



Empowering Excellence:

A Conversation with
Katie Day Winchenbach,
USOA Mrs. Maine, on
Pageantry, Leadership, and
Impactful Initiatives

In this insightful interview, we delve into the multifaceted world of Katie, USOA Mrs. Maine, who seamlessly combines her passion for empowering women with her unique experiences in both pageantry and professional leadership development. As the Program Director for Ms. JD, a national nonprofit supporting aspiring women attorneys, Katie shares the impactful journey of creating the Law Student Leadership Academy Intensive. This initiative bridges the gap between legal education and leadership skills, fostering a community of empowered women poised for success in the legal profession.

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Katie, as USOA Mrs. Maine, you’ve mentioned your volunteer work planning events for rising women leaders. Can you share a specific event or project that stands out to you, and how it has made a positive impact on the women involved?

I serve as the Program Director for Ms. JD, a national nonprofit organization that supports aspiring and early career women attorneys. A couple of years ago we launched the Law Student Leadership Academy Intensive, which is a two day leadership development program for women law students. That was one of the first programs that I helped to create for Ms. JD and it really fills a void for rising women leaders in the legal profession. Law school teaches students how to be a good lawyer, but it doesn’t teach them how to be a good leader. And as you know, leadership skills are critical for women to be able to achieve career success and to be promoted to senior management roles. It’s inspiring to see the women law students who go through the Leadership Academy Intensive apply the skills they learned and develop into strong leaders who will make significant impact through their work.

Being involved in pageants requires a unique set of skills and experiences. Can you tell us about a particular moment or challenge during your pageant journey that helped shape you into the confident and accomplished woman you are today?

United States of America’s Mrs. Maine pageant was my first pageant ever. I entered with the goal of learning about pageantry and raising awareness for the nonprofits I work with. Never did I imagine that I would get as much out of this journey as I have. I think the biggest thing that helped to boost my confidence is the other women I have met and the encouragement they have given me. From my pageant coach to my fellow delegates, they were there when I felt insecure or nervous, giving me pep talks, helping me choose my wardrobe, and making me feel like I truly was a queen.

Your commitment to empowering women is evident through your volunteer work.





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How do you believe your pageant experience has contributed to your ability to inspire and support other women in their journeys toward leadership and success?

My pageant experience has made me a more confident person and has shaped the way that I carry myself and that I communicate my passions and my work. By participating in the USOA Mrs. Maine pageant, I have had the opportunity to speak in front of large audiences, share my personal experiences, and raise awareness about important issues affecting women. This has allowed me to inspire and motivate other women to find their own voices and stand up for what they believe in. My pageant experience has also helped me develop strong leadership skills. I pushed myself outside of my comfort zone and did something that required learning new things, believing in myself, and facing challenges. All of those things strengthened my determination and taught me that I can do even more than I thought I could. I hope to inspire other women to believe in themselves and pursue their dreams no matter how daunting they may seem.

Planning events for rising women leaders is a significant undertaking. Could you share a memorable success story or achievement that highlights the impact of your work on the women you've been supporting?

What really inspires me to plan events for rising women leaders is the energy that is at the event and the testimonials women share when the events are over.

Many of the women who attend the leadership development and professional development events I plan were hesitant coming into the events. They know they will learn some valuable tips, but they don't fully grasp how valuable the workshops and the networking opportunities will truly be until they've been through it. It's uplifting to hear these women say that the connections they made and the skills they learned were life changing and to see them get new and exciting opportunities from being at our events.

Many people may not fully understand the world of pageantry. What misconceptions do you think exist about beauty pageants, and how have you used your platform to challenge or change those perceptions while representing USOA Mrs. Maine?

One common misconception about pageants is that they solely focus on physical appearance. What many people don't know about, likely because they don't see it, is that a large part of the pageant is the interviews with the judges. The judges truly are looking for someone with a strong platform, community involvement, and who will use the crown to make a difference. Tied into that misconception is the idea that there is a «pageant look». I thought that as a shorter, mid-sized woman I would not be able to win a pageant. The truth is that pageants focus on celebrating the diversity of the contestants and encouraging women to embrace their unique beauty. I hope that by showing up as a curvier queen, I will empower women to define beauty on their own terms.