

LAEL COUPER JEPSON

Founder, SheChanges. Helping women know who they are and what they want.

By Melanie Brooks | Photo by Lauryn Hottinger

The SheChanges office is a cozy oasis overlooking Fore Street in Portland. There are big windows that wash the space with light. There are inviting couches and periwinkle walls. There's a big, fluffy, squishy rug. There is hot licorice peppermint tea. And there is Lael Couper Jepson.

She talks with her hands and her arms, radiating exuberance. At one point she gets up to grab a notebook and pen, jotting down notes from her own quotes. It seems that she never stops thinking, considering, fitting pieces together. "I'm simultaneously writing three books in my head right now," she says laughing. She is a smart, driven, unapologetic woman whose experiences and passions formed her business, SheChanges.

In 2002, Jepson was working for a large corporation. She was attending its annual retreat, something she had done for the previous eight years. But this time it was different. Nine months pregnant with her first child, she walked into a huge room filled with white men. She looked down at the floor. She was barely able to see the tips of her shoes poking out from beneath her bulging belly. It was the first time in her life that she felt completely out of place because she was a woman. She was stunned, then angry.

For years she had been "one of the guys." She came to the realization that she had been diminishing the fact that she was a woman for years—downplaying her education, tolerating a lesser salary and feeling lucky that, as a woman, she had landed a job working for a Fortune 500 company. It was a revelation.

Three years later, Jepson left the corporate world to start a consultation and life coaching business catering primarily to women. She works with people (men included) from all over the country who seek change and want to be active in that search. "I don't like slow change;

"I work with fear and desire," says Lael Cooper Jepson, whose work is focused on women and men who seek change.

I don't believe in it," Jepson says. "I like to start fires. My work is blowing on the embers of people's fires."

While personal and corporate coaching and consulting is the backbone of her business, Jepson's monthly women's circle, her writing series and live improv/storytelling events—called SheSpeaks—are a huge part of the SheChanges community. "My business has to be about what fulfills me," Jepson says. "It's an intersection of where I'm happiest and where the need is." Her women's experiences happen over the phone, in person and on stage. "We have conversations about what it's like being a woman. When you hear someone else say your innermost thoughts, you take them more seriously."

"Dreaming and planning get in the way of movement," she says. "I work with fear and desire, and I don't work with people who don't want to engage both." Many of the people she works with say their sessions with Jepson are like bumping up against a live wire.

Jepson has been described as inspiring, funny and refreshing, but one of the big misconceptions people have about her is that she's fearless. With her big energy, big ideas, a big heart, she's an extrovert who is not afraid of conflict or contradiction, but she's not always moving mountains. "Solitude inspires me," she says. And she tapped into that inspiration when writing her first book. It took Jepson years to have the courage to start the process, but once she did, it took only 20 days to finish putting her thoughts on paper.

"Unscripted: A Woman's Prayer" was published at the end of 2015. "I wrote it for me, knowing it would be of service to others," she says. Jepson is a voracious reader—a word-girl who chooses her vocabulary carefully and intentionally. A big part of her work with her clients is helping them find their own words to vocalize who they are and what they want. "Nine times out of 10, what's holding my clients back is emotion. They're scared, afraid, insecure."

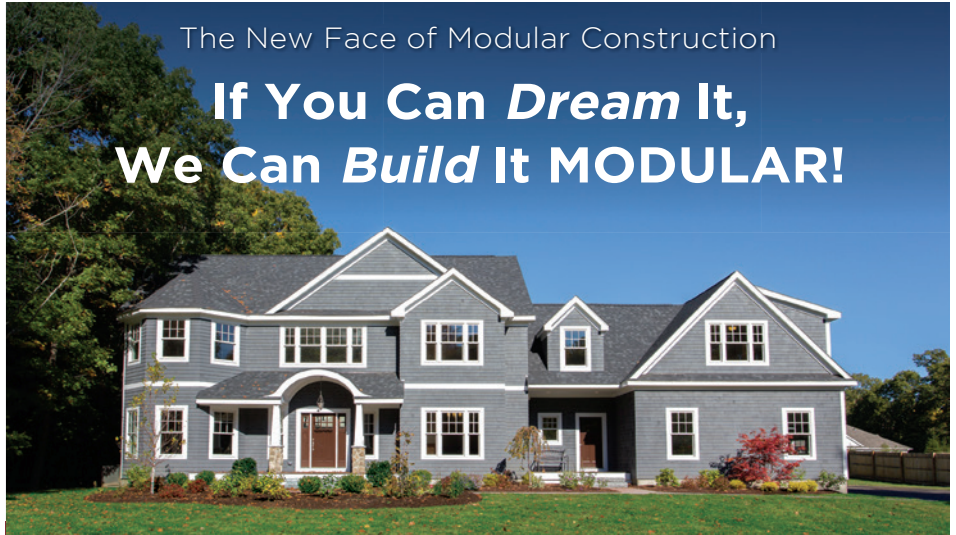
Jepson knows she could have decided to ignore the feeling she got when she entered that room full of men over 11 years ago. She could have kept her corporate job, her title. The people she works with are usually in the same boat. "I work with brave people who are saying 'yes' to something they could say 'no' to," she says. "My clients hire me for accountability and structure. We meet every two weeks for at least three months. They can't hide."

And they don't want to.

Melanie Brooks loves to write about Maine. Her work has been published in magazines and blogs throughout New England.

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