

# The New York Times

## THE BOSS

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### The Trail to the Top

By JILL LAYFIELD

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I WAS the fourth of five children, raised in San Jose, Calif., with a stay-at-home mother and a father who was an operations manager for Lockheed's missile systems division. My dad earned his master's degree while working full time when we were little. He was my first role model when it came to working hard.

I studied communications at Santa Clara University. To earn cash, I worked as a waitress in the evenings. Some of my customers worked at a nearby communications company, 8x8 Inc., that manufactured and sold video phones. Those customers liked me enough to offer me an internship. Then, when I graduated in 1997, I landed a full-time job in its marketing department.

Two years later, I went to work at Infogear Technology, in Redwood City, south of San Francisco. Cisco Systems acquired the company in 1999, and I worked there for six months -- long enough to know that I didn't like working for a big company.

My friend Jim Clark, who had founded Netscape, suggested that I apply at his new online photo sharing company, Shutterfly. I joined the marketing team in 2000. I loved it. I had amazing mentors and earned great experience.

Around that time, I met my husband, Dominick, who is an avid rock climber like me. We married in June 2004 after he completed his doctorate at M.I.T.

That fall, I saw a Craigslist ad for a marketing manager at Backcountry.com. The company was based near -- now in -- Park City, Utah, a great place for skiing, which both my husband and I love. Jim Holland, an Olympic ski jumper, and John Bresee, a self-proclaimed ski bum, founded the company in 1996. My cover letter was about four lines and wasn't very good, but they must have liked it. I started in November as the manager of a small online marketing team charged with exploring niche markets and expanding marketing capabilities.

I asked my husband, who was working on a start-up venture, to drive me every day down the steep, icy road from our Park City home to the office in Heber City. Winters in Utah are not like winters in California. I finally did get the hang of winter driving, but it took some time.

Beyond the weather, the transition to the new job was a big shock. My desk was an old door sitting on crates, and on the first day I had to build my desk chair.

My husband and I did lots of climbing, skiing, mountain biking and trail running in the early years. Then, in 2007, we had our first child, a girl. That same year, the company was acquired by Liberty Interactive, a digital commerce business. In 2009, I was named Backcountry.com's vice president for product management, to continue to develop our Web sites. The next year, I was named chief operating officer to oversee all operations. Last year, I was promoted to chief executive of Backcountry.com.

Backcountry continues to grow. Our revenue is now 14 times greater than when I started at the company; we have nine Web sites, including Competitive Cyclist, a recent acquisition; and we employ about 750 people. Last year, I was a mentor with Liberty Interactive's Women's e-Commerce Network, which pairs experienced executive women with up-and-comers. I was reinvigorated by my experience advising a young Harvard Business School graduate, Vivian Weng, on her start-up, FashionStake.com (recently acquired by Fab.com). The experience was a refreshing reminder of the importance of innovation.

Life is good and business is good. My single complaint is that since our first child was born -- we had a second daughter last year -- I have been doing far less skiing and climbing than I would like.

As told to Elizabeth Olson.

JILL LAYFIELD: Chief executive of Backcountry.com, an online retailer of outdoor gear based in Park City, Utah  
AGE: 37 RECENTLY READ: "Unbroken" by Laura Hillenbrand FAVORITE VACATION SPOT: Cancún, Mexico  
(PHOTOGRAPH BY RE WIKSTROM/BACKCOUNTRY.COM)

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