

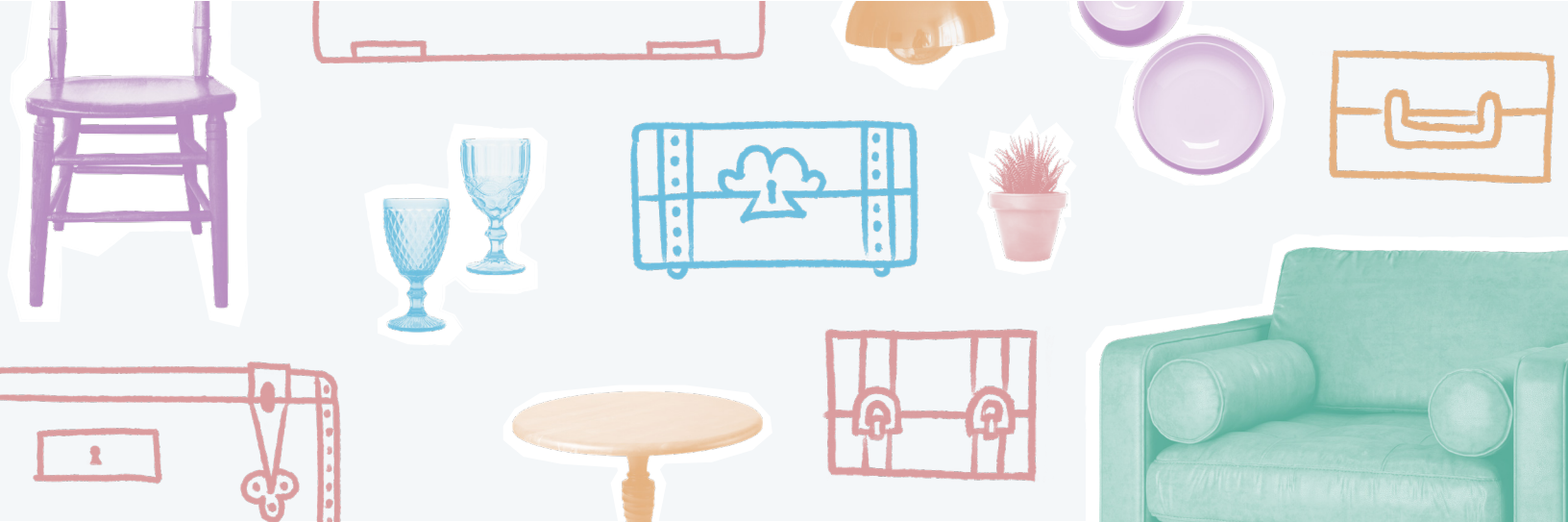
# *The* **TRUNK SHOW**

*With* RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 2 EPISODE 5



**CARVING YOUR OWN NICHE WITH  
LITTLE CELEBRATIONS**



CeCe Champion is the founder of Little Celebrations, a specialty rentals business in Boston that focuses on the kiddos. Hear how she found her unique passion and place in the industry. Plus, we discuss all things miniature and adorable from tables to sofas to chiavari chairs!



### **What's in this episode:**

- How mentorship helped grow Little Celebrations
- CeCe's business strategy for surviving the pandemic
- How embracing the power and freedom of delegation has helped CeCe grow
- Behind the scenes of one of Boston's biggest collections of little furniture



## QUOTES

“When kids go to events, they're sitting at these adult tables. It's not as fun for them or parents are telling them to stop touching the silverware... **So why not create a space... for them?**”

- CeCe Champion

“It seems like **that kind of thirst for knowledge also goes hand-in-hand with some humility**– the ability to acknowledge that you don't know everything yet but also coupled with the confidence to say, ‘I can do this.’”

-Allison Howell

“And, you know, **starting this business has allowed me to really build a backbone** to like say no, creating boundaries, respecting, or protecting my own peace.”

- CeCe Champion

“**I learned early on that delegation is key.** I am not the control freak. [...] For me initially, it was very important for me to invest in a bookkeeper and make sure I had all my numbers together so I could understand the growth of my business.”

- CeCe Champion

“When I look around at the industry, the people who are continuing to do [their own] deliveries, and especially late night pick-ups, **are the ones that burn out the fastest.**”

- Allison Howell

“The **opportunity for scale** in a business like yours is really different than a business that really requires the main principal to be the one doing the hands-on work on the day of the event.”

