



Pivoting Her Way to a Thriving Stay-At-Home Business

Guest: Debbie Bromley

Shelley Hunter: You're listening to the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. I'm your host, Shelley Hunter, and this is a place where we talk to people who recognize the Lord's hand in their lives, and specifically in their careers. Today, I want to introduce you to Debbie Bromley. For over two decades, Debbie and her husband, Dave, have worked with thousands of youth producing a fast-paced song-and-dance revue patterned after their own experiences as part of the BYU Young Ambassadors program.

The company is called Showbiz, and I estimate this power couple has worked with, I'm guessing, about 2,000 kids, ages 5 to 18. They've performed at large venues, gone on to performance and service tours, and have been instrumental in providing early training for some kids who have gone on to perform in college groups, television shows, and more. It all started with a little group of teenagers. Even at its heyday working with 160 kids in a single season, Debbie ran the program out of her home, allowing her to pursue a career she's passionate about while also taking care of her family. I ask Debbie to take us back to how Showbiz started.

Debbie Bromley: Dave and I met in a group called the BYU Young Ambassadors that you may or may not be familiar with, but it's a performing group at BYU. They really are truly ambassadors and they tour internationally so we went on lots of tours all over the world. We had seven tours between us, I think. Middle East, all over Asia, just everywhere, two worlds fairs. We were performing both as college students and as paid professionals in some cases.

We both always knew that that was something we wanted both our kids to experience and then to allow other kids to experience it who may not have that opportunity in college or in other ways in their life because they were so much more to it than just the singing and dancing. That was the key for us. We wanted them to experience all of the other good things they could learn through having that experience.

Shelley: Besides the singing and dancing, what is it you wanted the kids to experience?

Debbie: In class, there's a lot of things that the kids were learning. A lot of character building, respecting one another, teamwork, just like you would think of a sport, it was very similar. We depended on each other. Having the courage to do things that were maybe outside of your comfort zone. That was something that we're really focused on. Besides the things they were learning just in class, besides the singing and dancing and teambuilding and all of that, we added another element which was the service.

Our mission statement was we believe in building the character of youth through the magic of song, dance, and service. The service on it was key for us because lots of times, kids that are involved in the performing arts tend to be a little self-centered because the profession in and of itself is about that. You get critical of yourself. You are always having people look at you, you're performing. Our goal was to turn that around on kids and help them realize that their talents were pretty special and God-given and that the real purpose of them was to help and uplift other people.

Shelley: I love that.

Debbie: One of our goals was then to take them to orphanages, boys and girls clubs, senior citizen centers, wish foundations, those kinds of things where they could see the world and use their talents in a different way. It was pretty amazing to watch a kid who loves to have the attention, lives for the applause to then go and instead of being on stage where you're blinded by the light and the audience is dark, those faces are right up close and they were able to see the difference they could make in someone's life. We also took donations and supplies. When we visited, the kids would collect different things for the different organizations and that added another element. We'd usually stay and talk and chat so they learn those interpersonal skills, approach someone, and thank them and ask about them. Anyway, I get excited when I talk about it. [chuckles]

Shelley: Yes, I know. I love it though.

Debbie: Those were the important things to ask.

Shelley: You're young ambassadors, you and Dave are the performers, and you see this as something you guys want to do with your own family. Where is the transition between Dave and Debbie on stage and now, founders of this thing called Showbiz?

Debbie: We both had done, like I said, quite a bit of performing professionally and semi-professionally, but we've realized- even outside of being ambassadors, even in the bay area, I had done commercial acting and some things early on, but there came a point where it wasn't really conducive to family life and for Dave of his career as an attorney, but it all started when his little sister expressed an interest. It wasn't too long after we had been out of college and moved to the Bay Area. Originally, it started with a group of teenagers for his little sister and her age group.

That went on for a few years and then we realized we were having our kids and again, became not conducive to our family life [chuckles] because we were having to leave our young kids to go--

Shelley: You're littles.

Debbie: Yes or they would be there with us. I remember having Jacob in the swing at rehearsal [laughs] because we're doing it in the evening when Dave was finished. We thought, "Why are we doing this? Our kids are old enough. We want them involved now." I think Josh was maybe seven. Our first group was a group of elementary school kids. We put this little group together and it grew from there. We've pretty seen Jacob joined the group. He was really on the younger and so we made the group for him. [laughs]

We moved over to Danville with those two groups and then it grew from there. Around age groups of our kids and in between. More people wanted to be involved. It was a great social atmosphere for our kids and for their friends to be able to come. We did not audition. We just wanted kids to come and experience and learn.

