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Leah Brown
Founder & President
A10 Clinical Solutions

Healing the world

Why A10 Clinical Solutions' mission
to make a difference matters to you

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Leah Brown

Healing the world

The story of A10 Clinical Solutions and its founder, Leah Brown, is one of hope, promise and the kind of redemption that can not only inspire, but help, the masses

By Michael J. Pallerino

After 18 months of meetings and clinics and working her fingers to the bare bones, Leah Brown woke up one morning with a revelation she couldn't shake. It wasn't the kind of revelation that's consistent with the person whose "fear nothing" motto so passionately defines each and every step she has ever taken.

In Leah Brown's well-documented journey of passion and promise – a journey that has taken her from a law career in New York City to the pharmaceutical clinical research world of North Carolina's Triangle – middle-of-the-night revelations are not something that come – or that she offers up – so easily.

Yet, truth be told, Brown, the fearless founder and president of A10 Clinical Solutions, Inc., was struck with a reality that scared her: "I might be a statistic." In the world of entrepreneurs, the numbers show that nearly 90 percent of new businesses fail after the first year. But A10 was nearly two years old. And the company's mission statement, at least on paper, was something that everybody she visited with in those early days could embrace and get behind: to be the clinical powerhouse healing the world.

The promise on paper of what A10 could be was of little solace to a single mother of two boys who had no income flowing in for the foreseeable future. Well-educated, well-armed with all the resources the Cary business community could offer; and poised with a passionate spirit that some

– at the very moment her life shifted from preeminent-attorney-to-be to the founder and caretaker of a company that remains on the cutting edge of healthcare research and disease prevention.

As a 25-year-old working in Manhattan for a major Fortune 500 company in the

“I knew that we were going to do this and make a difference. When you have an opportunity to do something special, to impact something that touches and concerns pretty much everyone in the world, why wouldn't you sign up for that?”

say is unbreakable, Brown pushed on. She took a second mortgage on her house and used the remainder of a severance package she had received from a previous job to keep the A10 dream alive.

We'll stop the story there – for now. As the Leah Brown story continues to play out, it is important to start from the beginning

mid-'80s, Leah Brown seemingly had it all: great job, a burgeoning income and a future filled with all the trappings the big city could offer. She also had family on the Upper West Side, where her father's youngest brother lived in a bachelor pad overlooking Columbus Avenue. For Brown, it was a place of rest and solitude.

Up close and personal with Leah Brown



As inspirational and energetic as she is business-oriented, Leah Brown believes that staying focused, innovative and constantly on your toes is the key to success. Following are some of her thoughts on how she got to where she is today.

Make sure that whatever it is you do falls within your comfort zone, because you have to be passionate and comfortable with what you are doing.

I don't know if being a woman or a minority ever helped me. It just was what it was. It was my passion, and you can't fake passion. It's either there or it is not. I knew in the back of my mind that I was doing this for a cause, and that cause was to impact the world.

People would be surprised to know that we have collaboration areas with nice couches and chairs that we use as our nap area. We don't want our people to struggle. Take your power nap and move along.

The most important thing on my to-do list is to make sure I say I love you to my children (Christopher, 19, and Clayton, 16).

The most important traits every leader should have are the ability to have no fear, the ability to make decisions and be inspirational.

Best advice I ever received was to stay true to yourself.

My biggest role model is Nell Merlino. She is the person who founded "Bring Your Daughter to Work Day" and the "Count Me In" programs.

It was like something out of a movie. They threw parties together, with the culturally diverse combination of his metrosexual friends and her business associates taking in countless hours of lively debates.

But midway through 1987, her uncle fell ill. Diagnosed as HIV positive in a time when the AIDS virus was a scary and newly deadly disease, he died several months later. The day – December 27, 1987 – is one she will never forget. Angry and confused, she lamented over the fact that there not only wasn't much that could be done for him, but that there wasn't even enough information available to seek proper treatment for anyone with HIV/AIDS.

In a world where pain and anger can either destroy or inspire you, Leah Brown chose the latter. She admits to sulking in misery; she'll surrender that much. But in the years following her uncle's death, she started to re-channel her negative energy into an unrelenting focus to form a company that could provide clinical testing of the biologics that were impacting the African-American communities.

In late 2004, A10 Solutions, Inc., now A10 Clinical Solutions, was formed. Today, the company provides customizable clinical solutions and unprecedented service that result in getting lifesaving, innovative and investigational new drugs to market faster and safer through the quality management of critical clinical trials. The company's revenue continues to increase – from \$6 million in 2008, to \$8.3 million in 2009 and \$19.7 million in 2010. This year, A10 is on target for \$30 million.