- Allison Howell

## EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

- Allison Howell** Hey, there. I'm Allison Howell, and this is The Trunk Show, where I talk with leaders in the event rental industry about their rental adventures. The show is brought to you by RW Elephant, Mighty Inventory Management Software designed to help you conquer the chaos in your event rental business and reclaim your creativity. Because the world needs more of the beautiful events and environments you create. In this episode, I talk with Cece Champion, Owner and Founder of Little Celebrations, a furniture rental business that makes sure the kids have a place to sit, designed just for them.
- Cece Champion** My name is Cece Champion, and I own an event rental business supporting children event rentals, kid-size children event furniture. And I started my business October 2016, so I actually just highlighted yesterday five years in this industry.
- Allison Howell** Congratulations.
- Cece Champion** Thank you so much. Yeah, so really just started, you know, in my house, just figuring out what pieces to get. So it's a blessing to see how far I've come just now having an actual brick and mortar.
- Allison Howell** Yeah, and you're in the Boston area, right?
- Cece Champion** Yes. In Boston, Massachusetts.
- Allison Howell** What regions do you serve?
- Cece Champion** I serve Massachusetts and Rhode Island.
- Allison Howell** Well, tell us about your early career.
- Cece Champion** So, it's so interesting I'm doing this, I'm in this industry, because when I was in college, I majored in public relations. So, you know, my dream was to work in entertainment. I interned at a PR firm and a lot of the events we would do was hospitality.
- Allison Howell** Okay.



**Cece Champion** And then when I graduated from college, my first job was at the Marriott and I got a concierge position working red coat, which we would help event planners come in to set up conferences or events or dinners.

**Allison Howell**      Wow.

**Cece Champion** And then when I left the Marriott, I started working on our family foundation, which was helping impact children in the community with music courses and providing free music programs in the summer for kids. And I always have been—I always had a passion to give back to the community in terms of service. So when I ran the foundation, I also got a job at the United Way, where I was hired to do signature events, helping volunteerism.

**Cece Champion** So any large volunteer projects that United Way had, I pretty much coordinated it from beginning to end, you know, just setting that vision in there. Which honestly led me to part of the passion of little celebrations with the Community Baby Shower because we wanted it to be a space where mothers that were underserved or in low income environments, we wanted them to have a place where they felt like, Wow, I have a baby shower for me. So, we would have a boutique, we would have a kids area, we would have chair massages.

**Allison Howell**      What a special experience.

**Cece Champion** Yes, it was so special. Especially, like, the kids activity center, because we had Care.com babysitters come, and everything was donated, you know, so.

**Allison Howell**      Wow.

**Cece Champion** And when I would explore kid tables and chairs, it was simply just the classroom style tables and chairs.

**Allison Howell** Sure. So very industrial feeling and not at all celebratory.

**Cece Champion** Yes, exactly. Wasn't much upscale, you know? So it was that time that I saw, well, this market only has this for children available.

**Allison Howell** Right.



**Cece Champion** And when I started planning my best friend's baby shower in 2016 in Houston, Texas, I came across the business model of upscale children rentals and I said, Wow, if we can have this at the community baby shower, it would add so much value to the shower. And I started researching around Massachusetts, New England, seeing like who had these tables and chairs. And during my search, I found no one.

**Allison Howell** Sure. So it's a very particular niche.

**Cece Champion** Yes.

**Allison Howell** Yeah. So when you were searching and you didn't find what you were looking for, did you immediately think, "I should do this"? Or did you think, "Someone should do this"?

**Cece Champion** I just felt that—I just felt like a—honestly, I prayed about it. I said, you know, I see this concept, I see this idea. You know, is this fitting for me? And I also, myself, personally, have gone through a journey of infertility. And it was like—and I literally just—it was like this nudge on me and then I started thinking of names.

**Allison Howell**      Hmm.

**Cece Champion** So it was just like this one idea of me seeing this and it stuck with me, to me just acting out on it. Like, let me just do it and just see.

**Allison Howell** Sure.

**Cece Champion** And also being able to be a gift to other parents, as well. Because I realized, you know, when I go to events, they're sitting out these adult tables not as fun for them or parents or, you know, telling them to stop touching the silverware.

**Allison Howell** Sure.

**Cece Champion** Or, you know, the kids are grabbing all the things, the beautiful decor at an event. So why not create a space for children to have something where it's activities for them? Or they can bond with other children that are at the party? Or it feels like they're sitting in the classroom because that's where they go to Monday through Friday, they go to school, they sit at little tables and chairs. So now when they go to events, they're able to walk in and feel like, Wow, this section is for me.



