

Kathy Sendall Keynote Address  
*New Frontiers, New Traditions, July 6, 2000*

Thank you very much. I was both pleased and flattered to be invited to speak to you this morning. Pleased, because, although it has been a number of years since I last visited St. John's, early in my career I spent LOTS of time here when I was working on the embryonic stages of Hibernia and Terra Nova developments. And flattered, because there is so much expert opinion on the subject of Women in Science and Engineering represented in this room, and to think that Mary thought I could possibly add anything to this body of opinion!!!! As a result, and because Mary told me that I can speak on any subject that I choose, I thought that it might be smart on my part to NOT speak about Women in Science and Engineering! It did occur to me that there is one subject that I can profess to be an expert on and that is my life: my experiences and my learnings as an engineer and as a leader, and I thought that I might share some of that with you today. However, as you have undoubtedly noted, I am a woman and I am an engineer so perhaps some of what I will talk about will have relevance to the subject of this conference. (I suspect that the organizers just uttered a sigh of relief that I am not going to talk about exploration and development of oil and gas or the workings of the internal combustion engine or some such thing!!)

When I reflected upon what I might talk to you about, I cast my mind back 20 some odd years to when I was an engineering student and I considered what my expectations were, at that time, about what was going to happen to me when I graduated and what my priorities were. Now, as near as I recall, they went something like this:

1. GET RICH ..... now I wasn't quite sure how this was going to happen but I was certain that it couldn't be too tough. Ironically, my husband's name is, in fact, "Rich" so, in some sense I did "GET RICH"
2. Invent something important that would have worldwide impact and get my name on a formula or in a textbook
3. Become the CEO of a big company within 5 years (I think this one and the GET RICH one were somehow tied together). I wasn't too sure how this was going to happen either, but deep down I was convinced that, armed with a technical degree and lots of willingness, it ALSO couldn't be too tough.

Well, suffice to say, apart from "getting Rich" in some fashion, none of the above transpired. My career path has been twisted but the journey has been VERY interesting. And along the way, I've learned a lot that was never taught to me in university. I've learned that engineering is as much about leadership as it is about

technical excellence and I've learned that leadership is all about values.

To my first point, there is no doubt that the acquisition of key leadership skills is essential for the successful engineering professional today. The company that I work for, Petro-Canada, like many other organizations, has an exhaustive inventory of technical skills by which we gauge the competency, AND PROMOTABILITY of all our engineering staff. But we also have defined a comprehensive list of those multi-disciplinary, so-called "softer" skills that we expect our engineers to possess, in ever increasing amounts, as they progress in the organization ... LEADERSHIP SKILLS. To illustrate, let me quote a few of the leadership behaviours that we have defined that go hand-in-hand with those leadership skills:

- Recognizes individual and team effort
- Coaches others by showing and telling them what it takes to be successful
- Demonstrates passion for learning
- Faces difficult experiences with guts and tenacity by telling it like it is
- Holds things together during tough times
- Holds self accountable for outcomes
- Reveals personal standards and ethical limits
- Relishes LEADING

SUCCESSFUL ENGINEERING HAS A LOT TO DO WITH LEADERSHIP. Now, I will not stand in front of you and tell you that a solid technical education and achieving academic excellence is unimportant (certainly NOT in front of this crowd!). I WILL tell you that it is the required "table stakes" to play the game. But, I will further assert that, critical to the success of the engineering professional, be they male or female, particularly in the next decade, is the development and integration of those other, traditionally, "softer" skills.

Now, I am also not going to stand here in front of you and tell you that I am the best engineer or the best leader that you have or ever will come across. But I have worked hard over the course of my career to develop a degree of technical competency and, as importantly, I have struggled to acquire those skills that contribute to excellence in leadership. So I thought that I might share with you some of those deeply held, personal values that I use as the anchors for my leadership style and approach and in which any success I MAY have achieved is rooted.

*A person who is trusted has great power. If I want to be trusted, I must be principled in my behavior. I do not contravene my values. I take a stand on significant matters. I*

*keep my word. I pursue my mission in life and work with excellence. I treat others with respect and fairness.*

This collection of words, along with four other quotes that I will share with you this morning, some written by me...some written by others, have extraordinary importance and significance for me. They have sat under the glass on my desk and I have read them every morning before I start my workday for at least a decade. For me, they are not merely a collection of words, but the definition of how I have chosen to live my life. And for me, leadership and success are less about WHAT you do, than they are about HOW you do it.

I have taken this important statement and distilled it into a set of principles and behaviors that I have consistently worked to apply (and I read these every morning as well).

