

Congratulations! You've come a long way, maybe...



Kathy Simons (WTS-LA Chapter President), Photo © John Livzey, 2018

Edgar Allen Poe wrote, “The best place to hide is in plain sight.” Well, women would know. For much of our lives many of us have been hiding in plain sight, whether by choice, circumstance, or society. But something has changed. Whether it’s the #metoo movement, the #timesup movement, the current political situation, or just the alignment of the stars, something has shifted tectonically. And women are no longer hiding or being hidden in plain sight. Something has most definitely changed. Not convinced? Here’s what I’ve observed.

In the past few months I have attended four events that have either highlighted women, bestowed awards on women, or had them as speakers for major transportation programs. To say it is the year of the woman is an understatement. We are moving mountains in politics, providing leadership in major growth markets, advancing technology, and of course reinventing transportation—pick a discipline or sector and women are making their mark more publicly than ever before. And my anecdotal experience is bolstered by the numbers.

According to Catalyst, a global nonprofit advocating for women in business, nearly 15% of boards of director seats around the world were held by women in 2015, a 55% rise from 2010. Today, women comprise 50.8% of the population in the US, yet they earn almost 60% of all bachelor’s and master’s degrees here, as well as 47% of all law degrees and 48% of all medical degrees. Women also hold almost 52% of all professional-level jobs. Sounds great, right? We’re there! We made it! Well, not exactly...

Of those female professionals that comprise 52% of the workforce, only 25% are executive- and senior-level officials and managers, while only 20% hold board seats and only 6% are CEOs. Drilling deeper, from finance to law to academia to technology, the numbers reveal a very similar story. Without doubt, we have made significant gains. Women CEOs and executives grace the covers of numerous magazines—and not just women’s magazines. Women lead global companies. And women set policy around the globe. But, we are not there yet. And we have quite a way to go before we can truly and finally proclaim victory. So, how do we finally get there?

In truth, we were always there. WTS-LA knows this. And the chapter makes a point to regularly recognize pioneering women that fought the good fight from the start. But organizations like WTS-LA do so much more to advance women. And as a result, we have become more important than ever. More and more, as women demand credit where credit is due, organizations like WTS-LA are proving to be invaluable in helping them rise and gain recognition and acknowledgement. So, there has never been a better time to join the movement through an organization like ours. WTS-LA is one of the cornerstones of this movement. If you’re not convinced, consider the number and level of women leaders in our industry. Of

course, as president of WTS-LA, I want you to join our chapter. But simply joining an organization is not enough.

It would be easy to continue on as we have. Why not? It's working, right? It would be even easier to ease off the gas and relax a little bit. Take a breath. Celebrate our advancement. After all, we have made gains, right? Can't happen. Worse thing we could do. Now more than ever, we must fight even harder and more publicly to make it clear that merit should be the sole driver for all access, advancement, and accomplishment. We must build on the gains we've made and institutionalize them. Make equality the norm, so that we never have to raise the specter of inequality again. We are not there yet. We have not arrived. This is no time for a victory lap. So, yes, join WTS-LA and other organizations like it. But also get involved.

Action speaks louder than words. And simply carrying the card of an organization does not mean you are contributing. So, step up. If you're already a member, join a committee. If you are on a committee already, lead it. Volunteer for an event. Spearhead an initiative. Start something new. We women got where we got by taking action, together. Now is the time to continue that fight and pour it on. The late, great, pioneering Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm said, "You don't make progress standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas." She would know. Her number of firsts is truly astounding. And it was never easy. So, honor her legacy. Take action. Join our chapter or another organization with a similar mission and make a difference. Let's relegate equality to the historical dustbin by working that much harder for the next generation.