



Prime & Prim Studio of the Arts

Meet Shaka Pope, the natural born leader paving the way for young creatives

By Destiny Stewart

At first glance, it's easy to identify Shaka Pope as a leader. Her strong demeanor and can-do attitude sets her apart in any room. She's constantly on the go, checking on the latest updates for a project or meeting with a client, so there's rarely any down time for the multifaceted entrepreneur.

Shaka Pope is the founder and director of Prime & Prim Studio of the Arts, a creative arts studio in West Columbia. Usually she can be found—with her laptop in hand—managing her staff and making sure operations are going smoothly. But tonight, after the noise has faded and the busyness of Prime & Prim settles down, she sits while cradling her 3-year-old son, Yeison. She jokes that this is the calmest anyone will see her.

“He changed me,” said Pope. “I had to become more calculated with how I managed my personal life, being a mom, and running a business.”

Before becoming a mother, Pope graduated from Columbia College with a master's degree in organizational change and leadership. She cited her passion for learning and desire to take her business to the next level as reasons she makes education the foundation of her life.

“Realizing how much [Yeison] learns from me makes me happy,” said Pope. “It keeps me stimulated and in the education sector.”

After completing her master's degree and opening the studio, Pope said she needed something to refocus her. Without her son, she almost lost sight of her goal: get a doctoral degree and grow Prime & Prim through her education.

“Prime & Prim always come first before anything,” Pope said. “In order for me to be able to give my best at everything else, that needs to be in order.”

Pope founded Prime & Prim Studio of the Arts in 2013. The creative arts studio offers services from modeling training to brand consulting.

“I wanted this to be a place where any and all things can happen. That's what Prime & Prim is,” Pope said.

At first, it was a modeling school. But as people began tapping Pope for different projects, she decided it was time to expand.



“The talents that we have can become lucrative for us and eventually we become our own brand,” Pope said. “So, at the studio, we emphasize the importance of learning and preparation before entering the entertainment industries.”

Even though Pope is an expert at handling things on her own, Prime & Prim is not a one-person show. Behind her is a team of interns and creatives.

“The atmosphere is what attracted me to Prime & Prim,” said Ember Hang, a University of South Carolina senior media arts major. Hang is currently a production assistant at the studio where she started as an intern last March.

“I really enjoy what we do,” she said. “I like the free range of creativity that we have.”

Staff play an essential role at Prime & Prim. On studio production days, when Pope and her teams work on company projects, you can find a couple interns and assistants leading operations.

“Working here is stressful,” said Kiarah Beaty, fashion director at Prime & Prim. Beaty, who also previously worked as an intern, now leads the fashion department full time. “There are some days when Shaka and I bump heads.”

Despite the disagreements, Beaty understands that Pope simply wants her employees to be the best they can be. “She cares about her business, and she cares about our growth so when you think about it...she just wants us to give our all.”

To some, Pope is a larger-than-life character. She’s vocal, hands-on, and it’s rare to see her back down from a challenge.

“I always knew who I wanted to be,” said Pope, who was born and raised in the rural community of Dixiana, South Carolina. “My love for entertainment and fashion came from my personality.”

Eager to escape her small town, Pope enlisted in the Navy in 2004. After serving four years, she moved to Los Angeles. “This is supposed to be the city where dreams are possible, so it was time to break into the industry,” Pope said.

It was in LA that she started model training and learning the ropes of the industry. After realizing that she was keen on the business side, she got the idea to launch Prime & Prim.

“When you’re young you have all these ambitions and ideas of who you want to be,” Pope said. “I didn’t have the courage but I went out on a leap of faith and said that I’m going to do whatever it takes because this is what I want to do.”



Since then, Pope has dedicated her career to making sure young creatives like Ember and Kiarah are learning the skills and gaining experience needed to succeed.

“I want to be in a position where I can train, develop, and put people in positions where they can lead,” Pope said.

Even though she’s pushing people to achieve their fashion and entertainment dreams, she never dismisses the importance of having an education.

“Without an education I probably would have made a lot more mistakes, but it was all worthwhile,” Pope said.

Sources

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