**Allison Howell** Yeah, well, that's really, I think, a special perspective because it seems like having kids at an event can feel like an afterthought.

**Cece Champion** Yes. Yes, exactly.

**Allison Howell** So, you have this idea, you were planning your friend's baby shower, you had done the Community Baby Shower. You saw that there was a need in your market. What happened next?

**Cece Champion** So after that, I just, you know, reached out to two women that I saw running the same business model, which is Petite Seats. And I heard she changed her name. Her name was Little Seaters, but now she's Party Vibes Houston.

**Allison Howell** OK.

**Cece Champion** She, you know, wrote me back. She told me kind of the number of tears she started with. And she and I had, you know, coming into this business, I would say she's someone I admire. She's like my mentor, someone that I could bounce off ideas with. We made a point to go to High Point, the expo in North Carolina. Was like, Let's take this trip to source some pieces, you know, and me and her took this trip together, and it just feels amazing to have someone in the same industry and you're helping one another. You're not seeing each other as competition, and she's the kind of person where she loves to just give information.

**Cece Champion** And so I can say it's more than just having an event rental space. It's also finding your tribe of the people that can actually help you bring your business to the next level. And that's personally, honestly, why I joined RW Elephant, too, because I see how much you pour into event rental, the event rental industry. You give so much information on things that we just wouldn't know, like where to start. And so that's why I invest in my business to go to conferences. You know, I take the classes I need to take so I could just learn more.

**Allison Howell** Yeah, it seems like that kind of thirst for knowledge also goes hand-in-hand with some humility, right? Like the ability to acknowledge that you don't know everything yet.





**Allison Howell** So it sounds like you've had a lot of confidence in your journey. Have there been any parts that have been scary?

**Cece Champion** Oh, yes. Last year, the pandemic.

**Allison Howell** That wasn't expected for you? Huh. Well, tell us more about that.

**Cece Champion** So. I would say, I was, you know, obviously it's that fear of like, I don't know this industry, I don't know really what to expect, but I'm just going to go with it and roll with the punches.

**Allison Howell** Hmm.

**Cece Champion** And personally, for me, anyone that owns event rentals, you understand that you're putting a lot of investment to buy the pieces.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Cece Champion** So when the pandemic came, I really had long conversations of like, you know, where is this going? The first year, I probably made \$10,000 in sales just operating from my house. And so I started to see the growth each year where it was like doubling. My sales were double. And I said, Well, 2020 is going to be my year.

**Allison Howell** Yeah.

**Cece Champion** And then, you know, 2020 started off very strong and then March comes. And in Massachusetts, we were told you have to be completely shut down for events. You know, there's absolutely no events. And I just was like, Wow, like if everything that I invested in this business is going to go away now, like what is going to happen? How am I going to pay my rents? The overhead? I just moved into a warehouse.

**Cece Champion** And so I was just like in this mode of trying to figure it out. But then by me, really starting my business with all the ducks in the row, having everything in place, it allowed me to be able to apply for all the grants that became available to COVID relief. And I was able to show, you know, the government that I am a legit business. This is the income I was bringing in.



**Cece Champion** And through that experience, I was able to have a tribe of other women that are in event rentals and tell them, Hey, you know, you need to apply for these grants. You know, and a lot of times, you know, some people are skeptical, like, Oh, I don't know. But then when they started seeing me get grants at twenty five thousand, fifteen thousand, I probably got over sixty thousand dollars worth of grants in the pandemic.

**Allison Howell** Well, that's fantastic. And I know one of the grants you received was the Comcast RISE Grant. Is that right?

**Cece Champion** Yes, yes. At the time, they were just targeting towards African-American business owners. So I had applied and I wasn't, you know, I never really get anything, so I was actually shocked like, wow, I actually got approved for this. So they came in, they gave me free security, free internet. They gave me two iPads, two laptops, like anything I needed to equip my business to help me through this pandemic.

**Allison Howell** It seems like you had to provide a lot of information in order to qualify for the program. And so I'm just wondering, did you have all of that at your fingertips or did you have to do some digging? I know sometimes as entrepreneurs, especially creatives, in the event rental industry, you know, we're not always savvy with numbers or really interested in numbers.

