**Empowering the Next Generation of Female Leaders**

Good evening, thank you for being here and thank you to AnitaB for providing this opportunity for us to take some time out of our busy schedules to come together, share ideas, and find ways to strengthen and empower ***our*** mutual future, and that of those that will look to, and learn from, us. I’m excited to see so many colleagues, friends, and supporters here this evening in support of AnitaB and in celebration of women’s history month. I would like to express my gratitude to La’Shon Anthony for extending the invitation to speak. I appreciate that AnitaB.Org recognizes the **value** and the **necessity** of empowering the leaders of tomorrow and I am thrilled to be here today as part of the engine that propels this strategic conversation.

For those that don’t know me, I’ve had the privilege of working as a woman in technology for the past 20 years. Its been a fantastic journey. I started out as the only service desk technician for a small community bank. I worked my way up through the technical ranks, learning everything I could along the way. Then I transitioned into management and before too long I received an opportunity to lead the security and governance organization at Guggenheim. But it wasn’t always easy; at various points in my career, I’ve been the only woman in the room, I’ve been the only senior woman manager, I’ve been the only woman on the team. I’ve been talked over in meetings, there were times when my ideas weren’t taken seriously, and I’ve held meetings where outside consultants would only acknowledge my male counterparts that were in the room for the first half of the meeting until they realized that I knew what I was talking about. It was frustrating….maddening…. There were times when I felt deflated, and there were times when I cried in the bathroom. And while it was sometimes tough, I never gave up. I never lost sight of my goals or my drive to achieve those goals. Sometimes I thought, what am doing here? Why am I putting myself through this, but I learned to embrace those situations and treat them as just another challenge and as I’ve matured in my career I’ve come to realize that women have so much to offer and provide so much value to an organization. Research show that diverse teams outperform teams lacking diversity.

Recently, I saw a post on the internet. It was a picture of a simple dial, and this particular dial had just two settings.... a left side and a right side. The left side, the weaker side, was marked, “Complicit…in My Own Dehumanization” and the right side, the more powerful side, was marked, “Raging Feminist.” As I sat there, reading this, I kept thinking This is **2018**. I want to believe, and I intend to support the theory that we have **finally** arrived at a point in our societal development, that allows us to shift our focus from having to **label** and **defend** ourselves to concentrating on our contributions... our talents, our enthusiasm, our drive, and our unique purpose and mission in life, in order to get the job done. The fact of the matter, is that **labels** and **extremes** do still exist, but It’s time to focus on the humanity and the strengths we all possess in order to work in tandem to encourage and nurture ***our*** sisters who will be the leaders of tomorrow...

I think one of the best ways in which we can empower the next generation is to look back, look around us, and look inside us.... what were the influences that spurred our imaginations when we were younger? What sort of messages got through to **you**? What supported you in defining your purpose and in developing your strengths? When you take a look around in the quest for discovery and inspiration, where **did** you and **do** you look [for inspiration]? As women.... as curious, engaged, invested pioneers with entrepreneurial spirit and tenacity, we have the wherewithal to explore traditional paths and uncharted territory in preparation to finding the next steps to self and group realization.... personally, professionally, and societally.

We have history, to remind us of the wisdom of people like Harriet Beecher Stowe, who said, “Women are the real architects of society.” We have contemporaries in other fields, recognized for their excellence in what they do, to discover a glimpse into their process. Meryl Streep has said, “The best role models for women are people who are fruitfully and confidently **themselves**, who bring light into the world.” Michelle Obama reminds us, “There is no limit to what **we**, **as women**, can accomplish.” We also have new places to look.... we can find wisdom and courage in younger voices with fresh, modern perspectives. Malala Yousafzai has taught us that “When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.” We are living in exciting times when women from around the world are coming together more than ever in support of each other but we don’t even have to look that far. There are also many local heroes right here in Chicago that work so hard every day in the community and their organizations to develop programs to drive change.

Every day we have the opportunity and occasion, to learn something new. Whether it’s expanding into new areas of technology, learning new coding methods, developing more efficient processes.... or looking to younger generations to learn ***more***, about the evolution of society and its patterns, I believe, that one important way in which to empower the female leaders of the future is to **listen**. Listen to what they have to say. Be open to suggestions and change. Be supportive and share our wisdom in ways that it will be part of a conversation and build a partnership.

We must interact with young colleagues in such a way that empowerment is a **context** and not just an action. Respect is not assumed....it’s earned and it’s demonstrated in everything we do, and it’s imperative that we contribute to young women in such a way that strong, and confident foundations are formed and fostered. Often times young people don’t think their voices matter, or that they themselves do not have the ability to influence change. It’s up to each one of us to engage our younger female colleagues so that they **DO** have a profound sense that they ***can*** make a difference.... in every area of life and career.

Respect goes hand in hand with reinforcement of confidence. It’s important to acknowledge unique potential in everyone, especially in young females coming up through the corporate ranks. Priorities in professional life are shifting and the context of the workforce itself is changing. In many ways, young people are being conditioned to view themselves as their own “brand.” Now more than ever, with the advent and growth of exposure on social platforms, we find that the medium truly has become the message and our industry builds on that. It’s a challenge for seasoned professionals to know how to portray themselves to an “instant public.” Young women need to be taught how to edit and create their own presentation in order to achieve success in their business as well as personal lives. As professionals we have the innate intuition and skills to identify what works and what doesn’t work when it comes to relating our stories. We can use our skills to mentor and encourage up-and-coming leaders to set new and even more effective standards, and to envision themselves in a global perspective in every sense of the word.

We’ve made great strides in staking our claim as females in the workforce and in life. Over the past century we’ve gotten the vote, we’ve gotten to work, we’ve gotten to lead.... but it’s not enough. We have to know the strength of our individual and combined voices and we have to teach our sisters, colleagues, friends, and children to express their potential in every aspect of self expression.

The world in which we live and operate ... and **innovate** is changing, and while in many ways, thanks to technology and our contributions, many aspects are easier and more convenient, there is an obvious mandate for female solidarity and a call to action. We must prepare future generations to be strong enough and agile enough to build a viable future for all.... that starts with **us**. As I mentioned when I began, there still exist labels and extremes.... we have to find our way beyond that and discover the tools to take a stand and empower others. Whether that comes by “taking steps to greater transparency in the workplace” or through “active mentorship” of the young women in our lives and beyond, it is our responsibility to see to it that no young woman feels left out, marginalized, or unchosen.... after all, we have no idea where the next great talent will be discovered.... and there is great potential to be unearthed in every single young woman we meet.

Most importantly, we must practice what we teach and preach. We need to find the means to our own ultimate effectiveness in authenticity, self expression, and creativity. We’re all very busy, but we can’t expect to inspire by rote. We have to “be the change.” Our willingness to continue our own paths to enlightenment will be what ultimately inspires others to do the same. We already support organizations like Anita [B.org](http://B.org) that provide the impetus to encourage growth in all of us. Here’s to continuing and expanding the conversation, and strengthening partnerships and connections that will inspire all of us, and impact our future leaders with positivity, strength, and broadened perspective.

And so in honor of women’s history month, Ill leave you with a quote from Gloria Steinem, “the story of women’s struggles for equality belongs to no single feminist, not to any one organization, but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights.”

Thank you all!!