking. Some people are looking if their flight's delayed, some people are looking where their gate is. But they're all standing in front from the same thing in the same place, getting information. And I tried to equate to people that the way that we're going to think about building this thing out is somebody might be looking for, "Hey, do they have this in my size? And if they do, I need to go and see which store it's in. Or tell me more about this type of style. Okay, you want to shop things that look like this."

We started writing out all of these journeys that customers might be going on as they're standing in front of the big board that is our website. And started prioritizing how are we going to solve and enhance each one of these journeys with the investments that we're making. At the end of 2021, I think we released,→

several features that focused on, I think what amounts to 20 or 25 key journeys that we frame things in the language like, "I'm a client and I want to do this. How can I get it done?"

And every single time we didn't have an elegant or well used solution for it. We said, "Okay, this is a big red journey. We need to prioritize this. We need to come up with the future journey and turn it into development tickets and move it forward." I love thinking like this because it also gets us to understand journeys between online and offline and offline and online. And I think we knew that eventually the pandemic would loosen up and restrictions would lighten up, and there would be much more of a focus on getting into stores and our store business would eventually loosen up. And we wanted to make sure that digital was a compliment for it.

Somebody can make a trip down to the store with confidence and it says, "Okay, you can ship this to your store in one to two days if it's not there." So, we'll estimate the period of time it's going to take. These are the types of journeys that we've hopefully graduated into solving, and I think the next phase of our digital transformation, which is not led only by a digital function, is all about these cross-channel journeys. And it's a future that we believe is going to differentiate our business over any others

Esther Choy:

Earlier in the episode, Carter referred to the importance of understanding your customers and what they need from your businesses and how your ecommerce can serve their needs. Here, it might seem like it's due to Ian and his digital team's diligence, savviness and thoughtfulness to improve their customers' overall experience through plotting out their two dozens of so of different journeys.

But. It is also because of a value, an entrepreneurial gene of sort that has been passed down by Ian's grandfather's, Harry Rosen, since the early founding years of the family business.

Ian Rosen:

The big thing that my grandfather locked into early was if he listened to the customer, wrote down a little bit about them, and then could pair it back some of that stuff next time and really take an interest in getting to know them and build out their customer record, which was this Post-it Note Rolodex that he ended up building.

I guess it's the precursor to modern day CRM. But he had insanely detailed notes on everybody, where they worked, what their measurements were, if they had an upcoming celebration or milestone in their future. And that would give them a reason to call somebody. It would also give them a reason to impress somebody next time they came in. So one at a time the business started to grow.

Esther Choy:

Yes, pre-modern day CRM, it may be but equally important is in the way that the founder really set the example of wanting to learn about his customers. And in his relentless practice of laying the foundational value of really getting to know the customers that has allowed the family enterprise to flourish despite challenging market shift. It has embedded in the family and company DNA to learn not only who their customers are, but also how Larry Rosen, the leading high-end menswear can meet their customers' need.

And once you know that e-commerce is the way to go, the arduous journey has just began. Here's Carter again.

Carter Cast:

"How can we pull the online business into the core business so that it's better integrated?" For example, customers can use the internet in conjunction with their store experience.

For example, I see the inventory online. I want to reserve that, and I want to go pick it up in the store. That integration of clicks to bricks, that is not easy.

Esther Choy:

The integration of CLICKS TO BRICKS is not easy.

Carter Cast:

For example, you have to make sure you merge the item file. The file that each item is described, it's got to be merged between stores and online. You've got to merge software capabilities. You have to make sure operationally, you know where you're going to house the products. You have to have inventory visibility to know where the item is in the store, so it's visible online. There are so many challenges to integrate an omnichannel business.