**Cece Champion** Yes. So I learned early on that delegation is key, and I am not the control freak. I'm not the person that's like, I need to have my hands on everything. So for me, initially it was very important for me to invest in a bookkeeper and making sure I had all my numbers together so I can understand the growth of my business. So I did that, hiring a bookkeeper, which was great because then I was just able to print my profit and losses and stuff for these grants that were available.

**Cece Champion** Because one of my mentors, she's out here in Massachusetts. When I first started this business, she pulled me to the side and said, Hey, I noticed you do these kid rentals. You're the only one in this market. You need to increase your prices. Her name is Liz. She's from—her company's called Simplistic Charm.

**Cece Champion** And she also said, I noticed her doing deliveries. I noticed that you're doing cleaning and you're doing all these things. But I want to tell you that you need to hire people because you have to focus on growing the revenue of your



business. If you're doing deliveries, your cleaning, you're repairing, and you're doing all these other things, how are you marketing or reaching other people to build those relationships to grow the revenue?

**Allison Howell** I feel like when I look around at the industry, the people who are continuing to do deliveries and especially late night pickups are the ones who burn out the fastest.

**Cece Champion** You know, I was that person my first few years, you know, picking up at one, two o'clock in the morning.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Cece Champion** You know, and I kept thinking like, wow--

**Allison Howell** Who has kids parties til two o'clock in the morning?

**Cece Champion** Right. I'm like, Oh, my goodness, I'm like kid parties til one, two in the morning. And to be honest, I had to take a step back and evaluate my boundaries.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Cece Champion** And what my company wants to take on and what my company can't. I learned in this industry to really create space and boundaries for my piece. So, you know, I stopped doing the late pick ups. Now it's like, well, pick up the next day in the morning. Or, you know, if it's a reasonable time now I charge like late pickup fees, if it is pass a certain time. And then I also for even pickup hours, I only allow pickups from like nine to twelve in the morning.

**Allison Howell** Right. There's a way in which if you can set a boundary, other people will meet it. Whereas if you just say, Oh, when do you want to come? Then they tell you the most convenient time for them, but it's absolutely the least convenient for you.

**Allison Howell** And we're back with C.C. Champion as we dove into the collection itself. Get ready to hear about one of the most niche warehouses in Boston.

**Allison Howell** Describe your collection to us. Tell us what kinds of things that you're actually renting. I know you mentioned tables and chairs, but I know that warehouse has a lot more than tables and chairs in it.



**Cece Champion** I was actually talking to one of my mentors about it because I was telling her. I said, You know, a lot of people are able to like, create other sources of income because they're able to decorate the space, they're able to bring the rentals. Me simply, I'm like, what tables and chairs you need because I have no idea what to put on this table.

**Allison Howell** Sure. Yeah, well you know what? But there's something beautiful about that, right? Because your pieces can make you money when you're not there. So the opportunity for scale in a business like yours is really different than a business that really requires the main principle to be the one doing the hands on work on the day of the event.

**Cece Champion** Right. And that's what I enjoy, like bringing the stuff there and then seeing the event planner execute their magic on the rentals. You know, just like, Wow, you really created this whole thing and seeing those pictures come back and it's pictures that I can actually use for my Instagram, you know, that are quality pictures.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Cece Champion** You know, so I've been trying to think of different themes and, you know, different collection pieces I can add together. So right now, I've been building a lot of Halloween stuff with like black chairs, orange and greens, you know, things that will stand out for October. And then looking at, you know, what pieces will go good for like a holiday, you know, New Year's, Christmas or, you know, Hanukkah, that kind of thing.

**Allison Howell** What is the most surprising piece in your warehouse?

**Cece Champion** I would say, I went to... So I love to source. So I go to thrift shops, antique shops. I, you know, source different pieces. So I have a lot of wooden pieces that are wooden chairs. And one of the chairs is from 1930.

**Allison Howell** I feel like everyone kind of obsesses over anything mini. So, I mean, just walking in and seeing the Chiavari chair—your kid Chiavari chairs next to an adult Chiavari chair makes people go, Oh, that's so cute!

**Cece Champion** Yeah.



**Allison Howell** I mean, you must get that reaction a lot, right?

**Cece Champion** Yes. And that's why other parents are like, Where do you get that? And then the parents are telling me, I told all my friends they loved it. The kid tables were ahead. And it's so funny because even if the kids don't go to the tables, the parents are like, I need this just for the esthetics of my event.

**Allison Howell** Well, tell us about an event that you're most proud of being a part of.

**Cece Champion** I would say the event I'm most proud to be a part of. There's so many, honestly, but one is the Party Muse. She actually, I think she stopped doing events, but she only geared towards kid parties.

