

**STRONG, WELL WOMEN LEADERS – BUILDING OUR TOMORROW
REGIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S FORUM
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Thank you again.

The topic of leadership certainly is a very hot topic.

First of all, I would like to make it really clear that I personally do not call myself a leader.

I prefer to call myself an advocate.

I use my democratic right to advocate what I believe is true and just.

I don't go outside my boundaries.

As soon as I would step outside my boundaries, I have no standing.

This is very important – it's about knowing who you are.

We do need to be very clear about who we are and what we can influence.

When we know this, we can be very effective.

As a starting point, I'd like to introduce the concept of the 'dot'.

The 'dot' is our world, the things we know about, the work we do, the family we live in, the environment in which we have authority and expertise.

We'll always know more about our 'dot' than anyone outside that dot.

From the 'dot' comes a universal set of principles.

By universal, I mean that all communities, all people, all around the world - these principles or **ground rules apply to them.**

No matter who and where you are, these principles don't change – they are about **fairness, about **transparency**, about **accountability**, about **truth**.**

In the family, in the community – it does come down to being fair dinkum, walking the walk and telling the truth.

What I've observed throughout my life is that having a good heart isn't enough.

To change the world, even if your own tiny 'dot', you do need **skills**.

The first skill is to be able to **organise your thoughts**.

When we're clear in our own mind about what we need to do, things will build from there.

The next skill is **communicating**.

The world can change with a few words. Words are very powerful. Personally I have seen so much damage done by gossip, by harsh words, by what I call the 'jealousy gene'.

On the other hand, I've also seen the power of words in the direction of love and truth.

How we communicate can take hardship from people's situations. It can have a direct impact on a problem.

I can say this in relation to my kids, my neighbours, members of my extended family, government folks, etc.

I'm not saying beat around the bush. What I'm saying is find the best way and the most truthful way to say what you mean.

To be honest, I believe we have a lot of work to do in this area of communication. Everyone in the world, not just Indigenous people.

The next skill is **timing**.

So many bad things happen in the heat of the moment.

We need to stay very close to our instinct – what we call our 'liarn' in the Kimberley – and use timing as our friend.

Ask ourselves – when is the right time to act?

For example, when you have a family member creating moral destruction in the family.

It could involve using and dealing drugs, neglecting their children, being violent towards their spouse – any kind of destructive behaviours.

This is a situation going on in your 'dot'.

The question is **how do you deal with it?**

There's really only two choices:

1. Turn a blind eye.
2. Step up and act.

To me, there's never a real choice – personally in my 'dot', I must act.

But **how I act** is the key.

If we truly care, we will act. We **will** find a way to do something about it.

The skill is in the timing, the way we communicate, knowing how to access the resources and supports.

All of this does require what you could call '**leadership**'.

I'm not talking about leading an organisation or elections or governance.

I'm talking about human leadership on an individual basis.

Now talking about the bigger picture of leadership.

In 2010 at the Blank Page Summit Hard Yarn, one of the key questions which came up was about leadership.

People asked-

How do we get the leaders we deserve?

And again - In 2011 at the Blank Page Hard Yarn **Youth Mob Summit**, the young people said:

"There are too many wannabe Kings and Queens in our communities."

So the whole issue of leadership is very fascinating.

It brings up strong reactions.

I believe in my heart that we must prove our leadership capacity in our dot.

This is the foundation of our public leadership.

You have to prepare your foundation with those principles.

When you are a public leader, people will always want to know about your dot and what you do and did in your dot. People will always do a

background check on you – not a **background** check – but a **background** check on you.

I was saying yesterday in the Role Model Session that I grew up having a role model. A person who I really looked up to. I wanted to walk in her footsteps.

But what happened was that she failed those core principles – she had a very dark side – and despite all her words and her mentoring, I realised she was a hypocrite.

I could have been shattered.

But I realised I had to make my own footprints.

I had to find those skills I described and apply them in my own ‘dot’.

Our families and communities need human leadership.

Our ‘dots’ are suffering.

Our future lies in the hands of the ‘dots’.

We can talk about policies, have many noble plans, invest a lot of money in programs – all that is well meaning.

But the real work is in the ‘dot’ and it’s the hardest to penetrate. Only through taking responsibility in our dot can those plans and programs come alive and bear fruit.

The ‘dots’ need leaders, the ‘dots’ need advocates, the ‘dots’ need us to care.

Can I remind you of a well known saying – I don’t know who first said it – but it really applies in our lives as Indigenous people needing to break through to get a better quality of life.

It goes like this – **“the silence of the good people is worse than the action of the bad people”**.

Let’s be clear here. By maintaining the silence, we become perpetrators of those destructive behaviours. Governments and service providers will never be able to resolve the deep issues in the ‘dots’. However they can do so much more when **we** are organised in our thoughts, able to communicate and ready and willing to act at the right time in the right way.

It’s in our hands to decide whether we want to create livable communities where generations of people can live happily ever after.

Thank you.