Ian Rosen:

And I think one piece of context I haven't really introduced yet is, our existing website was breaking down. It was not ready for the amount of traffic it was going to be hit with. It couldn't accept the amount of orders. It wasn't set up to drive a specific type of business. So, while business was coming in as the store shut down and it was doing record levels of volume, it was nowhere near the potential that was out there. We were just missing it. There was a Google Chrome browser version 86 and 84 that harryrosen.com could not complete a checkout on. So, our customer service team was instructing people on how to update their Chrome version and or go into incognito mode or download Firefox.

This is not a way to do business at scale. And it was going to cost us a significant amount of money to fix that bug, or we could invest that money in launching something on the other side of it, something new, something different. And as we were charging to launch something that helped us scope a minimum viable product, which is there have to be pictures of things, descriptions of things, we have to be able to add it to the cart. We need to be able to add and apply promotions to it, and we need to be able to check somebody out, take payment, and get the order into our system. That's it. No wow features, let's just get something up and running that has better plumbing than the existing house, I think you might call it.

And we had 15% of our business before the pandemic and or during the first part of it was pickup in store. We made the tough decision to actually lose our pickup in store feature for one and a half months for the sake of getting live on the new site and reintroduced it a month and a half later. Those are tough decisions. I don't know if we could ever make in the "real world." But we were building the plane as we were flying it.

Esther Choy:

So, after 1 year and half of listening, learning, designing, planning, executing – fire drill style, what are some of his key markers for financial success?

Ian Rosen:

I'll start with the metrics that for us mark success. For a strict online E-commerce store, the penetration that we have at the moment is about 20%. We're targeting closer to 30 over the next few years. That's exactly where we want to be. And that was built on over 3X growth from 2019. Our marketed improvement in conversion rate, I believe the average conversion rate on the site has improved by over a 100%. The average page value, so how valuable is each URL on your site, has also gone up 50%. So we're finding that there's a huge win from the investments that we made and actually driving the actual business. We run a very profitable E-commerce experience, which I don't think everybody can say with a straight face.

The other metrics worth noting is we have over 400, we call them clothing advisors. They are our highly trained staff at stores. And as part of this digital transformation, one of the tools that we helped build them was an application on their phone. We called it Herringbone. Herringbone is my favorite pattern, and it also happens to be Harry's. And we both wear a lot of it, and we built them an app called Herringbone, and it has detailed inventory information, detailed client information, and it empowers those clothing advisors who help work one-to-one with clients to help outfit them or dress them. It's been for decades that they've been working with many of their clients. They can build a personalized webpage for any of their clients that pulls together all the styles in our store and also pre-select sizing that they know will fit that client.

During the pandemic when our stores were closed, that represented close to 15 to 20% of our weekly business online. So, that means that our store teams were driving 15 to 20% of our online business. That's why we think in omnichannel ways, that's one of those key journeys that I was referring to before. In the steady state it's a little bit less because stores have opened up and it's a much a different thing. But that's one of the key success metrics that we continue to look at is how much are our store teams driving our online business? Because we believe that a client should freely shop us, however they might do it.

Esther Choy:

Making sure that the business stay relevant to the market is one key factor in long term success. But making sure that the business remains relevant to the next generation is yet another critical ingredient in perpetuating family being IN business together.

How did the Rosen family manage this part?

Ian Rosen:

Growing up I definitely was extremely aware and proud of what was going on, but very different to when my father grew up in the business and around the business. He helped and joined at a point where it was being established when I was born. Every major mall that I'd enter into had a Harry Rosen store, and I was Harry Rosen's grandson. And that colored a little bit of the way I approached the business, which is, sure, that might be an option. My father did a great job keeping me along for the ride in terms of how

much business was done and how the business worked and took me to some trade shows and some trade dinners. But I was like, "I'm going to figure this out for myself, and if by chance I end up loving what you do, I'll find my way back here."

And he was, I think, respectful enough and also smart enough to realize that he had to empower that thinking. And again, myself and my now younger brother who just joined the business four weeks ago both found our way back here without any pressure. That's a unique trait that I think my father brought forward.

