

## To the victor belongs the toil...



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

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Napoleon said, “The most dangerous moment comes with victory.” Ignoring for the moment that I’m quoting a famed emperor/despot (depending on your perspective), the truth is that he would know. He learned something very profound from his “endeavors.” First, of course, never attack Russia in the winter, as Vizzini so cleverly reminded us in *The Princess Bride*. But more importantly, winning does not always mean success. And that is a lesson we can all use.

I just returned from the WTS International Conference in San Diego. And yes, there were stellar tours and workshops, lectures and networking, food and drink. It was great to see old friends and make new ones. I applaud the San Diego chapter for delivering on great promise. But aside from sun and sand and the transportation universe, I want to talk about what I walked away with from that experience, something that caught my imagination and would not let go—the Women Business Owners Roundtable.

They covered an unbelievable roster of topics including succession planning, brave leadership, workforce-issue problem-solving, and the navigation of personal challenges with business ownership. They could have been a conference of their own. Now clearly, as a woman business owner, I was their target audience. And those topics are things I wrestle with on a daily basis. But that’s not what struck me so profoundly about this group and what they discussed. Here’s what did—tenacity and resilience.

These ladies were indomitable. The more they spoke, the prouder I became that I, too, was part of the group. These women take on the toughest challenges our industry can present. And they handle them with poise, intelligence, class, and grit. They might not best every challenge or challenger, but only fools count them out or disregard them. From InfraStrategies managing principal Sharon Greene to SCI vice president Crystalann Deardorff to any of the other 22 women in attendance, I’d happily stand side-by-side with any of them in the transportation trenches. And that brings me back to Napoleon and where I started.

The WTS International Conference is not only a celebration of where we are. It’s also a reminder of how far we’ve advanced. But it’s also a benchmark for where we’re going. It is very easy for most of us to remember a time when women received virtually no respect for their talents and abilities in the transportation industry. Only the rare outlier stood out and could make her way. But we fought. And we fought hard together to change that. We have changed much. But before we start doing victory dances at every WTS meeting throughout the world, we have got to remember the reality in those trenches. Things are good. But they’re not great. And only great is acceptable.

As I looked around the room at that roundtable and during many informative and thought-provoking sessions and within the hallways between breaks, I witnessed young women who recognized the value of

being there, of connecting and sharing. And it changed me. It reenergized me knowing that we are not only acknowledging the distance we've travelled, but we're making travel plans for our collective future. And you know what? We better.

Things are changing fast in this world. Soon, as we learned recently for example, we won't even be driving cars. But despite maybe not getting behind the wheel anymore, our role in the transportation industry was never more important than now.

We got where we got for one reason—we banded together. One of us standing up, they could ignore. Two of us standing up, they could put us off. A hundred of us standing up and suddenly they had to listen to us. So, yes, there is strength in numbers. It's a cliché for a reason. So, membership, membership is the key. It doesn't just have its privileges, it brings strength. We must all look at growing the chapter and increasing membership. But in addition to reaching out to different modes and transportation populations, we must look within and mentor everyone from our scholarship recipients to our mid-career professionals. We must empower and grow true leaders within WTS to take our fight to the next level.

So, congratulations to WTS San Diego and particularly to the Women Business Owners Roundtable. I salute you all and thank you for sharing so openly and generously. But with the victories we have achieved, we have reached a very dangerous point. We cannot lose momentum in celebration. Though I wouldn't advise attacking Russia in winter, we must go on the "offensive" and expand our chapter and WTS International to ensure that we further the gains we've made and ultimately make them the norm for our industry.