Shelley: What I heard when I moved to Danville was you have to get on the waiting list of Showbiz. In the rest of the world, people were on waiting list for preschools. [laughs] The Showbiz had such a big presence that people told me that and I thought you know it. My daughter, she's so shy. Thank you for telling me about it. She will not do anything like that. I discounted it thinking that wasn't for us. The second thing I recall is like you said, you don't do auditions. One of the really magical things I've felt about Showbiz was that everybody gets a solo. Young ambassador is not like that.

Debbie: Business, in general, is not like that. It can be a little cutthroat. We wanted this to be a lot more encouraging [laughs] for everyone gets a chance and can learn and to do something that maybe they didn't think they could do. Do something hard. I think we have lost the art a little bit of doing hard things in this day and age if it's too difficult. We just quit. We just don't do it.

Shelley: I can attest to that because like I said, Ali was so shy that I didn't put on anyone on a waiting list, and we happened to be there at the time. You had some couples groups, different age groups and then you added a preteen or tween age. One of the girls said, "You know just Ali will going to do this." I was like, "There's no way." [laughs] She just will not do this. I asked her, and I think the groundswell of the other girls doing it is what made her say yes and it changed her life.

Debbie: I'm so glad she did it. It so fun to watch her sing. I'm so proud of her.

Shelley: Oh, my gosh. This is going to make me emotional, but it changed her life. I was shocked, jaw on the floor at the very first performance. She actually had the mic in her hand and singing her little solo. [chuckles] I never imagined she would do that. Now, as you mentioned, this is what she loves to do, to be at the heyday. How many kids did you have in Showbiz at any one time?

Debbie: Had about 120 a year. Six or seven working groups with about 20 plus kids in each one.

Shelley: Talk to me about the business side of it. How did that come about?

Debbie: That's actually really interesting. It started because it was what we loved because we wanted other kids to experience this, but all of my personal experience, and really it was my business. Dave helps in every aspect of it. He's an amazing technician and he, of course, is an amazing performer, but he has a job. [laughs] He has a career. I was in charge of this. My background and all of my training was in the performing arts, so I knew a lot about that and I didn't know a lot about business. [laughs] When I first started, that was an adjustment for me.

It evolved and I tend just to be nice. [laughs] Played the nice person. I had to learn good business skills. It was, in the beginning, very helpful as a supplemental income as we were really young, starting out family so I had to learn to manage that side of it. It was a process and that was okay. I went from not requiring a monthly tuition

to saying, "Oh, I got to do this," because, otherwise, my income was fluctuating depending on who had a birthday party that they would rather go to that week during class. I had to sort of learn the business and just by doing.

Shelley: Logistically I know you converted your garage to a dance studio. When did that happen?

Debbie: Initially we had rented space often on different places that we went and again found it not the most conducive with our growing family, so we just decided that we wanted to have it close to home. We started out in the garage just using the garage and then we eventually added onto our garage and made a studio space, which was awesome because the kids could come if they needed something they could come out.

As I had more people helping, they could come out and help with their homework or someone hurt their finger I could help. Whatever it was. I was close by and they knew that and it was comforting to them. They were all very involved from the beginning and they all had an interest in different ways in it, all participated but they all kind of were invested in the idea of it as well.

Shelley: You also didn't do it all year round. What was the season?

Debbie: That changed interestingly enough depending on what was happening in our family. As our kids grew we had four boys so guess what they all liked to do as well. They all liked different sports. We started out year-round and that was hard on not only our family, but I think all families to maintain that for a long time. We decided to make it a shorter focus and some seasons we did things at Christmas and some we didn't.

It evolved to where we did January to spring and then we were finished when school was out and that's what in the end what worked we had a pattern going there.

Shelley: At some point, you brought in helpers?

Debbie: As it grew, I really needed that help. We had leaders in charge, mother and father leaders in charge of each group that would handle a lot of the communication and help in the class. We had people that I brought in for choreography and extra help with the kids that way in the creative aspect of it as we got bigger and as the other kids got older and really accomplished and as I got older as well. It really helped to bring in younger dancers that could help keep up with those teenagers.

