

# DARE Q & A with: Kat Cole



*Kat Cole has served as the president of Cinnabon since January 2011, having previously been the company's COO. Prior to coming to Cinnabon, Kat was VP of Hooters of America. She is an active board member of the Women's Food Service Forum and an accomplished motivational speaker, who is frequently asked to deliver her powerful messages. Kat was selected as one of Fortune Magazine's top "40 under 40" business leaders for 2013.*

**Q: What is the most challenging thing you have ever had to do?**

**A:** In general, to learn to relinquish control. Specifically, to continue to take leaps in my career despite not always being experienced or the traditional choice for certain roles. I started my career as a retail salesperson at fifteen, became a Hooters Hostess at seventeen, Hooters Girl at eighteen, and took big career leaps in franchising and the service industry from that point on. Whether it was flying to Australia on three days' notice for a work opportunity (nineteen years old and having never been on a plane), or taking over as vice president at twenty-six, or going to Rwanda when offered an opportunity to work with post-genocide generations, or leaving my company after over fifteen years to become president of Cinnabon at the age of thirty-two.

**Q: Where did you get the courage and confidence to accomplish these things?**

**A:** From being raised by a single mother, watching her leave to raise her kids on her own, seeing the courage that she always displayed, and remembering her messages that I could do anything. From having dealt with adversity in our family life and understanding that life is truly what you make of it, and that your reputation and opportunities are formed by choices you make and every interaction you have over time. Many years of lessons and successes from opening businesses overseas helped me realize no matter how high the cultural barriers are, no matter how much is unknown about the situation, empathy and a focus on doing the right things for the right reasons, all while remembering to have fun, can move mountains.

***"...your reputation and opportunities are formed by choices you make and every interaction you have over time."***

It all started with one first trip, then it grew into many more. After having dealt with some of the (cont.)

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**A:** (cont.) most challenging cultural and business circumstances I thought possible at the time, and after having taken on new roles in my business career as a result, I felt many things were well within my reach. I also had great mentors, who told me I could do it, and had been telling me that for quite some time.

**Q: What is the biggest mistake you have ever made? What did you learn and how did you recover?**

**A:** Emotional reaction (it was passion to me, but it came across as immaturity and emotion). I was in charge of a large project; a top executive decided to intervene and take shortcuts. I was devastated, because I knew the frustration that would cause our employees, but I handled it poorly. I learned that it's not just what you say, but how you say it in the moment that can affect not only the work, but others' perceptions of your ability to "hang with the big boys."

**Q: If you had a young woman you cared deeply about entering the workforce today, what single piece of advice would you have for her?**

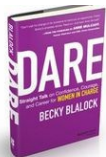
**A:** Follow these steps: Know yourself, know how you're perceived, know your audience, think about how you want to be perceived, connect those dots to make the most of yourself and your opportunities.

**Q: What advice do you have for building self-confidence?**

**A:** Wake up, put your shoes on, and go out into the world and try stuff. If you don't know what to try, just go where people are, talk to them, listen, and be curious about what they do, and why they do what they do. You'll find something that interests you and that ignites a spark. Meet new people, go to new places, take new assignments—just make yourself raise your hand, move to new city (at least once), travel, or make a drastic change. What creates confidence is experience and perspective. You won't get it sitting on your couch, wondering, wishing or dreaming.

**Q: What is your greatest fear today?**

**A:** Not asking the right questions. The fear comes from the thought that failing to ask the right questions may lead to letting people down who have given me chances in life and those who depend on me.



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