**Allison Howell** OK.

**Cece Champion** So when she does kid parties, her parties scale for like over \$20,000, like, that's the scale she goes on. So she did this party, princess party, where she had my clear Chiavari chairs, the tables and she had got every princess to come to that party. And it was like the kids were, like, so excited because it was a princess party.

**Allison Howell** I'm sure.

**Cece Champion** You know, so I'm looking at the princesses, sitting down on the chairs, too, with the kids and every seat was filled and those kids were sitting there just, you know, eating and doing the activities on the table. And that's what I enjoy, like seeing the kids really utilized the seating area and just like--it was a beautiful event, like, it was so beautiful.

**Allison Howell** Well, and how magical for the kids to feel like their dreams are becoming reality in that space, how special that memory must be for them, too.

**Cece Champion** Yes. Yes, it is.

**Allison Howell** So let's talk a little bit about the community you built. You mentioned a couple of times Petite Seats and Little Cedars and also Bambini. And it seems to me like there is quite a community that has formed in the kids rental world. Do you think that's the case?



**Cece Champion** Yes, there most certainly has. I, you know, I would say the community piece is very intentional because one thing, Petite Seats, she's a sharer. And I'm a sharer. Like, we share.

**Allison Howell** OK.

**Cece Champion** Because, you know, in this industry, it can be very catty, it can be very competitive. And you know, it's like when you have a competitive market, kind of, you know, I think I always had the perspective, what's for me is for me, you know? And as much as I can add value as a positive lens to this community, that's what I want to do.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Cece Champion** I also, on the side, I started hosting vision board events.

**Allison Howell** Ok.

**Cece Champion** And I, you know, put that under a Little Celebration's brand. And the way I cultivate the community is a lot of event planners, a lot of people in the industry come to the vision board event, and it's their first time doing a board themselves or their perspective on is like, what are you doing? Cutting out magazines? But the feedback a year later is like, Wow, thank you so much for introducing me to this idea of like doing these vision boards and stuff because it really allowed my business to reach to the next level, or personally things that I wanted, you know?

**Allison Howell** So yeah, it seems like it helps people set intentions and really create clarity about their goals. And when you have something physical and tangible and visible to see, you're able to see that as a marker.

**Cece Champion** Yes.

**Allison Howell** Tell me where you see your business going or you yourself personally going in the next few years. How do you see it growing?

**Cece Champion** So I see myself in the next few years, one, really growing my business to business relationships outside of, you know, of just event planners, but really creating those relationships more with venues.



**Allison Howell**      Mm-Hmm.

**Cece Champion** Also, I've always had this vision, especially when I first started a Little Celebrations, to franchise it. I want to create some type of directory of everyone that has this niche and be able to tell people, Oh, you're in Louisiana or you're in North Carolina. These people are here, you know, you're in New York. Call this...you know.

**Cece Champion** Because I always give I love to refer, you know, but I mean, I do have people that's like, Can you deliver to New York? You know, can you deliver...? I also have a lot of friends that were asking, like whether they can franchise it, as well, in where they reside and stuff. So just getting that paperwork together and what that direction will look like. You know, franchising it.

**Allison Howell** Well, that seems like a beautiful vision. I kind of like that you're dreaming big for Little Celebrations. What steps do you take to grow the revenue? If you feel like you want, you know, to grow by 20 percent next year, what are those steps? What are you spending your time on and investing in?

**Allison Howell** I spend more time on being intentional with my Instagram posts because when I first started, a lot of my business just came from Instagram. Like I remember when I first started my account, I'm like, Oh wow, I have two followers and now I'm looking, I'm like, Oh, I'm almost 5000 followers, you know? And there are other people in the industry that have the same niche as me. They have, like twenty thousand followers. So I said, you know, if I'm more intentional with how I post, sharing, you know, more people will see it, which it has like. Every time I post, I get new people and new inquiries and...

**Allison Howell** Great.

**Cece Champion** I made sure to get a van and brand my van. So when my driver is out, he's getting a lot of questions like, Can we get cards? You know, I see you have this company and stuff. So that's like a billboard in itself driving down the highway, which is great. And then also talking to the people I know that have those venue relationships to figure out, like, how can I get stronger in my venue relationships, but also the larger event rental businesses that don't have what I have in kids.



**Allison Howell** Tell me what challenges you're currently facing at Little Celebrations, and what resources are you utilizing to overcome those?

