

Joan Higginbotham

Retired NASA Astronaut, Rocket Scientist, Electrical Engineer, & Third African American Woman in Space

Breaking Barriers: An Astronaut's Inspiring & Winding Road to Space. Becoming an astronaut wasn't always a dream for Joan Higginbotham – she wanted to pursue a career in electrical engineering. But when NASA called, she answered. After 9 years working as a NASA rocket scientist, Higginbotham was one of 6,000 people to apply and 122 to be interviewed for the astronaut program. But, ultimately was not chosen. Not a fan of taking “no” for an answer, she didn't give up and went back to school to receive another graduate degree – becoming accepted as a NASA astronaut candidate in 1996. An inspiring story of the power of seizing opportunities, a strong work ethic, and never giving up, Higginbotham shares how she became the third-ever African American female in space. Captivating audiences by taking them aboard her STS-116 space shuttle mission to the International Space Station (ISS), she reveals how preparation, passion, and perseverance were key to her successful voyage into space and how the lessons she learned during this journey blur the lines between Earth and space.

Managing Stress in High-Stakes Environments. Retired NASA astronaut Joan Higginbotham is no stranger to working in high-pressure environments. In this talk, she draws on her time working through demanding situations – not only in space, but also on the ground participating in 53 different space shuttle launches with her colleagues' lives on the line – to offer a unique perspective on dealing with stress and challenges under pressure. Through preparation, hard work, bonding with your team, and not letting yourself feel defeated, Higginbotham will demonstrate to audiences how to power through any challenge and handle high-stakes operations like a NASA astronaut.

Down to Earth: Driving Corporate Social Responsibility & Social Impact. Since retiring as a NASA astronaut, Joan Higginbotham has been actively involved in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) space. From managing the Bioko Island Malaria Control Project at Marathon Oil and supporting communities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico through corporate contributions at Lowe's to directing CSR at Collins Aerospace (formerly UTC Aerospace Systems), Higginbotham speaks from experience on how to create a stronger corporate social responsibility identity. She'll provide the strategies she's used to drive social impact across sectors, and share how audiences can do the same.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion from an Astronaut's Perspective. The third African American woman to travel into space, Joan Higginbotham draws from her experiences as part of the integrated crews (also known as the “mini United Nations” crew) that carried out space mission STS-116 and the space station crew to lead a paradigm-shifting session that illustrates the power of a diverse team working together to accomplish a shared goal. She further explores how the overview effect, a cognitive shift in awareness after seeing Earth from space, enabled her to break through one of the biggest diversity, equity, and inclusion barriers of all ... accepting people for who they are.