- *Never compromise on matters of principle and standards of excellence.* In other words, be prepared to die on the important hills and never, ever accept second best.
- *Be persistent and never give up.* Loosely translated, a strong streak of stubbornness never goes amiss.
- *Have a vision of where you are going and communicate it often.* How can you expect anyone to follow or support you if they can't clearly see where you are going and why it is good for them.
- *Know what you stand for, set high standards and don't be afraid to take on tough problems in spite of the risk.* No explanation required I think.
- *Spend less time managing and more time leading. Lead by example.* Along with this one is my deeply held belief that I never expect people I work with to do anything that I am not prepared to do myself. This means NOT going home when everyone else is working until 2:00 in the morning on a big presentation. It means never underestimating the value of cheerleading and a leader's presence when people are going above and beyond the call of duty.
- *Bring out the best in others. Hire the best people you can find, then delegate authority and responsibility, but stay in touch.* A belief in the abilities and growth potential of others is essential and it is important to allow them the space to grow and demonstrate their skills. They may not do it in quite the same way as you would but the flip side is that you would have to do it yourself, overloading you and making them feel inept. BUT, never confuse delegation with abdication; skills are rarely built effectively when people are thrown in the deep end without a life preserver and they will NEVER forgive you for it. And I firmly believe that NO-ONE ever looks good by making others around them look bad.

- *Have confidence in yourself and those around you and trust others.* I am going to speak, for a moment, as a woman to all the other women in this room. I think that the confidence thing is very difficult for many of us as women. In technical and leadership roles, we are still feeling our way and often are still seen as an anomaly. But developing that aura of self-confidence is extremely important, for a couple of reasons. Let me give you an example. I recently was given some fairly significant recognition in Calgary, the nature of which is unimportant for the purposes of this story. Now I have never considered myself anything other than an ordinary person, so my reaction was one of embarrassment, shock, horror, astonishment...you name a negative reaction, I had it!

Upon reflection, it occurred to me that my reaction to receiving this recognition was a VERY female one. How many of you in this room, when being recognized for an accomplishment, or even being given a compliment, react with "It was nothing" or, "Not a big deal", or think, "I am not worthy", or, "They must have made a mistake or mistaken me for someone else!" Come on, put up your hand if I have described you!

I will contend (and there are many studies which agree) that, in general, this is, indeed...a VERY female reaction and a marked contrast to that of our male counterparts.

And to illustrate...compare my reaction (or yours in a similar circumstance) with the reaction of the guys that you know....think about the basketball player swaggering off the court after a good game...saying "I played pretty good, eh? or, receiving a compliment as if "it was only natural" or, as one of my male counterparts, the recipient of several recent awards, remarked to me, "he was proud to be receiving some good recognition."

Whereas we, as women, always seeking the level playing field, are forever hanging our heads and mumbling "It was nothing" or "you shouldn't have".

Now, I think that this has at least two inevitable results. First of all, I think that it has a big impact on our individual and collective self-confidence; and secondly, it tends to mask all the truly wonderful accomplishments and contributions that women make in this world.

First, the self-confidence thing ..... how can we project that aura of self-confidence, which, I contend is VERY important in being successful at anything you do, if we are constantly thinking, "I am not worthy", in the dark recesses of our minds. So I

am going to share with you a little story and a trick on how to project self-confidence (even when you don't really feel that way).

Anyone here ever nervous about speaking in public? Put up your hands. Anyone ever seen a speaker who appears so self-confident that they project an aura of power and competence even before they open their mouth? I will tell you that for most people, that is very much a learned behaviour and one where you can apply lots of tricks to help you get there. Let me give you an example.

My daughter, Courtney, who just completed her first year of science as a student at Acadia, is a singer. Now, Courtney has been performing in public ever since she was a little girl, with excellence and a high degree of comfort. But, when she was about 15, she went through a real crisis of confidence, had terrible stage fright, and, I'll tell you, some of her performances were pretty darn terrible, as a result. (Believe me, attendance at some of those performances were not proud motherhood moments!) However, shortly before one very important performance, her voice teacher provided her with some interesting coaching. "Courtney, he said, "I want you to march out on that stage, throw back your shoulders, and mentally say, 'I am Courtney and I spit in your face!'" Well, as strange as it sounds, I watched that girl walk out on stage, throw back her shoulders, pause momentarily...and then open her mouth and sing with the most beautiful sound I had heard in months. It was all a question of that "confidence thing," of believing that she could be great. So, remember this little trick and try it...it works !! And by the way, when I walked up here this morning, squared my shoulders and took a deep breath, what the heck do you think I was thinking about?