**Cece Champion** Challenge was staffing, and I can't say staffing is like perfect right now, but it's exactly kind of where I need it to be. So I ended up hiring my aunt. She does my invoicing. She answers the phones for me. And since she started, all of the customers are like, She's amazing. They love her, and she works remotely. RW Elephant allows you to work remote, which I love. You just log into the site and do the invoicing as she gets the phone calls and stuff. You know, because I have, I use Google Voice.

**Allison Howell** Mhmm. Great. Well, when you look back at the five years now that you've been in business, what are some of the moments that you're most proud of?

**Cece Champion** I'm most proud of not giving up, learning, always being a sponge. You know, always being a student.

**Allison Howell**      Yeah.

**Cece Champion** Figuring out ways, how I can get better, just character growth, you know? Yeah, I would just say like the relationships built as well, you know, just being able to have those genuine relationships and being able to help one another.

**Allison Howell** Sure, sure. You have a really refreshing perspective, Cece. You're really a delight to speak with.

**Cece Champion** Thank you.

**Allison Howell** Yeah, no, I I really appreciate the the ways that you are very self-aware and that you are seeing sort of how to spend your intentions and what to focus on in order to live the way you want to live, even if not all the circumstances around you are exactly how you want them to be, it seems like you're really finding a lot of joy.

**Cece Champion** Thank you.



**Allison Howell** Thank you so much, Cece, for coming on. You can find her website and social media info in the show notes. And if you haven't already, be sure to check out the show notes link to join the RW Elephant mailing list. Stay tuned to hear my lightning round questions with Cece.

**Allison Howell** Three words that describe your collection.

**Cece Champion** Unique, trending, and what's another word? Upscale.

**Allison Howell** Great. What is one trait you look for when hiring?

**Cece Champion** Responsible.

**Allison Howell** If you could only have one type of fabric in your collection, what would it be?

**Cece Champion** Resin. Well, that's not a fabric, but like something easy to wipe because the way these kids--.

**Allison Howell** Great. A business book you'd recommend.

**Cece Champion** I would say How Successful People Lead by John Maxwell.

**Allison Howell** Do you rent, lease or purchase your delivery vehicles?

**Cece Champion** Purchased.

**Allison Howell** Two things outside of work you love to do.

**Cece Champion** Work out, travel, and eat.

**Allison Howell** Great. Would you rather pack a delivery truck blindfolded or get a last minute order for a 200 person event that's happening tomorrow?

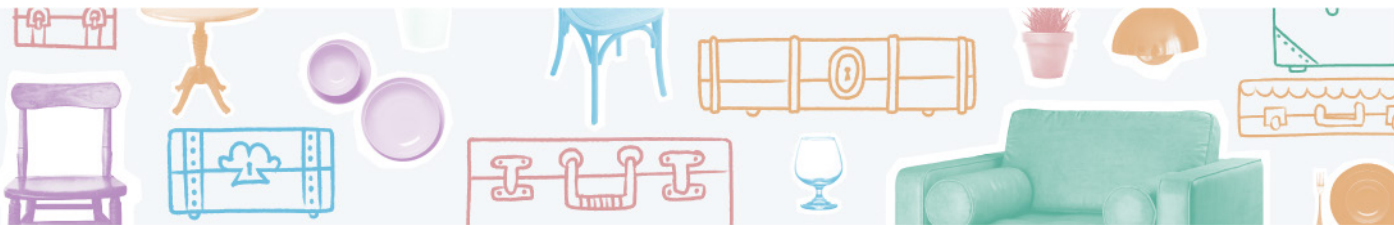
**Cece Champion** Pack a delivery event blindfolded.

**Allison Howell** OK. I kind of want to watch that. Here's my last question as we close out, what do you enjoy most about your rental adventure?

**Cece Champion** The connections, the relationships, the joy the rentals bring to the kids' faces.



- Allison Howell** Yeah, yeah. And that's really special. Thank you so much for spending this time with me. I really loved getting to know you more.
- Cece Champion** Oh, thank you so much for having me.
- Allison Howell** Thank you, Cece! And thank you for listening to The Trunk Show brought to you by RW Elephant. I'm your host, Allison Howell. Happy renting!



## **RESOURCES:**

[How Successful People Lead by John Maxwell](#)

[The Lend & Gather Conference](#)

The [RW Elephant mailing list](#) features more event industry resources and happenings—including announcements about new Trunk Show episodes!

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CeCe Champion of Little Celebrations

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