"Seven years ago I knew I was going to take this company and use all the knowledge and best practices that I had available to me. Was it daunting? Yes. I was always questioning myself. As soon as I answered one question, I'd ask, 'Did I do the right thing?' There are always questions. There are always self-evaluations. If you're not doing that, then you are not doing the right thing."

Of law and medicine

Leah Brown knew that if she was going to enter the healthcare field in any way

that it would have to relate to the law. That was the attorney in her. It was what she was comfortable with.

But to enter the always innovative, always daunting world of clinical trials, you need money. A fiscally conservative person by nature, Brown knew that she would have

"When somebody comes to work for A10, they are 100 percent there. I want them to be there; I want them to feel good; I want them to be engaged; I want them to feel that passion every minute that they are working on our behalf."

her work cut out for her. "The whole idea of clinical trials was all wonderful and great, but if you don't have any money to keep things going, it could be problem. So the big picture became: 'I had this great business idea, but how am I going to finance it?'"

There also was the fact that if she was going to enter this world, she was going to need knowledgeable people to help guide her through the processes. That meant hiring high quality clinicians right out of the gate. "The people that I initially brought on really cared and had a passion for the A10 mission. Some stayed. Others moved on. The ones who stayed did so through all the highs and lows. And there were some really difficult times here. There were points where we had nothing, zero, as in a donut, revenues for the first 18 months."

But Brown and company kept plugging away. A10 eventually landed its first clinical study with Talecris Biotherapeutics, which produces critical care treatments for life-

threatening disorders in areas such as immunology, neurology, pulmonology, etc. After Talecris gave the company its first break, A10 sought a major pharmaceutical company to add to its fold, something Brown calls a true sign that the company had arrived. Before long, it landed Merck & Co. and GlaxoSmithKline, two internationally recognized companies that put A10 on the clinical research "A" list. Soon after, other Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies came aboard. "I knew that we were going to do this and make a difference. When you have an opportunity to do something special, to impact something that touches and concerns pretty much everyone in the world, why wouldn't you sign up for that? Why get a job? I wanted the journey."

Stay true to the mission

It would be easy to say that the A10 story only gets better from here. But Brown doesn't believe in resting on her laurels. When she sets out on one of her many public speaking engagements, she likes to remind people about the story of PeopleExpress, the defunct airline that burst onto the scene in 1980. Aided by an explosive expansion plan, it ascended to \$2 billion in revenues by 1984. Plagued by a number of questionable management practices, the airline failed soon afterward.

Brown tells the story with the passion of a preacher, succinctly pointing out that the difference between success and failure is to not believe your own hype. So, as A10 continued to bring on more and more people, the PeopleExpress story weighed heavily on her mind. She kept reminding herself to be patient and stay true to the mission statement.

To help control growth, yet still stay true to its mission, A10 became selective in what areas it devoted resources to by leaning toward the therapeutics that had the highest impact to communities that traditionally experienced healthcare disparities. That meant focusing mainly on HIV, infectious diseases and women's health issues such as oncology.

Brown also started focusing on innovative programs that helped companies focus on their employees (See *The A10 Team of*

The A10 Team of Services

A10 Clinical Research provides FDA approved turnkey clinical trial solutions, from management to research studies and clinical testing, contributing to the health and well-being of patients. The program helps determine the safety and efficacy of medications, devices, diagnostic products and treatment, tests how new medical approaches work in humans in order to find improved methods to prevent, screen for, diagnose or treat diseases, and performs studies to answer questions about certain diseases or health issues.

A10 Clinical Care operates and manages eco-friendly on-site occupational health clinics for employees and their families by conducting routine medical care, health-management counseling, generic medicines and lab exams conveniently at the client's work location. The program controls ongoing cost increases in employer healthcare benefits, provides trained clinical professionals focused on improving employee health, and provides early intervention, diagnosis and improved clinical outcomes to produce healthier, better-educated, highly productive employees.

A10 Clinical Government provides research and technical expertise to government agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health, in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals. The program supports research for governmental studies involving chronic and acute diseases, health promotion and maintenance, symptom management, health disparities, care-giving, self-management, end-of-life, and provides up-to-date information through conducting federally supported clinical trials for a wide range of diseases and conditions.

