

Expert Interview I with Ivan Saenz, Founder of Easy June
Including | thoughts on causing ripples, creating change, and knowing that there is no room for intolerance.

>> *Ivan Saenz guest curated Strands on November 3, 2022 . [Read it here.](#)*

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

I used to practice law for a bit. Not for too long, but long enough. And in that 'long enough' period, I never felt happy or even content (I would have settled for the latter). In the legal world though, that's just par for the course. For years, I assumed it was normal to absolutely dread your job and cry in your car on Monday mornings. Lucky for me, I have a partner who actually enjoys his work. This motivated me to keep an open eye. To look for other ways to navigate through life.

I'd always thoroughly enjoyed skincare, but had never considered dabbling in it. Until one day when I was shopping at Sephora, and I realized that there was not a single advertisement, a single product, or anything that was aimed at me (or people like me). These big brands weren't even trying to advertise to me. And here I was, happily giving them my hard-earned coins every other week. It hit me like a punch in the gut: in my fifteen years of purchasing beauty products, I had never bought a product that was actually meant for me. I thought about the effects that must have had on my self-esteem. Afterwards, I started having conversations with other queer men in my life, especially queer men of color, and what I learned was so disheartening: none of them felt comfortable enough to participate in skincare outside of places like Target and CVS. They didn't feel welcome in places like Sephora or Ulta. They felt like they were intruding in someone else's space. And of course, there's so much to skincare. Trying to learn the difference between the countless ingredients, the endless products, and the confusing marketing claims of it all. It's too much for many. So they sit on the sidelines. I plan to change that.

What excites you most about what you do?

There is nothing I love more than causing ripples and creating change. I'm excited to create something that people will enjoy (hopefully), I'm excited to create something that will possibly drive change, and I'm excited to be rich. Mostly kidding. It's a new frontier for me. It's a giant puzzle that I'm trying to figure out everyday. And while that can be draining at times, it's also exciting when I find a piece that fits.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

I'm very weary of writing an answer to this, because I don't want to contribute to the idea that a successful or happy work life has specific qualities. I could say it's personally important for me to have a greater purpose to what I'm doing, but I know that many people don't have the luxury of picking purposeful work. I also don't want to say you should enjoy your work because that's also a privilege not afforded to many. So here's what I'll say: I believe in being soft with your words. I believe we are all struggling with imposter syndrome and some level of inner doubt. And we tend to overcompensate, and in an (understandable) effort to make ourselves feel like we belong, we are loose with our words. We say things that may make others feel inadequate. We contribute to a work culture rooted in quantifiable metrics. We talk about our bonuses, equity vesting schedules, and 401K contributions. I'm not advocating for making yourself smaller, or not being proud of where you are, but I think there's a certain depressing hamster wheel we're all on, and certain conversations keep the wheel spinning. So I like to approach things softly, and I like to lead softly. I'd like for us all to be off the hamsters wheel, and at a bar instead.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?

Launching my first product, Dayglow, has been monumentally fulfilling for me. It's the baby I never thought I wanted. Easy June is my first foray into entrepreneurship. I had absolutely no connections or prior knowledge to help me get a leg up on anything. All legs were fully planted on the floor. So it was incredibly rewarding to see the product

come together. From sourcing ingredients, bottles, exterior packaging, etc. It's been a whole ass dream.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

Ok, remember when I said be soft with your words? Fuck that. Not in this instance. When it comes to diversity and conversations around injustice, do not mince words. It is important to be clear about what values are important to you. Look, we're all human and at the end of the day, we all have different lived experiences. We see things through our individual lens, and should ultimately be open to others. So I'm not saying you should cut a bitch just for suggesting an insensitive idea. I genuinely believe it's better to approach these conversations with curiosity and eagerness to learn more about why someone may feel a certain type of way. However, that does not mean you have to appease that person. There is absolutely no room for intolerance. If you don't want to hear it from me, then hear it from Philosopher Karl Popper who coined the seemingly counterintuitive idea that "in order to maintain a tolerant society, the society must be intolerant of intolerance." So if you must cut a bitch, then cut away.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

I do believe that work/life balance is possible for most people. Some jobs are obviously more restrictive than others. But we're all steering our own ships. And if work/life balance is important to you, then you should steer in that direction. You may not be able to achieve the exact balance you want right now, but it doesn't mean



you can't start building towards it. People often say that we find time for what's important to us. However, that's sometimes clouded by fear. Fear of being laid off, fear of being passed up for a promotion, fear of failure. I think health and happiness is important to everyone, but sometimes fear is the louder voice in the room. If you find yourself short on balance, start with what you fear, and work back from there. Are there fears you can let go that may free up some time?

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

My media diet mainly consists of Twitter. So please grant me some privacy during this difficult time.

As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

No is going to knock on your door. No matter how helpful you've been to others, no matter how many people you've connected before. No one is going to knock on your door and make your life better for you. No matter how brilliant or nice you are. It is up to you to open doors. Or slam them. Or knock on them. Or use them as floatation devices after your ship's struck an iceberg. The door's are an extension of you. Funny story about doors that I probably shouldn't mention: but one time, I was at an Airbnb at the beach. And I wanted to sit outside and take in the view. So I tried going out on the balcony but the door wouldn't budge. It was an odd door (at least that's what I'm telling myself) and it just wouldn't work. So I tried, and I tried, and I tried. Because it's a door! And door's open. It's what they do. And eventually, it opened! And then I thought about how that was a metaphor for life. Because I'd opened millions of doors before, my belief in my ability, led me to be persistent, which then led me to being successful. It was my belief and persistence that led to an open door, not my skill set.