

Lisa Ellis

Executive Vice President, Sony Music Label Group



“I love developing new talent—working with artists from the beginning and seeing them fulfill their dreams.”

“I always wanted to do a lot of things,” said Lisa Ellis, “so there wasn’t one thing I thought I should be.” Lisa’s career track is definite proof of that: She got her start working for Pepsi as a public relations intern and then became an events marketing manager. Four years later she did marketing for two radio stations in Washington, D.C., and one in Houston, Texas. About a year after that, Reebok offered her a position as a field marketing manager. While attending the MTV Video Music Awards she was introduced to the executive vice president of Columbia Records, and two months later Lisa was hired as a regional promotional manager at Columbia. Since 1994 she has moved up the ladder to her current position as executive vice president of Sony Music Label Group. Lisa took time from her super-packed day to chat about her job and what makes her a top player in the industry.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I knew I wanted to affect people in some way, so at one point I thought I wanted to be social worker. And I was a writer from an early age, so there was a time when I thought I would be a novelist.

What did you study in college?

I had a fascination with advertising so I studied business administration in marketing and I minored in journalism—which is where my writing came in. I loved the creative part of business. I thought a business and journalism curriculum could fulfill everything that I was interested in.

What are your responsibilities as EVP?

It’s the general day-to-day operations of the label group—everything from promotion and marketing to A&R and publicity. I focus mainly on the digital initiatives for the company.

What do you like most about what you do?

I love developing new talent—working with artists from the beginning of their careers and seeing them fulfill their dreams and have their art brought to the world. It’s really exciting to see that whole process come together, from watching Destiny’s Child when they were 14 years old to Beyoncé being one of the biggest artists on the planet right now. Being a

part of the process that made them enormous is exciting.

What do find most challenging?

It’s steering a business into the future. You always have to be in front of trends and read your market very well. And there is an added challenge because your product is art—it isn’t something produced in a factory. It’s harder in our business now to push things through that are unique, though, because so much is cookie-cutter and copy-cat. People forget that the biggest successes in entertainment history were things that were different or culturally shifting. The Beatles and Elvis shifted culture. That’s what art does. So it’s an exciting job, because you can say your business is one that is culturally shifting and changes the world.

What do you think makes you good at your job?

I think I’m a risk-taker with talent. I always look for something different. A lot of the artists I’ve worked with pushed the envelope and were not like anybody else, like the Fugees, for example. I don’t ever look for the “next” something; I look for someone who is an original.

What advice can you offer to kids interested in a career in the industry?

Don’t imitate somebody else. Be yourself, believe in yourself, and be the best you can be.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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