A10 Clinical International develops international coalitions dedicated to identifying and replicating successful community-based solutions to improve health conditions and disease prevention. The program provides a wide range of research services to speed up the drug research and development process for pharmaceutical, biotech, and nutraceutical companies interested in conducting clinical trials overseas.

A10 Special Payroll Services provides clients with the opportunity to quickly on-board personnel, while placing the resource on A10's payroll, which allows its clients to utilize the skills of former employees, retirees, contractors, or seasonal and temporary employees. The service provides back-office support and payroll funding to clients, while offering minimal liability for contract personnel, provides human resources, payroll and benefit administration solutions, funds and prepares the payroll as well as assumes all mandatory tax and legal liabilities, and enables a company to resource "as-needed and when-needed" without adding employees to its payroll.

A10 Clinical Career Coaching develops programs that help professionals exceed their goals. A10 is a specialist in the clinical arena with contracts in international pharmaceutical companies, clinical research institutions and leading biotech firms, including reviews and updates of resumes; reviews and updates cover letters; and personalized one-on-one or group clinical-career coaching.



The A10 Way – Awards & Accomplishments

- NCIMED (North Carolina Institute of Minority Economic Development) MBE (Minority Business Enterprise) of Excellence Award (2011)
- Working Mother's Most Powerful Moms; Entrepreneurs (2011)
- *Fortune* Magazine's Top 10 Most Powerful Women Entrepreneurs (2010)
- *Inc.* Magazine's "Fastest-Growing Privately Owned Companies in America" No. 92 (2010)
- *Inc.* Magazine's No. 5 Fastest-Growing company in Health Industry (2010)
- *Inc.* Magazine's No. 1 Fastest-Growing African-American Company in America (2010)
- *Inc.* Magazine's Top 10 Fastest-Growing Woman Entrepreneurs (2010)
- Carolinas MSDC Supplier of the Year (2010)
- Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Carolinas (2010)
- MEA Magazine (a publication of the Minority Enterprise Executive Council) Top 50 Powerful Minority Women in Business (2010)
- U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency's Atlanta * Regional Minority Service Firm of the Year (2009)
- *Enterprising Women* Magazine 2009 Enterprising Women of the Year Winner (2009)
- Minority Enterprise Development Week (MED WEEK) Minority Business Service Firm of the Year (2009)
- Minority Supplier Development Council (MSDC) of PA-NJ-DE Supplier of the Year Class II (2008)
- *Black Enterprise* Magazine Emerging Company of the Year (2008)
- *Business Leader* Magazine Impact Women Business Owner (2008)
- Make Mine a Million \$ Business Award (2007)



The A10 Clinical Solutions team continues to receive recognition for its outstanding contributions and efforts.

Services). One of those programs is A10 Clinical Care, which operates and manages eco-friendly on-site occupational health clinics for employees and their families by conducting routine medical care, health-management counseling, generic medicines and lab exams conveniently at the client's work location. "When somebody comes to work for A10, they are 100 percent there. I want them to be there; I want them to feel good; I want them to be engaged; I want them to feel that passion every minute that they are working on our behalf. That is something that we bottled up into a service that we are selling to our current client base – and others."

In an economic climate where so many companies are working double time just to keep their heads above water, A10 is continually working to innovate itself. On one side, it is a very traditional clinical research company with alliances to the many regulatory and quality standards. And on the other, it is a healthcare solution provider that is changing with the times by filling, what she calls, the many healthcare gaps that exist.

For example, Brown wants to take the company international – where she says there are too many people living without the proper resources. "I've been doing a lot of travel to South Africa, China and South America. It is a very long process to build

relationships across the oceans, but I believe there are opportunities for innovation in many of these countries."

In the face of it all, Brown maintains that success means never having to say you're afraid. "Fear nothing. Fear can cripple you. It can stop you in your tracks. Whenever I have a bad day and things seem impossible, I always say to myself, 'Aim right in the middle of it, get all the data you possibly can, surround yourself with good people who can help you through, make a decision and stick with it. Period. I've been wrong sometimes. But if you're not making mistakes, you're not learning.'"

As a highly successful, African-American, woman entrepreneur in an ever-changing healthcare environment, one might think the journey still faces too many cons. Brown doesn't see it that way. "I don't really see cons. People always ask me if I've ever been discriminated against because I'm a woman or I'm a minority. I don't know because I don't even acknowledge it. I'm only looking at it like what we are doing is so impactful and so beneficial to the communities and people we serve that I refuse to look at any cons. My first responsibility is to my company. I have to make sure my company is strong, my employees are well taken care of and that we continue to do what we set out to do." ♣



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