



Labour Market Development

LMD Information Bulletin

MEET TODAY'S INDIGENOUS WOMEN

In this Special Edition of the LMD Information Bulletin, we're profiling seven Indigenous women who have crossed our paths at NWAC.

Last month, we asked each of these women a few questions about their career, business, and work-life balance.

The responses were phenomenal and we're very pleased to share them with you.

Did you know? According to the 2011 National Household Survey...

- There are over 700,500 Indigenous women in Canada, accounting for 4% of the country's population.
- 51% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had a post-secondary education.
- There is a direct correlation between higher education, employment rates and higher incomes for Indigenous women.
- The median income for Indigenous women (ages 25 to 64) with post-secondary educations was \$49,947 compared to \$47,742 for non-Indigenous women.

Missed out on our previous bulletins? Visit www.nwac.ca to access the LMD Information Bulletin archives.

LMD SPOTLIGHT: Liz Jordan



Title: National Director, Aboriginal Markets

Company: Royal Bank of Canada

Profession: Lawyer/Finance

Length of time at this company: 5 plus years

Length of time in the workforce: 20 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Mohawk/Oneida

How did you decide to pursue the career that you are working in today? What was the pivotal moment that brought you to that decision?

Mentors have had a huge impact on my career.

During my undergrad, a friend and mentor, Daryn, encouraged me to apply to law school – at the time I thought I wanted to study marine mammals. Daryn and I were both active in the Native Students' Association at the University of Toronto and I respected his views. He was a law student and was insistent that I write the LSAT and apply to law school.

I knew that Daryn wanted to see me succeed, so, after a bit of prodding by him, I wrote the LSAT and applied to law school.

Another example is later in my career when I was a law student. I was fortunate to get a summer job working in Aboriginal Banking at another financial institution. At the time I had no interest in working in financial services (mostly because I'd had no exposure to the industry and didn't know anything about it). Again, it was a mentor that was convinced that I would be a really good fit for that role. That first job at a Canadian bank helped me to understand how important economic development opportunities are for Aboriginal people. This realization had a tremendous influence over the choices I made in my education and the work I sought out as a young lawyer.

Once I graduated from law school and was in the process of completing my articles (articling is one way to obtain the required experiential training needed to get called to the bar in Ontario), I worked on a significant regulatory file. I spent a lot of time working with a young lawyer who knew that I had a different background from most of the articling students at my law firm – not only am I Aboriginal, but I came from a more modest household than most of my peers. We'd had some challenging issues to deal with as a family when I was younger and that mentor made me realize that dealing with those challenges made me a lot stronger, tougher and resilient than my fellow articling students (with whom I was competing with for a limited number of jobs). I learned to think of stuff that I thought as a problem for me or something to be embarrassed about as a positive – I realized that they had made me into a very strong, capable person.

The time and knowledge these and other mentors have shared with me has motivated me to mentor young Aboriginal lawyers and law students. I have encouraged all of my mentees to take commercial law courses and to consider careers in financial services.

If I could go back in time to when I was 20 I would tell myself...

Enjoy the journey more.

Continued...

What has been the most challenging aspect of your career?

Work life balance. Both the legal profession and the financial services industry can be demanding. I've always struggled with this, but learned early on that it's important to schedule time to recharge. For me, the best solution I've come up with is to travel. It's something to look forward to and helps me rejuvenate.

How do you define success?

I have a pretty broad definition of success – that looks beyond the immediate stuff on one's resume. To me, taking care of oneself and being healthy and happy are pretty important things. Professionally, working to a point where you are a trusted advisor and have impact and influence over the decision-making of others is a true hallmark of success.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

I'll let you know when I've achieved it. If my maternal grandmother is any indication, I will live to a ripe old age and I've got lots more on my "To Do" list. For now, trekking through the Himalayas (including hiking up to near the "death zone" on Mount Everest) and Africa are high on my list of achievements.

What advice would you give a new employee going into a leadership position for the first time?

Work hard. Listen. Be compassionate and patient. Have humility. Invest the time to build relationships. Look out for young talent and mentor them.

If someone wanted to get into your profession, what are your recommendations of how they should start?

Get an education. Be open to career opportunities that you may not have thought of.

How do you network?

I am not as technology savvy as I should be, so I tend to prefer face to face networking, whether at events or over lunch or coffee. In Aboriginal Canada, geography can be a challenge, so where face to face is not possible, texting and the telephone have been substitutes for me.

