

Women, Community, Energy – Tabatha Bull

Aanii, Boozhoo, Wachay, Segoo

Tabatha Bull Indignikaaz, Nipissing Indignibaa, Migizi Dodem.

I want to thank you Elder Lavalee and the White Pine Dancers for the opening this morning. What I plan on sharing today is much more personal than what I would normally speak about and I am hoping the opening will give me strength to share honestly – and not cry.

Before I begin, I would also like to thank Michael Classens at the IESO and Emma Sharkey from the Ministry of Energy and the entire team of people who have worked hard over the past few months to put these two days together. It's quite incredible to look out at this room of almost 300 people from close to 100 communities and know that everyone is here to learn and talk about energy planning and conservation in First Nation communities. I think that's a success in itself.

When Michael asked me to be part of the panel on Women, Community and Energy, I immediately said yes. But when it came time to prepare what I wanted to share, I struggled with what to focus on. There seemed so many directions I could go. From the outset I appreciated the freedom to not speak solely about IESO's commitment to Indigenous communities, or our programs or plans – there will be lots of time to discuss those topics over the next two days.

Because I had the benefit of seeing the registration list I took a look at how many women would be attending. The last time I looked we were just shy of 100, which isn't insignificant, but in a room of 300 I think there is still a way to go. When I graduated from electrical engineering in 2000, I was one of 19 women in a class of 120. I will let you do the math on how old that makes me later, but that equals 16% of the graduating class.

Today less than 13% of all engineers in Canada are women. I want to emphasize that by no means do I think you need to be an engineer to work in energy, in fact we definitely need people that aren't engineers, we need leaders, environmentalists, people with business acumen – like my fellow panelists and we need technicians, lawyers, finance specialists and facilitators. However, if we look at the workforce across the entire electricity sector in Canada, only 25% are women.

I am excited to see that the percentage of women here today is higher than 25% and much higher than you would see in a Board room or at a conference that wasn't focused on First Nation communities. I think that's a reflection of the importance of women and the recognition of women's strength and knowledge in our communities. And that makes me very proud.

When I learned that we were expecting close to 50 youth delegates here today – I decided that's who I was going to speak to. Partially because there are days I still think I fit into the youth category and then am surprised when I remember that my oldest son is closer to that category than I am. So what would I say... to my younger self? And what can I say that doesn't sound cliché or "easier said than done"? And for those in the room who aren't youth, hoping some of what I share is relatable to you as well.

Well ... I think I would tell my younger self a few things about my fashion choices and my Toni home perms ...

But those regrets haven't affected where I am today (and that list is long), so I will stick to three pieces of advice. I provide these pieces of advice with the utmost respect and humility to the youth here as I am sure many are wiser beyond my years.

If I could tell younger self three things, the first would be...

1. **Set a goal** – it doesn't have to be a crazy pie in the sky lofty goal, and it doesn't have to be set in stone or completely planned, just set some goal. And make sure that it's a goal you can believe in, that is based on something that means something to you, in your heart. Because there will be days that you will need that belief to return to. As Shannon said in my bio, I went into Engineering with a goal to someday help my own community and other First Nation communities. I wasn't sure exactly what that would be or what that would look like and I didn't graduate and start working with communities right away. I worked at various places and in different fields throughout school and after graduation learning and building knowledge until I felt I had enough technical background and was mature enough to take on this role –(and to not cry in front of a large audience). I know I am not moving mountains, I know there are others doing much more than I and there are many days where I wish I was achieving more. There are days when I feel the work I do is so small and I wonder if it is making a difference at all – like a small pebble in a big lake. But by ensuring that the small things I do each day are affecting some change no matter how little and believing in that change, I get to the next day. And of course there are days when I feel that the small ripple my pebble made is being felt on every shore and those days I think – wow – here I am, I'm meeting my goal let's keep going.

2. **Understand who you are.** Believe in that person and surround yourself with people who believe that person as well. I didn't grow up on a First Nation and I currently live here in Toronto. My grandmother lost her status when she married my grandfather, and although my father grew up on Serpent River First Nation with my great grandmother and extended family and we spent many summer vacations and holidays there, we were not band members. With Bill C31, my grandmother and father regained their status and with Bill 3 so did I. My parents now live in Nipissing, are active community members and we spend as much time there as possible. My boys play over 60 hockey games a year here in Leaside, but the 6 games they play as Nipissing Warrior in the Little NHL are what they look forward to every year. We are blessed to feel that we belong to two communities. I have always been proud to be a First Nation person and it has never mattered to me whether the Indian Act saw me that way or not. I recognize that my experience is different than many of you and I am always honest about all the things I don't know about my own culture or may not understand about growing up on reserve, and that only helps me to learn more. But there are times when I feel caught between two worlds or I worry that people may see me as a fraud or challenge me because I didn't grow up on reserve and don't currently live there. However, there are many more people who have supported me, who believe in me and those are the people who will lift me higher and push me to set further goals.

Lastly...

3. **Take care of yourself.** Don't be afraid to take a break, to ask for help, and ease off on the pressure. This is one I am still learning. Being away from your home, your community or your family is not easy and it feels like a tug of war. Last Tuesday for example, I took the latest flight possible to Thunder Bay so I wouldn't miss my youngest son's hockey game and when I came home on Thursday I went straight to the arena for my oldest son's game. Because being there to watch them play enables me to keep going. Quite often the mountain will seem too tall or the goal may seem too far away, and you need to ease off on the pressure you put on yourself. I am still learning to respect that sometimes I need to recharge and to know that I can only do my best work when I am my best self. The benefit we all have in this room in our work is that First Nation people are able to find humour and laughter in most any situation which definitely helps with the pressure and they understand better than most the importance of connecting with your family and home.

So, I want to say thank you to all of you for coming, for taking time away from your families and communities (and maybe for missing a hockey game) and coming here to share with us. This event has been something communities have been asking for and we have been talking about since I came into this role and, it is always rewarding to witness a dream (no matter how

small) come true. I do hope that you all enjoy your two days here, I hope you all feel safe to ask questions and share your thoughts, ideas and concerns and I commit to you that we are here to listen and do our best to bring those thoughts and concerns and ideas forward and to try to mould them into policy and programs that work for your communities.

Dream big, work hard, stay focused & surround yourself with good people like those in the room today.

Miigwetch.