

## Expanding Activities for WISE Ottawa

Misa Gratton, President, WISE Ottawa

To celebrate the start of a new year, WISE Ottawa Program Coordinators, Cynthia Bourden and Laura Neveille, organized a networking event on October 7, 2004, in an elegant setting at Fairmont Chateau Laurier. The event was open to members and non-members alike and over 40 persons participated. As was the case last year, we welcomed several members from the Wired Women Society Ottawa Chapter.

Following the October event, a rush of membership applications and renewals was observed. This phenomenon was partly due to the initiative by Dr. Monique Frize to fund the student membership fees under an alliance of organizations involved in youth education outreach. The funding arrangement was made by Dr. Frize with Telesat to secure student volunteers to participate in the Pathmakers Program (a secondary school outreach program). The alliance consists of Pathmakers, WISE Ottawa, Passport to Prosperity, and officials from organizations affiliated with the French and English School Boards.

With these new developments, our Executive Members, Cana Balay (Web Master) and Susan Côté (Record Management), were kept busy processing membership transactions. With their help, Misa Gratton was able to establish an "Electronic Distribution List" used to distribute information to members and supporters as required, with due consideration for the privacy and security.

On November 18, 2004, a meeting was organized for presentations by four WISE Ottawa members, Jennifer

Flanagan, Monique Frize, Misa Gratton and Teresa McNutt, on their trip to Kenya in August. They participated in the activities jointly organized by the International Network for Women Engineers and Scientists (INWES), the African Women in Science and Engineering (AWSE) and the UNESCO Nairobi Office. Presentations covered the Leadership Workshop for African Women Scientists and Engineers, an INWES Board Meeting and an African Safari that followed official activities. The Workshop attracted African women in leadership positions, e.g. head of a physics department in a university. They collectively had numerous impressive achievements, each having multiple advanced degrees.

During the INWES Board meeting, the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists (ICWES13) in Seoul, Korea, was presented by Dr. Myung Hee Jung, ICWES13 Chair, and Dr. Kong-Joo Lee, Organizing Committee Chair.



In Nairobi, enjoying discussion are, from left, Myung Hee Jung (Korea), Sue Bird (UK), Catherine Nyambala (Kenya), and Kong-Joo Lee (Korea)

For those interested, important dates are available on the Web site, [www.icwes13.org](http://www.icwes13.org).

In spite of INWES being only two years old, it is building quickly as a credible international organization, with more and more solid structure and global membership.

The November event took place at the University of Ottawa and over 40 participants enjoyed the slides and photos over pizzas. There were numerous pictures taken in Nairobi and Kenyan national parks and reserves. Some of them will be posted on the Photo Galleries of the INWES and WISE Ottawa Web sites. The event also coincided with an announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize received by Dr. Wangari Maathai of the Green Belt Movement based in Kenya. A card of congratulations with signatures of participants and the event poster was sent to her from WISE Ottawa.

As in the phrase, "Think Globally, Act Locally," a number of WISE Ottawa members have roots in different parts of the world and our activities increasingly reflect the diversity of their origins. WISE Ottawa becoming a member organization of INWES provides opportunities for members to think globally while contributing to the local communities. On January 19, 2005, WISE Ottawa will offer a "Career Day" for students and professionals in collaboration with the Women in Leadership (WIL) Foundation and Carleton University.

Two events are scheduled as below:

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## Expanding Activities for WISE Ottawa (continued from page 1)

(1) A lunch time information session on employment opportunities for students studying or planning to study engineering; (2) Presentations by women in senior positions, e.g. CEO,

Vice President, in the technology fields. Both events are open to the public free of charge. The registration is being accepted on a first-come-first-serve basis at the WIL Web site: [www.womeninleadership.ca](http://www.womeninleadership.ca). For more

information, please visit the WISE Ottawa Web site at [www.wise-ottawa.ca](http://www.wise-ottawa.ca). We recommend that you register early to avoid disappointment as seating is limited.

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## So You Want to Do Graduate Studies – Why?

Dr. Kelly Hawboldt, Assistant Professor, Engineering and Applied Science, Memorial University

When I graduated with my bachelor's in Chemical Engineering I suspected I'd be back for graduate work but I figured I'd stop at a Master's. I didn't and I'm glad I kept going but graduate studies are not usually the choice of most, particularly women in science and engineering. I am not sure why that is as my experience has been excellent. So for those of you considering grad studies or for those of you who have already made the choice, I have some advice on the pros and cons of graduate life, and some essential coping strategies. First of all, choose your supervisor carefully. This isn't as critical if you are doing a Master's as you can probably put up with someone you don't like for two years. However, a PhD, under someone whose very presence causes homicidal thoughts, is a very long three to five years. I have had colleagues who in the end survived this type of supervisor, but it was strictly survival. Think of the worst of those reality shows ("Survivor" or "Fear Factor") and then add in the fact there is not a vast sum of money to be won at the end. This is not to say you will always like your supervisor but despise them should not be part of the deal. In addition, your supervisor should match your approach to the work. If you are fairly independent then you want to avoid the "we should meet everyday to see how every second of your research is going and by the way I would like a daily report updating me on all bathroom breaks" kind of supervisor. On the other hand, if you can only identify your supervisor by voice over the telephone, he or she is probably a little too hands off.