Esther Choy:

Ian's father, Larry, giving him and his brother the space and time to figure how the family business is relevant to their own career. But making sure the business staying relevant to family members have to go both ways too.

Jennifer Pendergast:

So what I find so interesting about their story is how he was able to blend the piece, which is we need to stay relevant with the market. We need to go where the customers are going, which is more online.

Esther Choy:

That's Professor Jennifer Pendergast, our show's advisor and the executive director for Kellogg's John L Ward Center for Family Enterprises.

Jennifer Pendergast:

But I also think by understanding their values, that also goes to credibility, which is it made him credible with his father, his grandfather, to say, I get this business and I understand what's important about it and I'm not trying to upend it. And it made it him credible with all those people that work in the stores that provide this high level of service to say, I get the value of what you're doing, and I'm not trying to disintermediate you and tell you, you're not important anymore and get all of our clientele to come online and not come to the store and make you irrelevant. I want to leverage you and weave into this experience and make it richer and really help us differentiate from each other. So I think in and of itself, by understanding those values, gave him credibility.

Ian Rosen:

The three things that I would say to somebody leading a new venture in a family business would be, you have to be credible. And especially carrying the last name of a founder, it was really important to me to demonstrate that there was no job or task that I didn't want to understand how it got done. And frankly, especially powered by the experiences that we went through in COVID, I've probably done most of the jobs and made sure that I helped the team when there were spikes in traffic, or spikes in issues, or spikes in errors. I'll pick up the phone and call customers, I'll field customer care requests, whatever helps the team through the situation. And not just think it's top down thinking, but that there's bottom was up and an understanding of the impact on others that you're taking note of. So, that would be number one.

Number two, I would say communication, communication, communication in a consistent manner. You can't over communicate what the dream is, and you'd be surprised how few people are listening to that one town hall over Zoom that you did. The retention rate is probably five, 10%. So especially because we were forced into a more virtual setting, making sure that that was recorded, played that the senior leadership really understood it, that you're giving the time to communicate exactly where we're going so that people can audit what they're doing to say, "Hey, does this fit in with where the company's going? I hear Ian and the team say this again and again and again, but I'm not feeling like I'm driving that same direction." It might help people question a little bit of what's on their plate. So, my team's probably sick of my voice at this point, but I put a big emphasis on communication and I think it's probably one of the things that's harder than ever in this new world. So, that's definitely number two.

And number three, making sure that everybody's understanding the core values of our company. And understanding how those should influence and impact the way that we work together.

Esther Choy:

I can't leave without asking you because how much of that one customer at a time, building relationship and getting to know them, and how much of that applies to the online world where so much of E-commerce is about scale, it's about volume?

Ian Rosen:

It's a good question. There is a quote on the front of our head office that reminds you to take each customer is an individual, no matter where you're doing it. So while online is a different channel, we still treat the customers who shop there as a customer. In fact, we pair them up with a group of remote clothing advisors who work similar to call center in some ways, but they are still highly trained on and understand product. We don't want the online clients to feel less than. And while it's a different way of pressing purchase, it's still shopping with Harry Rosen, which we don't take lightly. We really think that's an important thing for us to resource again.

So we've made some strategic decisions to make sure that the online world still builds back to that vision that Harry was building in 1954. I think the fast forward version of this is, the hardest thing that we've had to do is scale what Harry was doing one to one. But that comes down to training, consistency and value is. So while we've grown from one little store to 19 we still invest a ton in training. We still make sure everybody understands the story where we came from and where we hopefully are going. And we all share similar values, which is ultimately to help the customer feel their best so they can go out and conquer the world and do their best. And that's all I really can say.

Esther Choy:

Perpetuating a successful multi-generational family enterprise means that the business or the group of businesses must stay relevant to the market AND the family. And by nurturing entrepreneurial ventures across generations, family leaders can help increase the chance of success. I hope Ian's story has provided you with a few concrete ideas and useful take-aways in your own situation.

