

Keynote at 100WF NextGen Dublin Launch Event
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Your Royal Highness, Ambassador, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Firstly let me start by saying thank you to the Committees of both 100 Women in Finance, as well as the Next Generation in particular Aoife, and Lorena for their lovely introductions. It is a great honour to be here, and what a wonderful opportunity it is to be part of such a fabulous event, and especially to hear from Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex.

When I was invited to present to you today, I was both delighted and daunted. Delighted at the prospect of meeting and sharing ideas with such an impressive group of women. Daunted at the responsibility of selecting the most useful pieces of advice I have been given over the two decades of my career.

In the end, one piece of advice stands head and shoulders above the rest.

And it's all the more important to me because I received it at a time when I was too young to appreciate its significance.

It was given to me in my late 20s by my then boss, who was head of capital markets and a hugely successful and well-liked individual. He told me that when you face especially tough challenges, the only thing that really matters is to get through the moment – to “just stay in” as he put it. He said this mantra had helped him and his wife cope with the combined pressure of his job and her work as a junior hospital doctor.

I remember nodding sagely at his words. But inside it didn't really seem to apply to me. Everything was going well, I saw no big hurdles in my way, I had no real responsibilities outside of my job. Sure, I could see why things must be tough for him and his wife. But what did that have to do with me?

Fast forward a few years and the birth of my first child and those words really resonated. At this point I was in a different part of the bank and a new boss had offered me a new role. It was a perfectly good job, sensible hours and well within my comfort zone. He strongly felt that this would be a role I could

combine with new motherhood and I appreciated his thought and concern. The only problem? The job was a teeny bit dull. It was true that the alternative would be more pressure. But it would also be more rewarding and fun. I decided to just stay in and turned down the safe option.

That decision wouldn't be for everyone – there are lots of ways of achieving your career goals and there are no firm rules. But at points in your career where you face a dilemma, it's critical that you don't give up merely because things might be harder in the short term. That is what my former boss meant by "Just stay in". Make a call, accept that there will be trade-offs and own that decision, rather than allow that choice to be made for you.

So, my first suggestion is to heed the advice you are given by people you trust, even if it doesn't seem to apply to you!

The second lesson is one I had to relearn last year when I relocated to Dublin. It wasn't an easy choice. I'd left directly after college having never really worked in Ireland, the scope of the job I would be doing was ill-defined and my professional circle was almost non-existent.

No doubt the easy choice would have been to stay on in London where I had a great job, was fully confident in my expertise and had an excellent network.

This time it was a combination of career and family reasons that prompted the move. I wanted my children to grow up in the city I grew up in and be part of a broader family network. My husband, who is from Clare, and I had always had the idea that we would move home. And with 3 children under the age of 4 – the draw was becoming stronger.

So after many late-night discussions - and facing the sobering realisation that this might mean we were finally grown-up! - we took the plunge and returned to Dublin.

Building a network almost from scratch is a stark reminder of my second piece of advice - your professional success is a result of the quality of your network. It's not the thing you do when you have a bit of spare time! Or the thing that takes you away from your day job. It is your day job.

I knew I had to be very strategic about it, committing to attending a certain number of events each month and planning carefully who I really needed to

meet. And sharing insights I gleaned at these events with other people in my organisation.

But, boy it was hard. Incredibly hard. Nobody enjoys entering a room where you know nobody and are only just getting to grips with the professional issues they care about. We all know that the trick at these events is to be both interested and interesting, but it's tough on a day when you are feeling a bit at sea professionally. As I head into rooms like this I take inspiration from designer Diane von Furstenburg: "Everybody wakes up and feels like a loser some days."

Know when you walk into that conference, or that busy room, that most people would prefer to be at home in their pjs watching the Bodyguard finale, but they get on with it! Once you come to that realisation, and you appreciate even one of the most successful designers in the world has a bad day, then it helps make networking and indeed life just a little bit easier!

Networking also means identifying those rare and great people who are willing to push you forward. I've been very fortunate in meeting a few mentors who have turbo charged my development and trajectory.

My current boss John Gibbons is one such person. When I had been in Ireland for around three months, he asked me if I'd theoretically be willing to take on an additional role – a global role. He knew I had three young children, was grieving after the recent loss of my father and was only just getting my arms around the Dublin role. He could justifiably have thought I had enough on my plate. But instead of making that assumption ... he asked. He was the first manager I've had that did so.

I said yes and the dual-location job I now have is the result of that conversation. And don't assume that if your managers aren't asking, they are thinking about you - remind them you are there!

The other mentor I have been fortunate enough to have is someone many of you also know – Marie O'Connor.

Though I've known her only since January last year, she was one of the first people to help me when I moved back to Dublin. Apart from quickly and generously sharing her contacts, she gave me three tips which have proved invaluable – 1) network with a purpose, 2) be aware of benevolent

discrimination, and 3) build your own personal board of directors. Experts that will support and – just as importantly – challenge you. Marie is without doubt the chair of my own board of directors!

And that's my third tip. Be humble enough to ask for help.

The first thing I did when I arrived was contact the few people I knew well in the city and ask them if they could connect me in person with the dynamos in their own network. I felt a little awkward asking for so much. But the response was swift and generous. Everyone in Dublin was keen to help me settle in and assimilate. Of the 100 emails I sent out asking for help, only two people declined to do so. It's been a humbling experience as well as a reminder that asking for help opens deeper human connections.

People on the whole feel good about helping others out, with two caveats: be crystal clear about what you are asking for. A vague "perhaps we could meet for a coffee sometime" is not the same thing as "I'd really appreciate any introductions you can make in Dublin." And second, be eminently willing to do the same for others.

So, I urge you to carry on with what you are already doing, which is contributing into your network WAY before you expect to take anything out. I am sure it's one of the things that helped Lorena with her successful (and brave!) move to London.

And indeed, 100WF and NextGen Dublin are exactly the networks we all need to have our backs when we grasp the opportunities that come up.

I'd like to end by broadening the perspective a little. As I arrived at the RHA this evening it struck me just how amazing it was to be attending an event like this.

It is only 20 years since the Good Friday agreement. 20 years ago it would have been impossible to imagine Dublin would be hosting such a gathering.

I've a very personal connection with that agreement. My father was the Secretary General within the Department of Foreign Affairs and at the time a key negotiator. Witnessing the peace process up close was a formative part of growing up. It showed me what is possible when people on both sides are willing to take the wider view. I was always extremely aware that people with

very different perspectives and backgrounds kept working towards something they hoped would occur – but with no real idea of when that point would come. I could see the sacrifice and the effort and was conscious in the background of meetings in houses, of car switches, of late nights, of frustration. But still people kept going. They just stayed in.

20-years ago on April 10 I received a call from my Mum to say “come home – your Dad is on the way, they have done it!” Even today, remembering that moment is emotional - What a special feeling to know that peace had been achieved, soon to be ratified by two referenda and the best example of why we must keep pushing even when things seem really tough.

Too often we think about our work and careers quarter by quarter, or at most year by year. I want to leave you with a question: What can you do today that will benefit the lives and careers of our daughters and our grand-daughters?

To bring the correct gender emphasis to an ancient Greek proverb: “A society grows when young women plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”

Thank you