And now to my second reason ... The disservice we do all women when we fail to graciously accept recognition and celebrate our accomplishments. To illustrate, I'd like to read you a quote I recently came across by someone named Marianne Williamson and I think that it will mean something to all of you, irrespective of your religious background or belief:

*" Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you NOT to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone, and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

So back to the principles:

- *Accept blame for failure and credit others with success. Possess integrity and personal courage...* This one is all about accountability, having the guts to hold yourself, as a leader, personally accountable for outcomes, particularly the bad ones. As a result of doing this, you will undoubtedly engender a high degree of personal loyalty amongst everyone around you. We have, upon occasion, seen in the press, reports about our political "leaders" (and I say that with some degree of tongue in cheek), shifting blame and failing to hold themselves accountable for outcomes ... I don't know about you but it doesn't leave a particularly good taste in MY mouth! I came across a story not too long ago which also serves to illustrate:

*A man is flying in a hot air balloon and realizes that he is lost. He reduces altitude and spots a man below him. Lowering the balloon further, he shouts, "Excuse me, can you help me? I promised my friend that I would meet him a half an hour ago, but I don't know where I am. "*

*The man below says: "Yes. You are in a hot air balloon, hovering approximately 30 feet above this field. You are between 40 and 42 degrees N. latitude, and between 58 and 60 degrees W. longitude. "*

*"You must be an engineer," says the balloonist.*

*"I am" replies the old man. "How did you know?"*

*"Well, "says the balloonist, "everything you have told me is technically correct, but I still have no idea what to make of your information and the fact is that I'm still lost."*

*The man below says, "You must be a manager. "(Note: the word is "manager" not leader)*

*"I am," replies the balloonist, "but, how did you know?"*

*"Well", says the man. "You don't know where you are, or where you're going. You have made a promise, which you have no idea how to keep, and you expect me to solve your problem for you. The final fact is that you are in the exact same position you were in before we met, but now it is somehow my fault."*

The forgoing (and maybe even what follows) doubtless sounds a little "preachy" and it certainly isn't my intention to make it so. And I certainly am not the paragon of virtue

that rigorous adherence to all of these behaviors would indicate. But I do TRY and remind myself of them every day.

Success and leading with my values very much means to me being able to look myself in the mirror every day. And so I have, also, on my desk what I have called a "Meaningful Code of Ethics" which is the behavior I expect from myself and everyone in my organization and it goes as follows:

*We will be fair, sensitive, honest, trusting and trustworthy in all our dealings among ourselves, with customers, with vendors and with the community at large. We will obey all laws, in fact and in spirit, we will always do the right thing, in every situation, to the best of our abilities. And if we fail, we will do whatever is required to make amends.*

I have also learned how important it is for me to lead myself. Success to me also means NEVER being a victim but recognizing that I exert tremendous control over my life and the direction that it takes. I think many times we forget this and succumb to letting our life run us than the other way around. To remind me of this, I also regularly read a quotation that I have had for so long that I actually forget where it came from but it means as much to me as it did when I first read it 15+ years ago.

*The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, for me is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church... a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the Attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our Attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90 % how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.*

I have said very little about how I view the application of a strong set of values in my personal life and what I consider to be successful leadership there, but I would like to make a couple of points here. I truly believe that the generation that follows me, and specifically my own two children, will be the true measure of how successfully I have lead my life. No one will ever judge me on whether I made an extra few dollars of earnings for Petro-Canada when I depart from this earth but they will certainly look at the values, standards and behaviors of those children of mine. I care passionately about my children's physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and they take priority over anything else in my life. I also care passionately about fostering the personal growth and leadership skills of the next generation, with particular emphasis on those of young

women, and so have focused a lot of my volunteer time and energy in that direction, through activities with groups such as Junior Achievement and Girl Guides. I feel I have been blessed by the gift of choice in my life and I want to do my part to ensure that those choices are available to all young women and men.

Successful application of my values ultimately means being able to strike the balance between career, family and contribution to my community and to ensure that in the hustle and bustle of today's busy life, I take the time to continue to discover, develop and nurture the important essence of "ME".

And so I leave you with the fifth collection of words on my desk ... a beautiful and inspirational poem written by a minister in the United Church and which I think defines what I aspire to as true values-based leadership and real success in life:

*To live content with small means,  
To seek elegance, rather than luxury,  
And refinement, rather than fashion,  
To be worthy, not just respectable,  
And wealthy, not rich,  
To study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly,  
To listen to birds, to babes, to sages with open heart,  
To bear all cheerfully, do all bravely,  
Await occasion, hurry never -  
In essence, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious,  
Grow up through the common.  
This is to be my symphony.*

Thank you very much for your attention