Shelley: Then each season culminated in a performance and a service tour, correct?

Debbie: Exactly, so we delayed our local performance so that all of their family and friends could come and see the fruit of their labors, and then we also would go on a service tour sometimes locally or somewhere not very far away. Then we did do DC, Hawaii, New York, Florida, all over the place.

Shelley: The thing that amazes me so much is that the kids, some of them they did were very talented and they did go on to do more things but a large majority that was the most they would ever perform in their lives.

Debbie: Right.

Shelley: Some people were scared of public speaking, public singing that's what they want. Solos, that's scary.

Debbie: It is scary but from the first day I would talk to the kids and help them all realize that we were all on the same team and that we were all good at different things and that we were going to be all just trying things that were new and scary but then we were going to support each other. We didn't laugh at each other. We were always encouraging and they bought into that from day one and they were so supportive of each other.

Some were great dancers. Some were great singers. Some were just good friends. They were very helpful, but you know what, some of those kids had talents when we got to those service venues where some of the performers may be way a little more hesitant. Those other talents came out and so they learned to appreciate each other for their individual talents.

Shelley: That's interesting.

Debbie: To accept their limitations as well and that's okay.

Shelley: What was the moment that you decided to sunset the showbiz program?

Debbie: Our last son went through the program and had been out for several years, and I had had a back injury for about probably over 10 years, honestly, that I just kept reinjuring. We were having grandkids, and Dave and I had been asked to help with a project outside of showbiz. There were some things ongoing at BYU. We knew when the time was right and I had gone into the doctor and he'd said, "You're how old and you're doing what?" [laughs]

I was trying to explain to him what it was. What is that that you're doing? He told me that with my age I had to take it easy for a while and let that heal or that my body was not going to be there for me later on. We knew that we were going to need to step back for a little while. I still have been teaching voice and helping with projects here and there. I kept showbiz going, the idea of it, as kids have come through.

There is thought eventually to maybe start something different, again, reinvent it for grandkids when that time comes on a much large scale.

Shelley: Your boys, all four of them performed in Showbiz?

Debbie: They did.

Shelley: Have all of them gone on and done more?

Debbie: They all performed in college, three of them with the young ambassadors like Dave and I did and then our youngest Jason with BYU Vocal Point.

Shelley: I know you guys are musical and some of that would have happened anyway, but do you have a sense that their success has been driven somewhat by this literal training ground they grew up in?

Debbie: Oh gosh. I hope so, Shelley. That was the hope, all of it, that they could do hard things, that they would have music as a lifelong sense of enjoyment and dance, and they would build those interpersonal skills, that they would have confidence in themselves. That they would be able to feel God in their lives, that they would enjoy serving people and that that would be a lifelong habit for them. That has been the hope for all the kids but for my own in my heart as well.

Shelley: What was the biggest leap of faith that you had to make?

Debbie: Almost interesting that you talk about faith because I feel like everything about this endeavor required it because when you have a group like this, you are starting to learn numbers for a show that won't happen until months down the road. You already have a venue, you know that you put money down on. You've had investors and all this music. You have people on a tour somewhere that are waiting to see you.

All of those things, the roadmap would be laid out before I even met with the kids the first day and so it was an incredible leap of faith every year. Initially, it was very organic. I think when you find something to do that you really love and that you really believe in, we did this. It wasn't scary necessarily. We felt driven to do it and almost led to do it and it wasn't really about the money for us over perspective of the whole thing.

The other things were a lot more important to us but anyone who would have wanted to do that as a business, you can. It can be done that way. I think we find something rather than you're driven it's less scary but the faith to keep going year after year and to make those plans and do that was just an act of faith every time.

Shelley: Debbie I know that the youth and the people who worked with you were tremendously blessed, but it was an unexpected blessing for you, something you couldn't see for yourself.

Debbie: There were so many things. The love of those kids, first of all. They become kind of an extended part of your family. Anytime you serve anyone, you love them more. The time we spent with crazy teenagers who were hoping hearing something during class, gosh you just love them. That community, that sense of community I don't know that it was an unexpected blessing maybe not on the scope that it has become and having the kids feel such a part of that community.

Shelley: I would imagine if I had the ability to reach out and do survey to all of them, I think you would be amazed that the number of youth that you've touched in a lasting way.

