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Forces of Change: Promoting positive choices

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Promoting positive choices

After graduating from Furman in 1983

with a degree in business, Jackie Brewton jumped immediately on the corporate ladder. Moving from town to town, she didn't stay on one rung for long.

Supervisor. Customer services manager. Public relations manager. Human resource manager. During 18 years with Procter & Gamble she held each title at locations in Cincinnati, Augusta, Lima (Ohio) and Atlanta.

Working up to 70 hours a week, she was successful, and the money was good. But while her colleagues drove expensive cars and purchased pricey homes, Brewton was more frugal. She lived in a modest house and drove the same car for 10 years. All because she had a plan.

The youngest of 10 children, Brewton first sensed her true calling as a young professional in Augusta, Ga., when she began working with teen-age girls at a church. She helped them with

schoolwork and talked to them about making good decisions. The teens were drawn to Brewton's energy and personality. To many, she was a mentor, a surrogate big sister.

During a career planning discussion with her P&G plant manager in 1995, Brewton was asked a standard question: Where do you want to be in 10 years?

"Not at Procter & Gamble," she said. "I want to be somewhere making a difference in the lives of young people."

She explained that her life had to be more than just "making soap," which is what the P&G plant produced. Her manager paused, then replied, "I know exactly how you feel."

After reading *The Path*, Laurie Beth Jones' book about creating and following a mission statement for your life, Brewton knew it was time to make her move. She began researching non-profits and praying for guidance.

"It was a spiritual decision for me," she says. "I felt this was what God had created me to do. I was looking for a sign. I thought, 'As soon as God gives me a plan, I'm outta here.'"

Soon thereafter, P&G began downsizing and offered employees an attractive severance package. Brewton saw her chance. She moved to the Atlanta area with 11 months salary, health insurance and stock options.

And she began attending conferences on teen pregnancy prevention.

She went on to earn certification in non-profit management from Kennesaw State University. With certification in hand, she founded Breaking the Cycle, Inc.

Brewton initially planned to offer after-school programs for teens. But her vision began to morph into something new after she was asked to speak at a PTA meeting about teens and sex. Her talk resonated with the audience, which included a school superintendent. Word of her talent spread, and soon her schedule was filled with speaking invitations.

Although abstinence is Brewton's most requested topic, "positive choices" is the theme she weaves through all of her talks. She says she encourages teen-agers to "delay gratification and practice self-control" in their lives. By doing so today, they will reap greater rewards tomorrow.

"Play now and pay later, or pay now and play later," she tells them. "Decisions determine destinies."

Weaving thought-provoking quotes, humor and powerful true stories into her talks, Brewton connects. Before long, the heads start to nod.

"I love it when it begins to sink in, when you see that light bulb go off," she says.

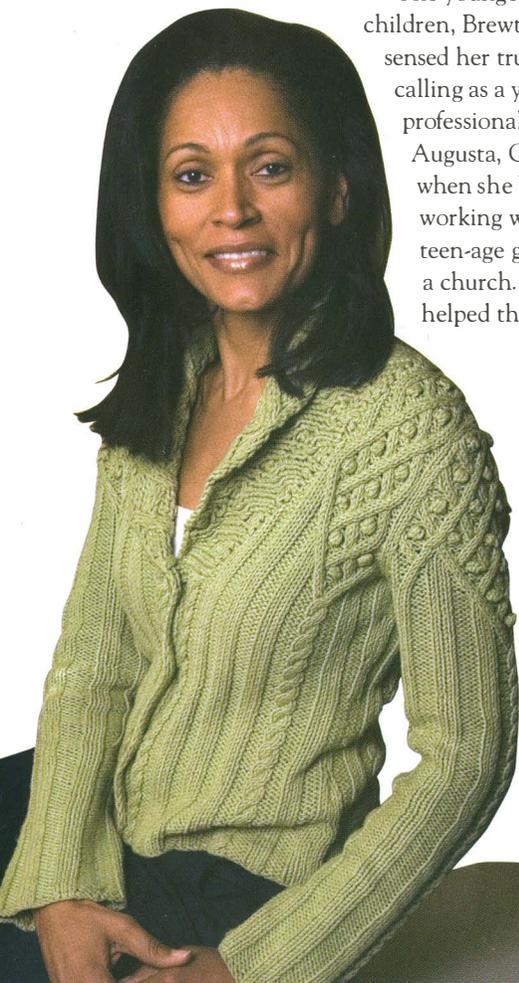
With demand for her message growing, Brewton founded MotivationN3D in 2006 to provide structure and help market her message. While high schoolers are her main target, she also speaks to college students and adult groups.

To date, she has spoken in eight states and in Africa, reaching more than 15,000 people. MotivationN3D employs one other speaker, and Brewton hopes to add more.

Though her work may lack the one-to-one intimacy she once envisioned, Brewton feels she is helping to change more lives. "I really did struggle with that initially," she says. "It's easier to see the long-term impact when you are working with a small group for a longer period of time.

"But it's hard for me to see my long-term impact when I don't see the students again after my presentations. I do get letters and lots of positive feedback, so I know that I am making them think differently about their choices."

— JOHN ROBERTS



KAY HINTON