If you could try a different career for a year, what would it be? Why?

Whitewater raft guide. I spent a summer in New Mexico early in my career, working with an expert on Indigenous peoples in international law. I love spending time outdoors. There was some great whitewater rafting in northern New Mexico and I had some opportunities to do a bit of whitewater rafting, but I've always wanted to do more.

My greatest fear is... drowning, but that didn't stop me from scuba diving. I was terrified, but it was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life.

My favourite business tool or resource is... social media. Even though I am not very technology savvy, I have friends who work in new media. I get a tremendous amount of news from Facebook, Twitter, etc. I don't rely on social media for my news, but it is a really efficient way to understand what others may be talking or thinking about and to get different perspectives.

My favourite quote is...

"The key question to keep asking is, 'Are you spending your time on the right things? Because time is all you have.'" — Randy Pausch

Destinee Barrow



Title: Owner

Company: Destination Fitness

Profession: Group fitness contractor, business educator

Length of time at this company: 15 years

Length of time in the workforce: 30 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Metis

Why did you become an entrepreneur?

I think I was meant to be an entrepreneur; I remember doing Kool-Aid sales when I was about 10, then a small home-based sewing business in my twenties. I did go to college and had a successful nursing career for 13 years but I kept being drawn towards self-employment. I have owned 3 sole proprietorships and 2 incorporated companies in completely different business genres and I appreciate the experience I have now to share with others.

What do you love most about your career?

I love empowering others to unlock their personal potential. It's an honour to be part of another individual's life journey.

What have been the riskiest moments in your career so far?

Having to make a quick and unplanned exit from a business that began as a dream but over time became toxic and mentally exhausting.

If you were given 15 minutes to interview anyone (dead or alive), who would that be and why?

Wayne Dyer and Tony Robbins. I admire anyone who motivates others to unlock their inner potential, it's powerful and life altering.

What is the most important discovery you have made about yourself?

I am a human service provider who is happiest when I can help those around me feel happy, healthy and supported.

How do you motivate yourself and stay motivated?

I appreciate the fragility of our existence. I try to embrace every day of my life, and everyone that I connect with each day.

What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs?

Know your industry, your competition and your own personal strengths, weaknesses and limits. Also, practice listening.

If I could go back in time to when I was 20 I would tell myself...the road ahead is challenging, but you will change your lifestyle, meet amazing people, have awesome opportunities and become an effective educator.

The biggest lesson I have ever learned is...that I influence what happens in my environment. I am accountable to my family, friends and responsible for everything I do and say to other human beings.

I believe...

that you attract what you put out to the universe. Choose wisely.

Melissa Hardy-Giles



Title: Owner

Company: [Hardy Giles Consulting](#)
and Origin Recruitment and Training

Profession: HR Management

Length of time at this company:
6.5 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Ojibway, Red Rock Indian Band

How did you decide to pursue the business you're working in today? What was a pivotal moment?

I did the 9-5 'stable career' thing for over 10 years. Even though I enjoyed my work, it wasn't enough for me. I loved to be free, and I couldn't take the leadership role in the atmosphere I found myself in. It was a natural choice for me to provide positive, motivating and goal-orientated training options for people. It is how I live my own personal life. Don't get me wrong, there are obviously hills and valleys when working for yourself, especially when you're trying to break down barriers at the same time. But in the end, I believe all good work will be rewarded.

What was your best and worst decision you've ever made?

The best choice I made was to actually quit a full-time, full benefits, unionized, Senior Administrative position. I've heard comments like, "What are you doing? Are you sure? You've got full benefits. You were a single mother and worked hard for this position. Most would kill to have that and have tried to land it for years. And you're just walking away?"

I have to admit, it was scary, but for all who know me and my husband, they know we live our lives to the fullest. If it wasn't for the amazing support of my even more adventurous and fearless husband, I may still be sitting in that office.

What do you think is the most significant barrier to female entrepreneurship?

The barrier that initially came to my mind was to be taken seriously. I actually like the questions, 'Who is your boss? Who do you work for? Can I speak with the owner of your company?' Because the answer is, it's me. I love the looks on their faces. Then, they seem even more interested in the work we're doing.

What habits have helped make you successful?

My husband and I made a promise to each other in the very beginning of our ventures that if we ever start to focus on our pocketbooks instead of helping people, we need to stop. Sticking to my roots, working from the heart, and having integrity are vital while working with our people.

