**FEATURE**

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**Coach CEO, Victor Luis, and what it means to be gay**

**New York City, NY – Mar. 17, 2015** - Victor Luis, known around the office for his matching sock and tie combos, strode in amid the cheers, hoots and hollers. It was Jan. 1, 2014, and Luis had just been named chief executive officer for Coach Inc. With one of the most decorated resumes in recent times, it was no surprise that he be named CEO; the surprise came through an interview more than a year later.

With just over a year in his new role as CEO completed, Luis has made strides in entering new international markets and increasing overall sales. Prior to his arrival at Coach, he worked as CEO for Baccarat Inc., a French retail luxury brand, and headed North American operations. Luis joined Coach in 2006 and started as the CEO of Coach Japan Inc. Most recently he was acting president and chief commercial officer, responsible for all of Coach’s revenue-generating units, strategy and merchandising. Previously he oversaw Coach’s operations outside of North America as president of the International Group, and president of Retail Coach International.

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He also managed directly operated businesses in China, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan “I am passionate about Coach. And it’s my belief that the best way to truly understand what’s at the heart of Coach is to know the people

who make it run: Our employees,” says Luis.

Born in Vila Franca do Campo, Sao Miguel, Azores, Luis and his family emigrated to California at the early age of six, and finally settled in Providence, Rhode Island. “He was the most stylish of all his sisters,” explained Luis’ mother, Heather Luis, “We would sometimes be waiting for him longer then his sisters before we would leave the house.”

Luis grew up with three sisters all born within five years of each other, and life in the Luis house was anything but quiet “I remember sharing a room with my sister, Jesse, when we were very young, and my favourite part of playtime was when she would bring out the makeup,” said Luis.

The interview that aired Mar. 15, 2015 with ABC News and Luis focused mainly on Luis’ sexual orientation, something that he had kept to himself for the majority of his career “Working with Luis was always very professional, his personal life he kept to himself, and I respected that,” said Stuart Vevers, creative director at Coach.

Up until the interview, Luis had not spoken a word to anyone on his personal affairs, a strategic move for his career as he explained, “I chose to keep my personal life personal. I believe that if I had spoken openly about myself early on in my career, I would not have come as far as I have,” said Luis.

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Luis is not the only high profile businessman to come out in recent months, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, was recently quoted saying “I’m proud to be gay,” in an interview with Bloomberg Business Week (full list here <http://www.cnbc.com/id/102136592/page/2>). Cook, along with many other CEO’s have prioritized equality and social acceptance, and have spoken out publicly to encourage this.

With Luis however, the choice to keep his sexual orientation a secret was something he felt he had to do “When I was young, I learned that being gay brings labels, and labels blind people from seeing things clearly,” said Luis.

The recent wave of marriage laws was the one thing that pushed Luis to say something about himself “I was never ashamed of being gay, but I didn’t want the world to focus on anything but the brand, but now that I see how much simply talking about my orientation can help people, I would be hard pressed to find a reason not to.”

Luis advocates strongly for charity including the Coach Women’s and Educational initiatives and speaking out on himself, he hopes will bring strength to the those looking for a little inspiration “I want kids like I was to know that being gay doesn’t make you any different than anyone else, and to love yourself wholeheartedly.”

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