**CONFERENCE SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ENID LAV THOMPSON**

“A woman is like a teabag. You never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water.” Those words were said by the late, great, former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. I have a feeling everyone within the sound of my voice can relate to this very astute quote. Hello, I’m \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I am honored and thrilled to be here, among such a distinguished group of strong, powerful, vital women at this year’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Conference, and I know, in a very significant way, that by being here, by choosing careers in the longshore industry, you have placed yourselves in “hot water.” You’ve chosen to work in a field that has not historically been too “female friendly,” and yet each one of you has persisted. You bring your skills, common sense, and experience to jobs that are notoriously tough. Before I can say anything about today’s topic, I must acknowledge each one of you here today. Congratulations!!! I am in perpetual awe of your determination and drive!!

We have all been through quite a wild ride for the past several years, and if one thing has become evident, it’s that the role of women in today’s society- in all aspects and phases, has become more and more evident, integral, and critical to the functioning of daily life. The conversation may have started a long time ago, but the voices are getting louder and more persistent. Women…. **STRONG, HEALTHY, VIABLE** women…. are needed in order for this world to work.

The jobs you’ve chosen would have been challenging enough in past environments. When we look at the “new normal” in which we are living, whether we like it or not, the longshore industry is spotlighted. Global commerce priorities have shifted, freight forwarding patterns have transitioned, the way people shop has evolved, and at the center of these shifting trends and patterns is the longshore industry. At the center of that industry, we find **YOU**. More than ever, the jobs you fulfill and the functions you perform affect **everyone**, both locally and globally. We’ve all seen, first hand, the effects the pandemic has had on this sector. The world watched as one freighter got wedged in the Suez Canal. Everyone, at every level of society, waits for shipments, endures shortages, and needs **YOUR** incredibly important professional contribution to function, and you know what that means??? **YOU** have to be able to function… to be fit, healthy, and ready to perform. Most significantly, it’s critical that you are fully aware of just how important **YOU** are…. To yourselves, your families, your friends and communities, and ultimately, this planet.

Many years ago, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said, “If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something **DONE**, ask a woman.” Women have been “getting it done” since the dawn of time. We do it bravely, sensibly, determined, joyfully, selflessly. We just get it done…. To the point where we put ourselves and our well being aside for the good of the goal… the accomplishment…. the betterment and nurturing of others and the work product. A simple Google search brings us some interesting points. In a blog post on the Team Stage website, we can learn that as of 2021, there are 7.8 billion people on earth, and **most** of them are women. 27.1% of women are managers and leaders. 42% of women state that they have faced discrimination at work due to gender. 72% of women feel that work-life balance creates conflict in daily living. Add to that trying to navigate in an industry dominated by men … even more than others, and you can see the need to find ways for you and your female colleagues to feel supported in being effective!!

I am here today to talk to you, and to acknowledge you, for all that you **DO** get done. I am also here to invite you to take a look…. And to shift your focus…. Just a little… to one of encouragement, care, and priority…. Shift to a focus wherein you realize that you…. **WE**…. cannot be effective, nurturing, or as powerful as we **CAN BE,** if we don’t think of ourselves and manage ourselves **first**. **WE**… you and I, are the **TRUE PRIORITY**. How does that manifest itself? In very simple and obvious ways. We have to do our best to make sure we are taken care of before we can serve others, and the best, most effective way to do that is by managing and respecting our **SELVES**, our **WELL BEING**, and our **HEALTH**.

Of course I understand how we get caught up in the day to day doing of our jobs. Each one of you is a professional, mandated to be responsible for integral parts of a whole…. Each function and purpose in the longshore industry is interdependent, and while you have probably heard throughout your careers that “no one is indispensable,” while you’re doing what you need to do, and most probably doing it well, you are very important. Because of this, and like the equipment you use in your everyday responsibilities, no matter the scale… from calculators to cranes…. The equipment has to work. It has to be able to function optimally. Consider your bodies, your minds, and your well being your **MOST PRECIOUS** equipment.

So, what do we do? In the simplest of terms, I am here to tell, remind, and encourage you, to **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES**. You are a finely tuned instrument. You need check ins, check ups, tests, and the occasional tune up to keep you going. You need to remember there are pro-active actions you can take in order to reap the benefits of preventative maintenance. It’s critical to not only hear of, and talk of, getting it done…. You need to **DO IT. … JUST DO IT.** You wouldn’t operate a crane or a truck without knowing it is in optimal shape. Why risk damage to our **OWN** equipment??

Every woman here has access to the essential procedures and processes that support a person in feeling better, living longer, and performing at optimal levels, both on the job and in one’s personal life. It’s of critical importance to have annual overall wellness physical check ups, mammograms, gynecological exams, colonoscopies, and other tests in order to maintain wellness, and if something is found, early detection is the best defense against more catastrophic illness. There are conditions that may silently do damage, but with knowledge and awareness, negative impacts on your health and well being are minimized. I urge you to make a plan…. Speak to professionals… do the research to determine how to best serve and care for **yourSELVES**, and **STAY HEALTHY.**

And now for some good news/bad news/better news…..while we know that the longshore industry, along with most others, is dominated by men, did you know that, according to reports, as of 2021, the life expectancy for men is 77 years of age. … and the life expectancy for women?? **81**! Also, some quick research informs us that currently, there are over 5,300 people employed in the longshore industries in the country. Of that, less than 13% are women…. You know what that means??? You need to be **STRONG AND HEALTHY** in order to make it in this job!!! It also means that as you set an example for success, you have the power to encourage more women to join the industry….which will mean greater balance for female longshore professionals.

Before I leave you, I want you to know, without **ANY** doubt, that **YOU**… and I mean each one of you… as individuals, and as a collective female longshore group, are **IMPORTANT**. Your presence and contribution to this industry is vital and has the power to revolutionize the business…. And I think it’s really clear, based on all of the crises and challenges faced in the recent past, that this is something that is both needed and wanted. You can change the landscape of this industry for the better…all it takes is determination, dedication, and **HEALTH**.

I want you to know that I truly admire all that you do and what you represent. You are an inspiration to others that may think it’s too hard to break through into a traditionally overwhelmingly male dominated sector, but you’ve done it, and you’ve done it well…. Now, stay **HEALTHY** and inspire those that will follow in your mighty footsteps!! Thank you all!!