# Influential Women Features Gwen Ward: Building Real Presence, Purpose, And Joy Through Retail Leadership At Ulta Beauty



MCKINNEY, TX, UNITED STATES, September 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Ulta Beauty Leader Turns Presence Into A Discipline — Designing How People Feel The Moment They Walk Through The Door

The Ulta Beauty leader has spent her career designing how people feel the moment they walk through a door. Her real subject is presence — and the discipline of building it, in others and in herself.

Most people think presence is something you're born with. Gwen Ward has built a career proving otherwise — that presence is a discipline, one you can design, teach, and build, in others and in yourself.

As Senior Manager of In-Store Experience and Activations at Ulta Beauty, Gwen designs how people feel the moment they walk through a door — whether they feel seen, whether they leave better than they arrived, whether they come back. Partnering with senior field leadership, she turns high-level strategy into consistent, measurable execution on the sales floor, store by store. It's presence at scale, engineered on purpose.

What sets Gwen apart is a conviction she has spent her career proving: that how a team shows up is the experience — the everyday behaviors a guest barely notices are exactly what they remember. Translating that belief into something teams can learn and live has been some of her most meaningful work. "Taking an idea from concept to something people genuinely rely on — and hearing them call it the best training they've ever had — has been one of the proudest moments of my career," she says. "I didn't build it alone, but holding my own on a big cross-

functional team and helping turn a vision into reality meant everything."

That instinct — to build what matters and bring people with her — defines her trajectory. At Ulta, she has moved through three distinct roles, each a larger canvas than the last. She began as Director of Field Services, leading the field team behind the company's salon and specialty business. From there, she stepped into a role she helped shape — Senior Manager of In-Store Experiences — and today she is pioneering new territory: connecting guest experience to live in-store eventing and activations, and designing stores as destinations where guests come to have fun, discover, and explore, again and again.

It's a career built the way she builds everything — from the store floor up. Earlier general and district leadership roles across some of retail's most recognized names, along with a Texas State University degree in fashion merchandising and business, laid the foundation; knowledge, relationships, and results carried her the rest of the way.

But ask Gwen what she's most proud of, and she won't lead with a title. Not long ago, a message arrived out of nowhere — from a young man who had been an assistant manager for her early in her career. He sent photos and told her the impact she'd had on him still shapes his work today. "It stopped me in my tracks," she says. "It's a reminder that what we say and do as leaders ripples far past the room we're standing in." Prouder still, she says, is her son — raised with intention through the early loss of her husband, a chapter she moved through without losing her footing or her joy.

Because joy is the through-line. "So many of us are handed a checklist," Gwen says. "The degree, the job, the title, the house. We think that's where joy lives. But the checklist is a receipt, not a destination. Joy is built from the inside out — and that starts with your mindset." It's a conviction she's tested personally. As often the only woman who looked like her in the room, she learned early to walk in holding her own. "People may see your color, your size, or your age before they see you," she says. "Let them. The room doesn't get to assign your worth. You walk in already holding it."

Her leadership rests on five values she returns to again and again: faith, courage, curiosity, kindness, and trust. Faith in God, in her own abilities, and in others. Courage to try new things. Curiosity that keeps her a lifelong student — "I'll never know it all, and I don't want to. I want to learn from everyone in the room." Kindness given and received. And trust, sometimes extended as an advance, because relationships are built on someone being willing to go first.

For younger women entering the industry, her advice is both practical and deeply personal. Be a genuine student of the business. Understand what you love, where you excel, and how you come across — then lead from your strengths. Be your personal best and execute with excellence by a standard you set for yourself. And don't chase leadership for the title; pursue it for impact, and let credibility follow from what you know and who you serve.

She’s clear-eyed about where the industry is headed. The central challenge, she says, is making the brick-and-mortar experience compelling in an increasingly digital world — and preparing teams, many of whom entered the workforce during or after the pandemic, to connect with guests confidently and in person. She sees it as the opportunity of the moment: to create in-store experiences so consistent and human that they give people a reason to return, to discover, and to feel something a screen can’t replicate.

Through every chapter, Gwen has stayed anchored by faith, family, and a genuine care for people — and by a commitment to finding joy in the work, while letting others pour into her as generously as she pours into them.

The reflections shared here are Gwen’s own and represent her personal leadership philosophy.

Learn More about Gwen Ward:

Through her Influential Women profile: https://influentialwomen.com/connect/gwen-ward

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