

By Assarine "Ashley" Morgan

It's 3 am and Assarine "Ashley" Morgan is awake and praying, keeping in mind her mother's words "God walks at 3 am." She has a strong belief in God and asks for his help throughout each day. It has been only three hours since she lied down to rest. After a day filled with classes at Fayetteville State University and balancing the responsibilities of her cleaning business "The Dust Bunny," the single mother of two young children, still must take care of her family. In just a few hours Ashley's daily routine will reset and she will begin again.

It is true that challenges in life multiply and become more complex with age. While not all college students understand this, there is a group that must balance work, family responsibilities and classes. According to the Department of Education 13 percent of adult students were single parents in 2011. Fueled by the desire to achieve and provide for their families, these students define the non-traditional degree seeker.

Ms. Morgan initially obtained an Associates degree in Arts in May of 2010 from Fayetteville Tech Community College before enrolling at FSU. At FTCC 18 to 27 credits each semester helped her complete a fast track to education. A traditional undergraduate student might find this workload overwhelming, however, for a single mother, like Morgan, it was the only way she felt should could meet her educational goals. She graduated from FSU last May with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and expects to graduate again from FSU with a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Communications this May.

Most adult students are also employed to meet their financial obligations. The economic downturn in the past five years has driven many people to seek additional jobs and alternative sources of revenue. The weight of an uncertain economic future has prompted some individuals, like Morgan, to try their hand at entrepreneurial ventures. Morgan has been operating her company "The Dust bunny" since Dec. 2010.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor of 2010, five percent of college students were in business for themselves, an increase from 2007 when only 2.2 percent of students reported owning a business. Another survey conducted by the Young Entrepreneurial Council suggested students went into business to supplement their income from daily jobs, to meet the increasing cost of living, and 23 percent reported it was because of unemployment. In addition, individuals found that social media had made it easier and cheaper to market their products and services, allowing them to engage in small business ventures. Small business owners face high risks of failure as more than 50 percent of small businesses fail after four years, according to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

Owning and operating a company was not her first choice, Morgan, a Jamaica native, initially sought to enlist in the Army. However, her father did not believe it was a woman's place to be a soldier, and so Morgan went on to other pursuits. She performed exemplary in all her subsequent job opportunities, as her belief in her own ability and mental composure remained strong.

The struggles of a female working parent and non-traditional student reveals, that their greatest stumbling block lies within the perceptions of society. Society is still not receptive to the idea of women who assume the role of breadwinner and take on competitive positions in the business world. In some instances, family and friends are the biggest roadblocks who discourage them from pursuing further education and careers. Not all women have been fortunate enough to get jobs with benefits and sufficient financial security. The choice to continue with their education or to accept minimum wages is presented and they must decide. Morgan continued her education because it would guarantee a better job in future, and hopefully a better life as well.

Their continuous plea is for the society to have an objective look at their capability. This is because they look at their wide responsibilities not as a hindrance but a motivation to be proficient. The other struggle they have to contend with on a daily basis is the ability to plan. Unfortunately, planning skill are not an inherited trait, but are learned as one grows and faces challenges.

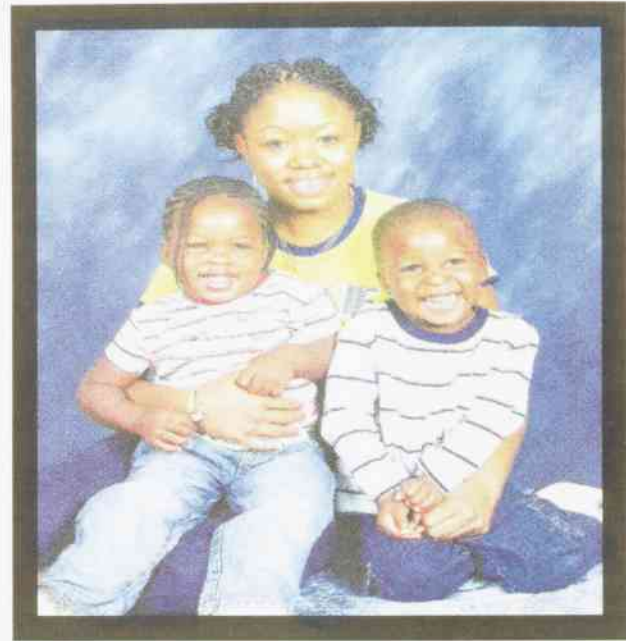
A good number of college students juggling work and parenting have acknowledged the possibility of failing at some point. The failure was not inevitable as a result taking on too many responsibilities, instead failure often results from an inability to plan. Those who are able to stay the course and hone their planning skills are able to derive immeasurable benefits.

In addition to all of the physical and, at times, emotional challenges the greatest test remains to be one's mental perception. Obtaining educational goals while simultaneously carrying on other responsibilities require a great deal of composure.

Success in all endeavors requires that an individual remain focused. While there have been many cases of successful student entrepreneurs, the truth is that many more try and fail. A large number of them lack the required support to succeed while others are bogged down by the challenge. Again, the latter has largely to do with one's mental strength. The one thing that has been common to all those who have succeeded is great composure and a never say die attitude.

Despite the many obstacles entrepreneurial college students and single parents face, most of them feel satisfied with their achievements. They choose to focus on the things they have accomplished and the bright future ahead. Furthermore, their greatest satisfaction comes from seeing their families, especially their young and ambitious children, continue to give their love and support. Moving forward, the driving force for this group of students remains their families and the strong social groups they have surrounded themselves with. This explains their attachment to those people who matter most, because being human means at some point they will need a shoulder to lean on.

Another common characteristic to success is their steadfast believe in God. Many, like Morgan, remain pious as they are convinced it is through God that their plans will be actualized. Ultimately, this group of people hopes to pass along their strong work ethic, self-reliance, confidence, belief in education, and trust in God, to their children. They are convinced that this is possible because they have been able to live it and their actions have spoken louder than any words.



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