At the same time you are choosing a supervisor you should also keep a wary eye on their research areas. The most stellar supervisor in the world probably can't make up for the fact that the project you get is studying the mating practices of dung beetles (my apologies

to any dung beetle aficionados out there). So in addition to being a good supervisor take a critical look at their research. Again, this is not as important if you are doing a Master's, as the commitment is not as long and often you have not developed the research idea but rather have had it thrust upon you. The key objective of a Master's (in addition to your thesis) is to train you to work independently and give you an idea if this is something you would like to do longer term.

For a PhD, you should not only like your project but also have a stake in it. By stake I mean you should have either developed the project yourself or at least had a voice in the direction and development of it. Why, you ask? Well the first reason is that you are not always going to like your project; things will not always be rosy. Here are some examples:

- For those doing experimental work, there will be days and weeks perhaps even months when no matter what you do, your experiments will not work. For no reason, they just won't work.
- When your results show a trend completely different from your hypothesis or worse, show no trend but rather look like the results from a defibrillator.
- When almost finished your thesis somebody helpfully says "I read a paper on (insert the most important part of your thesis topic here) just yesterday."

In fact, the point at which you are almost finished your thesis is the point at which you like it the least. The thought of looking at it on the computer screen induces fits of nausea. I should mention these instances will be few and far between if you choose your topic or area carefully. In fact, if what you chose to do comes from a real interest, I would say they would hardly occur at all.

Next, make sure your supervisor and university encourages and gives you opportunities for you to go to conferences, particularly as a presenter. This experience is invaluable for meeting others in similar (and different) areas of research, making connections with possible future supervisors or co-collaborators, and picking up new information that may help your thesis. Often this information comes in the form of casual conversations in addition to the actual presentations. Plus, no matter how much the thought of standing up in front of your peers and presenting your work makes you nauseous, you need to do it. This type of presentation prepares you for your defence and often the questions (or grilling) afterwards can identify weaknesses in your work that you can rectify. Better at this venue than in your thesis defence that some Mr (or Mrs.) Smarty Pants comes up with a hole in your work. Should someone be particularly cruel you can get back at them at one of the many social events, perhaps drawing attention to their comb-over or their lack of dancing skills.

Finally, get out and meet grad students in other areas. As much as you would like to think that engineers are the coolest people around (and if you do think this you really do need to get out a lot more), meeting students from other departments will not only expand your social circle but also possibly enhance your own research. My M.Sc. thesis in Biochemical Engineering came from a math article on cellular automata and discussion with mathematicians. Graduate studies should be a time of meeting new people, independent research and enjoying your time in the hallowed halls of the university, so enjoy it and make sure you get out and do other stuff like hiking or latte drinking or socializing. You know, "living".

## Dealing with Difficult People at Work

Maja Rehou, Member, WISE Toronto

Whether you work in a huge corporation, a small size professional service firm, or even as a cashier at the local grocery store you will find in your work life that there will come a time when you have to deal with a difficult person or persons, be it a coworker, boss or customer.

There may be the co-worker who divulges more personal information than is appropriate for the workplace or the perfectionist who goes over and redoes your work constantly. They could be meddling, but well-intentioned or just plain confrontational. Whether you have to deal with someone who steam rolls over his or her fellow co-workers and always has to be right; or a complainer who whines about everything from the amount of work on their desk to how long they had to wait for their bus. There is the drama queen/king, the backstabber or the indecisive; and the list goes on. Coworkers are cited as the number one stress-inducing factor in the workplace.

People's difficult behaviour is usually brought on by four intents or purposes that have been thwarted.

- Getting a task done (controlling),
- Getting a task done right (perfectionist),
- Getting along with people (attention seeking), and
- Getting appreciation from people (approval seeking).

Since the only way that you may be able to get these people out of your life would be to quit your job, the following provides some advice and useful hints to help you deal with any type of difficult person you come across.

First listen. The best way to calm a belligerent person is to become all ears. Tell them that you understand where they're coming from and reflect back what that person says to show that you heard them. Knowing they have been heard will begin to defuse their anger.

