

# THE ARMSTRONGS: A SUCCESSFUL PAIRING

> By Shari Held

Michael and Lori Armstrong are typical GenXers — highly educated, ambitious, active, balanced, and family-oriented. They've nailed success, by anyone's standards.

As senior vice president and general manager for Viacom's international division, Michael's responsible for three of the company's brands — BET (Black Entertainment Television), Paramount Channel, and Spike. He's the guy putting together the overall strategy for marketing the brands' programming to international cable networks and ensuring that the daily operations run smoothly.

Besides focusing on doing what you're good at and what you love, Armstrong has another component for success: "Make sure you contribute and leave a mark on the world," he says. "You have to figure out every single day how you calibrate your life to fit the moment."

Michael's isn't the only heavy-hitter career in the family. Lori has served as chief of staff to a former New York City Council member, director of communications for Newark Mayor Cory Booker's transition team, and regional director for former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer. In 2009, she launched her own consulting firm to focus on strategy and relationship brokering.

Communication is key to success for both Michael and Lori, although their communication styles are very different.

"Lori can take a 30-second occurrence and tell it to you in 30 minutes," Michael says. "I can take a 30-minute occurrence and tell it to you in 30 seconds."

Michael and Lori attend Centric TV's 6th Annual Soiree at Martha's Vineyard.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PHELAN MARC



## A focus on reaching out to others

The dynamic couple are united when it comes to supporting causes they believe in and helping others. Michael serves as board chairman for Dance Theater of Harlem, and they recently took their two sons, Caleb (10) and Coleman (4), to an event.

"It's a family value," Lori says, "and, because it's a value, we make time for it. We wanted to expose them to the organization culturally and also have them see the kind of things their dad does to help other people."

Michael also serves as board chairman for the National Association of Multi-ethnicity in Communications (NAMIC) and on the advisory board for Fairchester Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship.

Lori has worked with Girls, Inc. and the New Rochelle Fund for Educational Excellence and is helping organize a foundation to honor a friend who succumbed to breast cancer. Then there's PTA, fundraising events, and galas.

## A marriage and family life founded on mutual respect

Their marriage — 15 years this October — is a huge source of comfort and inspiration for these "best friends" who met as undergrads at Hampton University.

As marketing majors, they had both classes and friends in common and became great friends. It wasn't until a few years after graduation that they realized there was more to their relationship than friendship. They made a promise to each other that if they took their friendship to another level, they'd never turn back.

"We never wanted to jeopardize the best part of it — our friendship," Lori says.

And they haven't, even when facing some potentially career-changing questions young power couples face such as: How do two highly driven, ambitious GenXers start their own family — with no family nearby to help? It wasn't easy, and, after their second son was born, Lori started her own consulting firm so she'd have more control over her hours and more flexibility.

"My schedule pretty much wraps around theirs and tends to accommodate Mike's travel schedule and other activities," Lori says. "For the most part, that works out."

## Michael never takes it for granted.

"Lori stepped back from her career to make way for me to grow professionally, so I need to make sure I'm balancing my work life in concert with what's needed at home," he says.

He works a "pretty solid 10-plus hour day" and travels 30 to 40 percent of the time — sometimes on the weekends. But when he's home, he's the family cook — breakfast is his specialty — which he makes before dropping the boys off at school or summer camp. When he's traveling, he uses FaceTime and Skype to keep in touch and help Caleb with his math.

Lori obtains balance between work and home by putting family events on the calendar and then working around them. She also ensures the kids get to bed on time once she and Michael have spent time with them in the evening.

"It's important that Mike and I have parent time to decompress, talk about our day, have dinner, and watch TV before we crash," she says.

## A time to relax

They love travel, and Lori's accompanied Michael to Barcelona, London (for the launch of BET), and Amsterdam (for the European music awards). Recent family travels have included El Salvador and Dubai, and then there's the annual vacation at Martha's Vineyard.

It's not always that glamorous, however. Often the couple relax by "binge-watching" TV shows and movies. Lori likes her spa time — she gets a massage every other week — and Michael devours 20 to 30 articles daily from the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Popular Science*, *Hollywood Reporter*, and others. When possible, he cherishes uninterrupted time on the patio, drinking coffee and reading a paper edition of the *New York Times* — no iPad, please!

"That's the best," he says. "It's a rare occasion when it happens, but, when it does, it's magical." ■

Shari Held is a freelance writer based in Indianapolis, Ind.

## THE ARMSTRONGS

### TITLE:

(Him:) Senior Vice President/General Manager, Viacom, Inc.

(Her:) Principal & Chief Activation Officer, Verbify

### AGE:

(Both:) 42

### EDUCATION:

(Him:) B.S. Marketing, Hampton University; MBA (Marketing & Strategy), University of Chicago

(Her:) B.S. Marketing, Hampton University; Juris Doctorate, Wayne State University Law School; Master of Laws, Loyola University Chicago School of Law

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

(Him:) Launching BET international — a network that "means so much to so many people around the world" — and creating the Paramount channel "from scratch"

(Her:) Organizing and hosting the first African-American and Latina women's fundraiser for then-Senator Hillary Clinton (it was Standing Room Only) and visiting Trey Whitfield School — a top-performing school in a troubled Brooklyn neighborhood serving an African-American and Hispanic population

### SUCCESS...WHAT IT IS:

(Him:) A happy balance between family life and a fulfilling career

(Her:) Consistently being true to yourself, your family, your values, and your community

### HOW YOU CREATE IT:

(Him:) Focus on doing the things that you're good at and the things you love

(Her:) Have a high level of ambition, determination, diligence, and a strong work ethic

### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

(Him:) In the workplace — Entering and leaving the workplace with a smile and having the social capital to get things done inside the organization

(Her:) Socially — Consistent and meaningful engagement with the people who matter most to you

(Both:) Economically — A level of comfort where you're not worried about the daily basics, can invest in your future, and help others