The biggest lesson I have ever learned is... I have a few! You don't need to explain yourself. Giving is rewarding. The smallest circles are the best circles. Negativity takes away from your focus. Give your energy to those who give energy back.

My greatest fear is... I don't have a fear because I've learned that fears are only weaknesses that can rule over you. Fears can ultimately make you stagnant.

Kateri Skaarup



Title: Co-Owner, COO

Company: Skaarup Construction

Profession: Home builder

Length of time at this company: 11 years

Length of time in the workforce: 19 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Ojibway-Fort William First Nation

Can you describe your career trajectory up to this point?

My career has been incredible; incredibly tough, incredibly male-dominated and incredibly worth it. We started the company in 2005 with nothing. We were doing small contracts and building up our capital. We started doing larger and larger jobs until one day, in 2009, our company got burned for over 6 figures. Instead of folding, I got a part time job as a waitress/bartender and we started again from the bottom. I worked part time at the bar at night and full time at the company during the day. We built ourselves back up, except this time we were our own customers.

Since 2011, we have turned into a 7 figure operation and continue to build, rent and sell our homes to the hardworking people of Thunder Bay. Giving back is key, so we have become very involved with children's charities and support a lot of local causes with our events.

If someone wanted to get into your business, what would your recommendations of how they should start be?

Trades school first of all; hone your skill. And then just do it. You learn as you go. Read A LOT. Every business is different. You need to fine tune yours as you go. Persistence is important—anyone who has worked with me knows this about me—I rarely give up.

How do you network?

Network... I am the Social Planning Director for SHIFT Thunder Bay Young Professionals Network and my role is basically to put on networking events monthly for the under 40 demographic. I also put myself out there and am not shy to introduce myself. You can learn a lot about your world that way. I also organize the Thunder Bay's Strongest Man event annually so it forces me to contact and form relationships with a variety of people and companies.

Did you face any gender-related roadblocks in your business?

Male attitude. I'm a tradeswoman and run crews of men, if you can't respect me the way I respect you as a person then we simply can't work together.

What are your thoughts on society's tendency to stereotype/typecast women for specific businesses/careers?

Why does society get to determine who we are? I work construction and organize Strongman events. I love the look on people's faces when I tell them that.

If I could go back in time to when I was 20 I would tell myself... Nothing. No heads ups—I needed to learn everything the way I did. It has made me who I am.

My favourite quote is...

"The road to success is always under construction."—Lily Tomlin

Maria Vandenbrand



Title: Surface Miner, Production Driller
Company: New Gold – Rainy River Project

Profession: Surface Drilling

Length of time at this company: 9 months

Length of time in the workforce: 6 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Métis

How did you decide to pursue the career that you are working in today?

It was by chance that I decided to pursue a career in mining. There was a chain of events that led up to it, starting with getting “fired” at my first job after college as a diesel mechanic apprentice. To be honest, I HATED working at the shop I was at. I loved the work, but it wasn’t the laid back and friendly work atmosphere that I was used to. If you wake up dreading going to work, than what’s the point, right? I was heartbroken and devastated. I’d never been fired from a job before, let alone one I actually really wanted to make work.

I ended up moving back home to Northwestern Ontario, where I continued to help at my friend’s farm and waited for the summer. I eventually tried my hand at a surface miner training program offered through our local Métis community. I had nothing to lose at that point, so I was up for anything. I ended up completing my training and was hired with New Gold. Just goes to show sometimes bad things happen for a good reason!

Who inspires you and why?

Every single woman I work with is an inspiration. Some are mothers, some near retirement, and some young like myself. The fact that we all go to work with the same common goal and are breaking that male-dominated industry myth, I think that’s pretty neat. My mother is also a huge inspiration to me. That woman goes above and beyond her call of duty as a teacher and a mother. You go, Sue. Also, my ‘fairy godmother’, Joanne Meyer. She’s another one who goes above and beyond. I have her to thank for all the opportunities I get to experience and all my exposure to industry.

How did you overcome any gender-related roadblocks in your career?

To be honest, I haven’t faced many gender-related roadblocks since I’ve been in mining. I have surprised a few contract drillers that I’ve been lucky enough to work alongside within the past few months. Hearing that I was the first female driller they have ever crossed paths with, and to be doing so good for my age felt good, especially from such experienced drillers.

The most courageous thing I’ve ever done is...

Move home from Manitoba after losing a job that I thought would kick-start my career in the heavy equipment/diesel machinery industry. I felt as though I let myself and my family down and was afraid of what everyone would say when I came home, but it turned out to be one of the best things I’ve ever done.

My favourite quote is...

“Some women fear the fire. Some women simply become it...” – R.H. Sin

Angie Turner



Title: President

Company: [Smudge Web Services Inc.](#)

Profession: Website and Graphic Design, Web Application Development and Technical Support

Length of time at this company: Started 2010, Full-time 2013

Aboriginal Ancestry: Mohawk from Kahnawà:ke

Tell us about your business.

I started Smudge after writing an event/conference registration software with my husband (we both have similar IT backgrounds). I wanted to offer it to other Indigenous organizations and small businesses that couldn't afford the high costs associated with this industry.

As a developer I was naturally inclined to start building websites. I expanded my services to include graphic design and technical support as my clients so often required it.

What has been the most challenging aspect of your career?

Constantly having to prove that I had the intelligence and capabilities to work in a male dominated industry.

When did you realize this was the right career for you?

I am a problem solver by nature...I don't think it was a career choice as much as it is who I am.

How did you conquer those moments of doubt that so often stifle or stop many entrepreneurs with great ideas? What pushed you through?

My family. I had 3 young children under 3 and I was still on mat leave when I started working full time to get the business going. My husband really pushed me through during those moments of feeling defeated. Also talking to other entrepreneurs who understood the ups and downs of starting a business helped tremendously.

What is your advice for women who are building careers in your industry?

Be confident. Even during those moments of self-doubt. You just have to push through and know that you are on the right path to building your own success.

What habits helped make you successful?

Determination, confidence and perseverance...I think all Mohawk women are just born this way. I also enjoy lifting weights and running. It helps keep me focused.

The biggest lesson I have ever learned is... you are going to make mistakes, but it is how you choose to recover from those mistakes that can make you a better and stronger person.

The most courageous thing I've ever done is... at the age of 23, convincing the CFO of the company I was working for to hire me as the head of the IT department.

My favourite business tool or resource is... [the Internet, of course.](#)

Katharine Tippeneskum



Title: Office Coordinator

Company: Detour Gold Corporation

Length of time at this company: 3 years

Length of time in the workforce: 16 years

Aboriginal Ancestry: Cree

How did you decide to pursue the career that you are working in today?

I had been working at a bank for a few years, and I was robbed. At that moment, I decided I didn't want to be in that situation again. I applied for a job at Detour Gold. I knew absolutely nothing about mining but I was determined to take a chance to give my family a better life. This was a life changing decision, because I knew I would be away from my family but I felt this was the right choice.

I moved my family from Toronto to Timmins to be closer to work. We lived up north for a year, when another opportunity arose I took a chance and applied for a role at the corporate office in Toronto. This meant I had to move my family again but I would be home each night – best decision ever.

What women inspires you and why?

I had the opportunity to work with a lovely lady named Rachel Pineault, she was the Vice President of the HR Department at Detour Gold. From the first time I had met her, I felt she genuinely cared about people and was always looking for ways to make a positive impact in people's lives. She made a difference in my life, I will always be grateful for the opportunity she gave me and for her support along the way.

How did you overcome any gender-related roadblocks in your career?

I had no idea what to expect going to work at a mine, but it was very intimidating to be a woman working in a male dominated environment. There were days when I wondered - what am I doing here? It would be easier to give up and go back to Toronto. I needed to prove to myself that I could do this. I asked a lot of questions and I made a lot of errors but I never gave up. Eventually with experience, my self-doubt eased and I gained confidence to believe in myself and excelled at my job.

When I face a big challenge I... take a breath, step back and take a look at my situation to figure out what my next step is going to be.

I believe... a positive outlook and hard work always pays off.

The biggest lesson I have ever learned is... you need to go through the tough times to be able to appreciate the good times.

The most courageous thing I've ever done is... adopt my youngest son, Alexander.

Do you know an Indigenous youth or elder who is successful in her career, family, school, or hobby? Someone whose story deserves to be told?

We want to know!

The next LMD Information Bulletin-Special Edition will showcase some of the outstanding Indigenous youth and Elders in our communities. If you have an individual in mind, we would love to hear from you! Email us today!

Stay tuned for another SPECIAL EDITION of the LMD Information Bulletin!

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Have an idea or concept for our newsletter? Let us know! Submit your ideas via e-mail to:

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