

**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery for
The Honorable Lynn Scarlett,
Deputy Secretary of the Interior,
Executive Women in Government Summit
*March 12, 2008***

Good morning! Welcome to this annual summit of Executive Women in Government. I'd like especially to thank the EWG Board and team that made this event possible. Above all, I thank each of you here for your public service, your leadership, and your commitment to excellence.

Those gathered here are leaders of economy, culture, community, science, health, education, and governance. You need no lessons in leadership. Each of you has a personal saga of leadership and service. Each of us also recalls our own heroes—women leaders who stepped away from hearth, home, and workplaces to change the course of human events.

We think of Harriet Tubman, Marie Curie, Margaret Mead, Amelia Earhardt, and so many others. The list is long and varied. We need no reminder of their courage, their leadership, and their accomplishments.

But, as we gather to contemplate leadership in the workplace, I want to remind us of a subtler kind of courage that accompanies leadership. That is the courage—in the daily workplace—to think outside the box—and the courage of humility. Both, I believe, are critical to leadership; both are critical to executive success.

At Interior, Rachel Carson, the first women biologist in the Fish and Wildlife Service, dared to think differently—and made a difference. But she was always humble along the way.

Each of you has similar tales in the workplace. Often, these tales spring from a recognition of the importance of “local knowledge,” recognizing that answers don't always reside at headquarters. Often these tales spring from a recognition that, as poet Wallace Stevens once wrote: “Perhaps real truth depends on a walk around the lake.”

These tales of success also spring from a recognition that “no man—or woman—is an island. Leadership resides in tapping the knowledge and imagination of many.

Courage to be different; courage to be humble; courage to listen to others—leadership requires these many shades of courage. So, too, does leadership require conviction.

Success in any endeavor, it seems to me, centers on “seizing the day”—doing something you love. If love your work, you’ll never work a day in your life.

One great woman executive at the Interior Department—recently retired—left an indelible mark on my thinking. She often talked of her mother’s wisdom. I’ll borrow from the wisdom of her mother. Her mother always told her: “No deposit, no return.” That “deposit” springs from a conviction that what we are doing is important—that we are making a difference for the world around us.

A few months back, I was sworn in as President of this organization at the Mary McCleod Bethune house. As we gathered for that event, I contemplated leadership through conviction.

Bethune was the daughter of parents born into slavery. She had a passion for education. She wanted to touch the lives of African American girls. She opened a school in 1904 in Florida. The school had no equipment. Bethune used crates for desks. Ink came from crushed elderberries. Bethune financed the school through baking pies and making ice cream.

Eventually her small school grew—and became a college. Mary McCleod Bethune was a person of conviction. She was also a person of confidence.

Conviction without confidence will yield only limited results. Leadership requires confidence. I think of the bumper sticker: “You go, girl.”

We all need confidence—the self-assurance to act. But that assurance comes from a strong sense of purpose: “What is our mission?” “What goals are we pursuing”? Success in any organization—large and small—is about knowing where you are trying to go and measuring progress.

Consider the metaphor of mankind’s quest to measure longitude. In Oct. 1707, the entire British fleet was lost, not in battle, but on the rocks of the Scilly Isles. The flagship smashed into the rocks, and every other ship in the fleet followed blindly behind to destruction. Four warships were lost 2,000 people lost their lives. Why? Mankind still had no way to measure longitude.

The British captains knew where they wanted to go, but they did not know how to measure progress.

This is an apt metaphor for our workplaces—and for leadership. Great courage, conviction, and confidence are imperative. But we must also center on a strong sense of purpose, mission, and clearly articulated goals.

There is one other important element of leadership. That is the imperative of civility. Civility is, perhaps, the greatest civic virtue. Our interactions in the

workplace are not about “winning debates.” Conversation is about communicating. Communication requires civility.

I am always struck by the wisdom of author William Isaacs who describes dialogue as conversation with a center not sides. I believe truly great leaders must nurture such conversations.

This summit will nurture conversations that we may excel in our work and our communities and that we may help nurture a universe of women leaders.

I want to take moment to give special thanks to one woman leader here, my predecessor as president of this organization—Nancy Nord. I have a small token of appreciation for her leadership. As I hand her this pin, let us all give her a round of applause.

Thank you.