Assume positive intent. If you assume that the difficult person's intentions were positive, it will empower you to conduct yourself in such a way that you can bring out the best in the other person.

No matter what tone the person is talking to you in, remain calm and talk quietly. Don't raise your voice because that will only illicit the person to raise his/her voice in competition to be heard. Your quiet manner will force him/her to quiet down, as well.

Don't go to the person's boss to complain or gossip behind their back.

Put on a big smile, but be sincere, expressing positive emotions visually always helps to disarm your opponent and shows you are in emotional control.

Let dead dogs lie. Don't go over old wounds and pick scabs. Deal with the issue at hand without bringing up past history.

Avoid forming an army- don't try and get the entire office on your side to prove you are right or to get sympathy; deal with the situation on your own.

Be straight forward and sincere. If they have done something to hurt or aggravate you, remain calm and tell them that you are upset. Do something positive like ask them their advice/opinion, smile, share some humour, and/or offer a compliment. Finally, tell them what you want and how they may be able to help you with your problem.

Blend. Find common ground with the difficult people and adapt to their communication style. By blending you can reduce the difference between yourself and the person you are having difficulty with. But beware not to blend to the extent that you appear to be ridiculing a person and never emulate hostile gestures or words.

Finally, stay away from words and actions that are disrespectful or that trivialize, reject, ignore or minimize. Don't diminish or tamper with the identity a person has of themselves.

In contrast to your private life, you rarely can choose the people with whom you spend the majority of your day. There are several psychological truths about working with difficult people. First off, don't expect them to radically change their personalities, because they won't. You can help to modify their behavior but doing so will require a commitment of time and

energy. Second, we perceive people as difficult because they elicit an emotional reaction in us. Thus, unless you can learn to control that emotional reaction, you have little chance of altering the relationship. Finally, modifying your behavior to adapt to the behavior of a difficult person is no easy task. You need to be flexible, patient, clever and intuitive.

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*Maja Rehou is consultant, writer, editor, and founder of WordForce Communications. Her firm provides technical language and marketing communication services to help engineers, scientists, web developers, lawyers and business professionals improve the effectiveness and profitability of their written collateral. She can be reached at (416) 970-6733 or by email: [mrehou@wordforce.ca](mailto:mrehou@wordforce.ca).*

### From Kenya ... ..



## WOMEN IN MINING: a Survey of Career Experiences

Lindsay Moreau, Vice President, and Helen Francis, Executive Member, WISE Sudbury

A growing problem within industry today is the greybeard phenomenon. The aging professional workforce, combined with the ever-present gender imbalance, results in an industry facing a future where there may not be enough professionals to ensure companies continue to operate in a safe and economically sound manner. This problem is magnified within the mining industry, where university enrollment as a whole has dropped and only three percent of women engineers classify themselves as 'mining engineers'. The solution to raising the number of qualified professionals in the mining industry is to attract more women to the profession. But how?

Researchers at the University of British Columbia, Ginger Gibson and Dr. Malcolm Scoble, have launched an investigation into the matter. They conducted a survey to identify the positive elements of a career in mining (i.e. What about mining appeals to women?) and also to determine the negative aspects (i.e. What aspects make the industry a less appealing career choice?). With Sudbury's reputation as a world-class mining center, a number of members from the WISE Sudbury group were asked to participate in the international survey.

Approximately fifty percent of the WISE Sudbury members are either directly or

indirectly employed within the mining industry.

One of the key outcomes from the international survey of 50 women was the identification of nine hurdles to women in mining. They are listed in the order of the number of women that prioritized them:

- Hurdle #1: Balancing family and work
- Hurdle #2: Promotions
- Hurdle #3: Stereotyping
- Hurdle #4: Harassment
- Hurdle #5: Workplace culture
- Hurdle #6: Inflexibility
- Hurdle #7: Lack of role model
- Hurdle #8: Different styles
- Hurdle #9: Health and safety

The paper by Gibson and Scoble states that although the women identify these issues as hurdles, they see the hurdles as challenges. A number of suggestions in overcoming the hurdles, such as development of flexible and innovative work arrangement combined with changes to corporate policies to curb discrimination and harassment, were included in the surveyed women's responses. The women also clearly voiced that Senior Management (today mainly male) has a crucial role to play in supporting change in workplace culture, such that the environment becomes one that women feel comfortable in and want to stay in. It is genuinely believed that the mining industry can be a

desirable career choice for a greater percentage of women with the incorporation of the suggested changes. Perhaps, the changes will be a necessity of the industry to ensure sufficient talent is available for the continued safe and productive operation of the mining industry.

For the full paper please see the CIM Bulletin – September 2004.



Helen Francis

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From Ottawa Chapter:



From Sudbury Chapter:



From Toronto Chapter:

