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Moraga Mom Makes Backpacks and Donates 1-for-1 to Needy

By Diane Claytor



Sydney Paige founder Courtney Brockmeyer (center) with her daughters, from left, 10-year-old Paige and 9-year-old Sydney. Photos provided

A sign hanging in the entrance to Courtney Brockmeyer's immaculate Concord warehouse reads, "She believed she could. And so she did." Those eight words succinctly describe Brockmeyer.

Admittedly strong-willed, the Moraga mom started her own high-quality backpack company, Sydney Paige (named after her daughters) three years ago. And like Brockmeyer herself, Sydney Paige is not a typical company; with a tag line of "giving back together," Sydney Paige implements the "buy one, give one" business model - and then takes it up a notch.

A Southern California native, Brockmeyer spent many years working very long hours in the corporate world. When, at the age of seven, her oldest daughter asked why she worked so much, "I cried," Brockmeyer said. "I didn't have an answer she could understand and I started asking the same question. Why was I working so hard? What was I doing? And I decided, then and there, that I could never be asked that question again and had to make a change."

Brockmeyer clearly understood herself. A workaholic, she said, "I knew I could not be happy staying home." So she decided to start her own business. But then new questions arose. "It was an open slate. What did I want to do?"

While at Nestle USA, Brockmeyer worked on growth initiatives. This role gave her the opportunity to meet lower income consumers in their homes, often shopping with them to observe food purchasing habits. She saw their struggles. When contemplating a new business, "There was one thing I knew for certain," she said. "I wanted to give back more, help people more. I wanted to make a difference." With those goals in mind, the memories of the kids she met while doing market research at Nestle and her strong belief in the importance of education, Brockmeyer honed in on the idea of making - and filling - high-quality backpacks.

"Kids just want to fit in," she said. "They know they're poor, but they don't want to stand out because they don't have a nice backpack or school supplies. Education is the most important way to get these kids out of poverty." Brockmeyer knew she couldn't solve the problem of 16 million American children living in poverty. But she could give many children from lower income families the confidence and tools they need to succeed in school.

With the support of her family, Sydney Paige was born; its mission is "to promote the importance and enrich the life of a child in need while empowering those more fortunate to help break the cycle of poverty..." Brockmeyer thought the buy/give model was "brilliant," she said, but she wanted to raise the bar. "Instead of giving something cheaper," she explained, "I decided to donate the exact

same backpack as the one purchased - and fill it with school supplies. And I wanted customers to be able to choose where their matching donated backpack went, because it's such a personal decision."

With plans in place, Brockmeyer was ready to begin selling the personally designed, colorful backpacks in 2014. But then her husband was transferred to the Bay Area. "So, along with our belongings, we moved hundreds of boxes of inventory to Moraga." Brockmeyer said. "My garage, along with three storage units, were filled with backpacks and school supplies."

Three months ago, Brockmeyer moved into the Concord warehouse, making life much easier. Pallets of boxes line the walls. With Asher, her six-month old Golden Retriever, by her side (and chewing anything in sight), Brockmeyer is almost a one-woman band. She sells, markets, designs, manages inventory, does the bookkeeping, packs and ships, and sweeps the warehouse. She has several helpers, including two other Moraga moms - Tracy Feldman and Tenaya Garrett, described by Brockmeyer as "'My VPs of Everything'...These women have so much heart. I couldn't do it without them." She looks forward to the day when she is profitable enough to actually pay them a fair salary. Her husband, Dale, along with her two daughters, have also been known to sort, pack, move and ship.

For Brockmeyer, whose passion and enthusiasm for what she does shines through, this is just the beginning. Her goal is to start a nonprofit foundation, providing college scholarships to lower income students.

"I'm super passionate about helping these kids," she said. As a student at Pepperdine University, Brockmeyer was awarded a scholarship created by the Chancellor in memory of his son. "It was a huge deal to me. I felt very grateful and honored. I want to do the same thing and I want it to be personal. Just as Dr. Runnels did for me all those years ago."

Her girls have never again asked why she works so much; they understand that while she still does, it's all for good reasons.

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