



*Leaders*

# Zenith with Zara

## Amancio Ortega: Founder, Inditex fashion

The son of a railroad worker, born in Northern Spain in 1936, Amancio Ortega's story is the journey from a hard-grafting delivery boy at a local shirt manufacturer, to the leader of one of the largest clothing companies in the world. A seminal moment on this trajectory involved an expensive yet simple quilted house coat,

which Ortega realised he himself could replicate cheaply. And so a kitchen table business began and the seeds of Zara, his most prominent business, were sown.

As a 'fast fashion' pioneer, Ortega's savvy vision was to keep design and manufacture simple, with sourcing and production teams working closely together to fine-tune processes.

The supply chain is carefully controlled and things like manufacturing designs with in-stock standard fabrics and using local factories enables timelines to stay tight.

Customer centricity and speed sit at the heart of the Ortega ethos. "The customer has always driven the business model," Ortega has said. Zara made its name off the back of responsiveness to the consumer, specifically catwalk-inspired styles at affordable prices. The business model is based on customer demand and therefore benefits from little wastage. At the same time, it leverages a local supply chain and is able to make stock changes from week to week, supplying stores with dozens of collections each year.

Ortega founded Inditex together with his ex-wife Rosalia Mera in 1975. It is now the world's largest clothing retailer, with brands

including Zara, Massimo Dutti and Bershka. His 59 per cent stake in Inditex has made Ortega Spain's wealthiest man with a fortune of upwards of US\$50 billion.

While most of the world is very familiar with his fashion brands, Ortega himself is conspicuously low profile. Rarely photographed or interviewed, he lives a very private lifestyle in the Galician town A Coruña, where he opened the first Zara store in 1975. Although he stepped down as chief executive of the company in 2011, the business remains firmly in the Ortega family's control with Marta Ortega Perez, the youngest of his three children, in the position of non-executive chair.

As for retirement, the octogenarian approaches that with caution. He continues to spend much of his time at Inditex headquarters. Hard work never goes out of style. [faortega.org](http://faortega.org) ■

“The key part of Inditex's business model is its human capital.”

*Amancio Ortega*



“You are built, not to shrink down to less, but to blossom into more. To be more splendid. To be more extraordinary.”  
*Oprah Winfrey*

Leaders

# Leading lady

## Oprah Winfrey: Businesswoman & host

With businesses that include her own production company, *O Magazine* and her eponymous book club, Oprah Winfrey has built a lucrative multimedia empire focused on her popular personality.

Hosting her own globally successful chat show, the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, over a 25-year period, she pioneered the style of direct, honest communication that she is now globally famous for. She uses the same winning, empathetic approach whether sitting on the couch with a celebrity or someone relatively unknown. And, she has never been afraid to tackle contentious topics, including racism and sexual harassment, always seeking to emphasise the shared nature of the issue. “The platform grew out of my desire to let people know you’re not alone,” she told *Time* magazine.

“There’s nothing that has happened to you that hasn’t happened to at least a thousand, perhaps a million other people, and the feeling is the same.”

People have always responded to Oprah’s sensitivity and warmth and have come to her when they want to say important things. Michael Jackson’s 1993 live unedited broadcast to 100 million; Tom Cruise’s declaration of love for Katie Holmes in 2005; and, in 2021, the Harry and Meghan interview; all tell their own story.

Winfrey’s influence and multi-billionaire status is all the more impressive because her backstory has so many obstacles. Her rags to riches story started in rural Mississippi in 1954 with a childhood marked by both poverty and sexual abuse. At the age of 17 she got her entry into journalism through a part-time job as a news anchor on a local radio station. From there she moved into the talk show sector, something she proved more than adept at. With Harpo Studios, Winfrey’s own privately-owned production company, she syndicated her hit show to a national and then global audience, and earned millionaire status.

Oprah Winfrey is a brand and authenticity is her trademark. It follows that she has always leveraged her leadership in areas she champions, be that child protection legislation or the endorsement of Barak Obama.

She continues to support numerous causes globally and, through the Oprah Winfrey Foundation, has pledged over US\$400 million philanthropically.

Inspirational on many levels, it is perhaps her generosity of spirit and willingness to share that has made brand Oprah so enduring. Her secret: “The big secret in life is that there is no big secret. Whatever your goal, you can get there if you’re willing to work.”

[oprah.com](http://oprah.com) ■