But even if you think your situation is very different, we've got you covered. Because in the next episode, we'll show a roadmap of how to systematically cultivate entrepreneurship in a family business context.

Thank you for tuning into Family IN Business, a podcast sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises. Thank you, Ian Rosen, President and Chief Operating Officer at Harry Rosen.

Our show is supported and advised by Dr. Jennifer Pendergast, executive director of Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises. Kane Power is our podcast engineer. And, I'm Esther Choy, an adjunct lecturer at the Kellogg's Ward Center, Founder of Leadership Story Lab, and author of the book *Let the Story Do the Work*.

Esther Choy is the President and Chief Story Facilitator of [Leadership Story Lab](#), where she teaches business storytelling to organizations and professionals who are searching for more meaningful ways to connect with their audiences. Leaders trained in storytelling find compelling narratives to communicate authentically, inspire others, and create unimagined, lasting impact.

Since 2010, Esther has combined the science of persuasion and the art of storytelling to help her clients gain a competitive edge. Since launching Leadership Story Lab, Esther and her team have served clients across industries, including United Airlines, West Monroe, fairlife, ZS, McCormick Foundation, Brookfield Asset Management, Adyen, Moore, Kwik Lok, US Cellular, and SC Johnson.

Esther is the author of [Let the Story Do the Work: The Art of Storytelling for Business Success](#). Her work appears regularly on forbes.com, virgin.com, entrepreneur.com, and ama.org. She is a graduate of Kellogg, as well as Texas A&M, holding an MBA from the former and MS in Higher Education from the latter. Her podcast, Family IN Business is sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises at the Kellogg School of Management, where she is an adjunct lecturer.

Every Monday morning, you'll find Esther beginning her week with a 1,000-meter swim and a raw jalapeño. She's a mom of two trilingual girls, wife of a German who's not very punctual, and is a very humble student of kitesurfing. Esther spent nearly half her life in Hong Kong, and now lives in Chicago with her husband and two daughters.

Established in 1999, the [John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises](#) pioneered much of what is known about the collective challenges that family businesses and their leaders and owners face, making the Ward Center synonymous with new ways of thinking about the ownership and leadership of family enterprises. Clinical Professor Emeritus John Ward, along with co-founder Lloyd Shefsky and numerous faculty and staff aligned with the Ward Center, developed a world-class teaching and research center that provides cutting-edge thinking and guidance for family business purpose, vision and strategy, governance, leadership, succession, entrepreneurship in family business, family engagement and cohesion and family business culture.

The Ward Center has built a collaborative family business community among Kellogg students, faculty, alumni and family business scholars, and has developed a global network of successful business families who can learn from - and connect with - each other to generate innovative solutions to current and emerging challenges faced by family enterprises. The Ward Center also creates unparalleled executive programs and conferences to drive strategic conversations about innovations and best practices in the field of family enterprise.

Renamed the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises in 2020, the center today is in a unique position to transform the decision-making and strategic thinking of future generations of family enterprise leaders. The Ward Center is dedicated to producing rigorous and relevant research into the unique demands, strengths and evolutionary paths of family enterprises. Results of this research are delivered in the classrooms to all ages of family business leaders.

In addition to our focus on the complexities of family enterprise leadership, governance and strategy, we integrate Northwestern University's and the Kellogg School of Management's authoritative expertise into our curriculum to create a world-class, comprehensive, cross-discipline family enterprise resource. Our fusion of this deep academic capability with knowledge gleaned from our global community of high-impact business-owning families helps create the Ward Center's unique theory-driven, evidence-based frameworks.

The Ward Center has a three-pronged approach:

- Providing MBA curriculum and programming for students who are part of a family business, as well as students interested in the fields of private equity and venture capital
- Offering executive education courses that cover the full gamut of family enterprise management issues including family business strategy, governance, succession planning, entrepreneurship, family offices and family business culture
- Conducting groundbreaking research, both academic and practitioner-based, to better understand the challenges facing business families