Debbie: I hope so, Shelley. I've learned all those things with them along the way. We had one of our jokes was being cheerfully flexible. It's up on our wall. Still we have little things that I would say all the time on one of the years the kids got the little vinyl lettering for some of my mantras that I would repeat in their third year. That was one, be cheerfully flexible because you never know when you're on tour if your outdoor venue is going to be rained out and you're going to be crammed into a little tiny theatre and have to revamp your entire show on the spot, but it turns out to be one of the most memorable experiences dancing with the families and the IOC. Sometimes when you choose to be cheerfully flexible, something amazing happens in return. That was just one example. Something I hope they learned, that I learned myself.

Shelley: What advice would you give? You've already mentioned it, but what advice would you give for somebody who wants to start let's make it not performing arts specifically, but they want to do a business like this out of their home that it's going to be some service class teaching type of thing. What advice would you give to somebody like that?

Debbie: I would just say, go with what you're good at, start in a place with something that you know, be willing to learn things that you don't, yet there's always going to be a learning curve, and that's okay. It's okay to have it change and morph and grow as you learn, you try something and adjust it, just be willing to take a chance. I think it's exciting to be able to still do what you enjoy and have the home life that you want and even the possibility of including your family in that process.

Shelley: I love that. What haven't I asked you about the business side that I should have?

Debbie: The other thing we chose to do is to keep it a certain size. It had people ask different places like franchise and we really felt strongly that we wanted to keep it small because a lot of it was so much of our ideology that we didn't want that to change somehow.

Shelley: You wanted it to stay what you had felt inspired to create.

Debbie: Right, and what that is for each person will be different and what each individual is able to manage in their own personal situation would be different and that's okay.

Shelley: Right. Well, that takes me to my last question. How have you seen the hand of God in your career?

Debbie: In every way. I think I've seen the hand of God creatively in the shows we've designed and how we've designed them and how we've involved the kids in tours that we've planned and the people that we've met, the ability to recognize the hand of God in those things, and the opportunity to also let the kids testify through song and dance and even spoken word, and just my gratefulness for the ability to use, to be an instrument in the Lord's hands at times, different circumstances, but really, in every way, being able to learn the things I've learned on the business end, too, because that wasn't my natural aptitude, but that came and that I was able to see we need to do this, now I need to do this. That changed really in every way.

Shelley: I love that. Debbie, thanks for joining me on this show today.

Debbie: Thank you for having me. It was really fun to relive and to think about. It's funny that you say that because we have been entertaining the idea of what this could look like in the future.

Shelley: I love that.

Debbie: Or scale.

Shelley: Yes, I've been thinking that the whole time like, "What is Showbiz 2 going to look like?" That's exciting.

Debbie: I don't know yet. It's just this little wheel that's been turning inside me thinking to see what happens or if the Lord takes us in different direction.

Shelley: Ever since I had the idea to start this podcast, I wanted to interview Debbie because I'm very interested in finding actionable at home businesses, or side gigs that have been successful and Showbiz by any measure has been a profitable financial venture, though I for sure know they never charged what they should have.

In talking to Debbie, it's clear to me that the money wasn't the driving force behind this business after all. What stood out to me is how much the Bromleys had to adjust the business. As interest grew, their family grew and their goals evolved. In the business world, we would call this a pivot. As I started to add up the pivots Debbie made, well funny enough, for this dancer it might look more like a pirouette or some other type of a dance move, and it's no surprise that one of her mottos is being cheerfully flexible.

Here are some of the pivots I noted. First of all, she changed her professional career when it was not conducive to Dave's career. She started with a little group of teenagers and then pivoted that when she had small children. Then they pivoted

again when they wanted to add their younger kids into the showbiz platform. They grew into more groups, they had rented space and brought the business home. Debbie changed it from a year-round program to a seasonal program. They had to adjust the way they charge for the business. Are you dizzy from all of these pivots? Me too.

I hope you see that starting a business like this is all about trying something and making adjustments. Like Debbie so humbly admitted, she had all the talent and ability needed to teach song and dance and performance, but she did have to learn the business side of things. That's all part of learning. Don't let fear stop you from taking a leap of faith on your own if that's what you feel driven to do.

Thank you for joining me on the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. It's my hope that listening to this episode will inspire you to think more broadly about how your career and your spiritual journey intersect. If you like that idea and want others to have a similar epiphany, then please share this podcast on social media, leave a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts, or leave a comment on the website. Doing so will help others find this content as well.