

Managing Change & Sustainability

A presentation by

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to

Ontario Women in Business Luncheon

Toronto

October 29, 2009

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I'm honoured to have been invited here today.

This is a wonderful forum.

I think this is what we do well as women. We share our stories.

Whether it's across the dining room table or the boardroom table. On the treadmill. And yes, at the nail bar.

We like to share our successes and disappointments. As well as our hopes and aspirations.

Today, I'd like to share with you two stories.

The first is my own story.

The second is about my company and its vision.

And that story—the story of the Ontario Power Authority—is tied very closely to something I feel very passionate about: Opportunities for women in the green economy.

I can honestly say that as vice-president of finance and administration at the OPA, I've never had an opportunity quite like this before.

Yes, there are still the traditional aspects of my job.

I set the direction of my department. I do my best to win the respect of the people who work with me. And I still put out fires—enough fires that there are days when I have Dalmatians following me home.

But, seriously, I've never been as excited about my work as I am today.

At the OPA, what we are doing is changing the face of the electricity sector in North America. Maybe even the world.

At the same time, we're building a better future for all of Ontario's citizens.

And I'm not exaggerating when I say that the world is watching us very closely.

I see myself as an enabler. I help my bosses achieve their goals—goals that are set by the provincial government.

These days, that means creating 50,000 green jobs in Ontario over the next three years and a cleaner environment for future generations.

With the recent introduction of the Green Energy Act, Ontario has become a global leader in conservation and renewable energy.

It's been said that the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the one that leads the global economy. So it's easy to understand why I believe our role at the OPA is so important to the province's prosperity.

We've just launched a new, renewable energy program that allows everyone to become active participants in the electricity sector. From small project developers —like the homeowner in Ottawa and the farmer in Niagara—to the consortium of investors in Richmond Hill producing energy from woodchips.

Energy promises to be one of the most dynamic industries this century.

And that's what I'd like to highlight for you today. Opportunities. How to identify them. And how to seize them.

But if there's one thing I want you to take away from this talk today, it's this: find your passion. Find your passion and you'll have your compass. It will lead you where you need to go.

But beyond that basic lesson, there are a few others I've learned along the way.

I'm going to share a page out of the Kimberly Marshall playbook. It's really a manual I started compiling when I was still in pigtails.

You see, everything I learned about how to succeed in business, I learned playing games—whether it was card games or board games like Monopoly.

There. My secret is out. I'm not just a finance geek. I'm also a game freak. I trust you won't share that with anyone outside of this room today.

But everyone who knows me knows I'm very results oriented. I'm a driver. I've kicked butt a lot and I like to win.

I trace my competitive spirit back to my summers at the cottage. My nights were filled with endless games of Pairs—a kid's card game where you test your memory by finding matching cards.

At high school, it was euchre in the cafeteria during spares and at lunch time.

Later, as an adult, Team trivial pursuit games went on forever and took trash talking to a new level.

These are games I still like to play—and win.

So, here are my top lessons, learned playing a few of my favourite games.

Lesson one comes from Trivial Pursuit:

Trivial Pursuit taught me the importance of teamwork.

You can play Trivial Pursuit on your own, but you have more fun and a better chance of getting the right answer when you're part of a team.

For example, if my team landed on sports and leisure as a topic, my male partners might take the lead on a sports question. But I could certainly handle the entertainment questions.

In other words, everyone brings something to the table. Build on each other's strengths. I've tried to apply this philosophy to every job I've ever had.

Lesson two comes from Jenga. Does everyone know Jenga?

It's a game where you take turns removing wooden blocks from a tower. The object of the game is to keep it from toppling over.

Jenga taught me the importance of being open to reworking your career plan. Sometimes you've got your eye on a particular piece and then your opponent beats you to it. So, you've got to come up with a new plan.

Careers are often like that. I left a job I loved in finance at IBM after 10 years. I had my heart set on becoming a controller and the company wanted me to move into strategy.

So, I switched jobs. I moved to Shoppers Drug Mart as director of finance.

Well, guess what? It wasn't long before I was tapped to work on strategy for Shoppers. The same job, more or less, that I would have been doing at IBM.

It wasn't part of my grand plan, but in the end, it was what I should have been doing all along.

In other words, keep your options open. Don't be wedded to one career arc.

And then there's lesson three from Risk.

A four-letter word in finance today but a much more benign game when I was young and total world domination seemed within our reach.

Well, as the name suggests, I learned the importance of taking risks in your career.

After years of working for blue-chip companies, I moved to work for a high-tech start-up. It was during the glory days of the dotcom era—before everything went bust.

I saw it as a chance to build something from the ground floor up.

I poured everything I had into it. I worked late nights. I put on 25 pounds. The wine bottle never went back into the cupboard at night because I knew I would need it to settle me down when I got home the next night.

It was a really stressful period in my life.

In the end, the dotcom wasn't a success story. And that was really tough.

But would I give up that experience? Not on your life.

It taught me that you can care too much. You can become too invested in your job. It's important to have some distance and not take yourself too seriously.

Above all else, I've learned you can do all of the right things. Play smart. Try to take managed risks. But still you don't always win.

As women, we tend to overanalyze what we could have done differently. But perhaps we just weren't dealt the right cards at the right time. In a card game this is something we understand.

The opposite is also true. Sometimes we just get lucky. Accept it when it happens. Enjoy it. And know that sometimes you will win when perhaps you weren't the best at that moment. But it all averages out.

Above all else, be passionate and competitive about the game you're in. Play to win. But realize it's just about the game. It's not personal.

So there you have it. That's the Kimberly Marshall Plan. I hope it will prove useful.

But before I wrap up, I'd like to tell you a little more about the Ontario Power Authority and what we do.

The OPA is currently in the process of rolling out the Green Energy Act—a ground-breaking piece of legislation. As I've said, it not only focuses on greening the environment and creating jobs...but building the foundation for the future of Ontario's prosperity.

We're already seeing signs of the future of green energy in Ontario. Solar panels on rooftops. Wind farms in the countryside.

What does it mean for you?

Lots of job opportunities. We're already seeing a boom in demand for engineers and technicians with expertise in new energy sources.

But there are also lots of opportunities we have yet to even fathom. Jobs that don't exist yet.

I think that if I were a young accountant right now, I'd be looking at financing opportunities—finding ways to help companies participate in the green economy.

As I said, I feel really honoured to be working for an organization with such progressive goals. Believe it or not, there's something called "tingle voltage" that people talk about at the OPA. It's got something to do with electricity, but I've given it my own interpretation. I feel it every day when I walk into my office. I really do feel a tingle of excitement.

Find your "tingle voltage"—find your passion—and you'll find your path to success.