



# Empowering WOMEN IN LAW, *Leadership, and* PAGEANTRY:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KATIE WINCHENBACH



We sat down with Katie Winchenbach, a corporate attorney, non-profit director, and USOA Mrs. Maine 2024, to discuss her inspiring journey and impactful work in advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment.





**Tell me about your advocacy or volunteer work. What causes are you passionate about?**

As a young female leader, I am committed to advocating for gender equality and empowerment. My passion lies in empowering women and dismantling the obstacles that hinder their advancement. I want to make the path to leadership roles easier for women that will come behind me. Through Ms. JD, I have been able to support and mentor aspiring female lawyers, providing them with the guidance and resources they need to navigate the legal profession. Additionally, my participation in Women Standing Together has given me the opportunity to engage locally and work to break down barriers that hinder the progress of rising women leaders in various fields. Through these experiences, I have been able to leverage my platform to champion the causes of gender equality, mentorship, and women's empowerment.

**Women's empowerment is such a key topic. What does it mean to you personally?**

To me, women's empowerment means that all women have the ability to design and realize the life that they want. For some women, that may mean advancing to an executive leadership role or starting her own business. For others, it may mean having a family. I think what is important is that each woman is able to choose her own path.

**Can you share some of your biggest achievements?**

I consider myself to be a lifelong learner, and I am always looking for opportunities where I can push myself out of my comfort zone. That led me to attending law school, where I graduated Summa Cum Laude in the top 10% of my class. During the challenging times of COVID-19 and while working full time as a corporate attorney, I earned my M.B.A. Summa Cum Laude. I was a first-generation law student, so I didn't have the connections or previous experiences that some of my classmates did. It was definitely a challenge learning how to navigate the nuances of the legal profession. That is actually when I was first introduced to Ms. JD. I used the organization's resources when I was a pre-law and law student! The guidance and

mentorship I received from the women I met through Ms. JD are a big part of my success today. It's also one of the reasons I'm so passionate about providing those resources and opportunities to other first-generation women law students.





**In such a competitive field like the legal profession, what do you think makes you stand out?**

I think my resilience makes me stand out and is part of the reason I have seen

success. No matter what has been thrown at me I have continued to put my best foot forward and make progress. I have faced the challenge of being a first-generation law student and of completing an M.B.A.



program during a global pandemic. Yet, even more difficult, I faced the loss of my mom after a years-long battle with cancer shortly before I began preparing for my first ever pageant. Losing my mom was one of the hardest things I have ever had to go through, but I looked to her as my example. No matter what she was facing, she exuded positivity and displayed incredible resilience. She taught me to always keep fighting and giving it your all. I believe that outlook has helped me in every aspect of my life, including during my pageant journey.

**On top of your career and volunteer work, you also compete in pageants, how has pageantry impacted your life?**

Pageantry has helped me to gain so much confidence. As a mid-size woman, I definitely felt self-conscious. I didn't think there was a place for someone who looked like me in pageantry, fashion, or modeling. Being in such a supportive environment has not only boosted my confidence, but has also opened doors to me that I never thought would be open.

It has also helped me build my public speaking and presentation skills, which benefits my work as well.

**What is the legacy you hope to leave behind?**

I hope to inspire and pave the way for other women to pursue their dreams fearlessly. In law, I aspire to leave behind a legacy of breaking barriers and advocating for gender equality in the legal profession, ensuring that women have equal opportunities for success. In pageantry, I hope my legacy will be one of kindness, confidence, and using my platform to advocate for meaningful causes, inspiring other women to use their voices for positive change.

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