

Advice

BUSINESS | WEALTH CREATION

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MINDING HER BUSINESS: Karleen Roy, CEO of The Vanity Group, is hands on when it comes to luxury.

At Your Service

KARLEEN ROY'S LUXE CONCIERGE BUSINESS INDULGES THE SUPERRICH AND MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPEN *By* ALIYA S. KING

Imagine that this is the start of your day: You receive a request to plan a birthday party for one of the world's most notable hip-hop artists—and you have less than 24 hours to accomplish it. At 7:00 a.m., you're on the phone with caterers, realtors, even interior designers. Experts must be commissioned and artwork flown in from Paris. Your budget is well into the six figures. The aforementioned scenario can be any given day for Karleen Roy, the 35-year-old founder of The Vanity Group (TVG), a concierge service for the jet set. But TVG is not just an epic party-planning business, and don't count Roy's venture among the typical for-hire enterprises (e.g., dog walking, dry cleaning pickup and other essential chores)



VANITY AT ITS BEST: Roy's company excels at creating extravagant experiences.

that bring order to wealthy people's lives. TVG is in a league of its own.

"The bulk of my clientele demands privacy, so I can't share most of what my company does," Roy confesses. "[TVG] definitely does events—I did Justin Bieber's birthday party and Ne-Yo's wedding, among others—but I can't post a picture of myself holding the Birkin bag I bought while I was on a shopping excursion for a client in Paris."

It's difficult to put hard numbers on the growth of concierge services because of its often "confidential" nature. The National Association of Organizing Professionals boasts approximately 4,000 members, and only a few cite working in Roy's niche lavish market. Indeed, her brand satisfies the needs, including high-end travel, personal shopping and coordination of fanciful and unusual requests, for a clientele that requires quick turnaround. Patience, flair and hustle are a must. Roy honed these qualities with the best.

STARTED AT THE TOP

"Working for [Sean "Diddy" Combs] was one of the best decisions I ever made," the Memphis native tells EBONY; she began in the business as the senior executive assistant to the man she still refers to as "Mr. Combs." In her mid-20s, Roy had to make the impossible happen for the mogul every day. "And he never settles for less," she adds. The no-nonsense businesswoman has some major commonalities with her former boss: In addition to being Howard University alums, they both embrace high standards for excellence.

So it came as no surprise in 2013, a few years into her gig with Combs, that Roy started thinking about her next move, and she recognized that she was already on her way. "I was used to getting

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BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR

The toughest part of Roy's job is not day-to-day tasks; it's actually being a business owner with employees, invoices, office space and all the minor and major affairs that make the execution of entrepreneurship a test of willpower. The learning curve wasn't easy. At first, she found it difficult to surround herself with like-minded people who shared her vision—and her stamina.

"Early on, there was a lot of turnover," Roy admits. "I had to be slow to hire and quick to fire." Now with a dedicated staff of four (three associates in New York City and one in Los

Angeles), the expanding service is moving full speed ahead—and into new office space in the Big Apple. The entrepreneur expects to have a brick-and-mortar location in LA soon as well. More impressive is her growing clientele, which includes Rick Ross, Common, Fabolous, Atlantic Records, Def Jam—and Combs and his Ciroc vodka label.

Roy, however, doesn't need to advertise to attract prominent clients; in the tight-knit celebrity world, the majority come through word-of-mouth. And nowadays, business is so good that she chooses whom she works for and her projects. "I'm reading Shonda Rhimes' *Year of Yes*, but this is my year of no," says Roy. "I'm not about fruitless projects and goals. There's nothing wrong with saying no. You have to be able to turn down what doesn't work for you."

This mantra is also essential for self-care in an industry that's always on-call. "I am the boss, so I make time for myself," she says. "I work out every single morning, and I try to eat right. You can't look run down and tired. My dad has Alzheimer's, so that really clicked for me. We only get one body. I put myself first."