



WE Local Detroit 2023

What we learned...

In February 2023, GradSWE UofT attended the SWE Local Detroit conference, with MANY thanks to the office of Diversity, Inclusion and Professionalism (DIP). With the support of the DIP office, GradSWE was able to send seven members to the conference to network, build professional development skills, and to connect with the broader SWE community.

"It meant a lot to hear that the DIP office was willing to sponsor us attending the conference. It really reflects how much they value the professional development of women in engineering by providing opportunities for us to build our networks and learn from the broader SWE community. I wouldn't have been able to attend this conference without their support so I really appreciated it."

- Liz DaMaren (3rd Year PhD, MIE)

The conference was packed full of seminars, presentations and workshops by women engineers who were at various stages of their careers. The GradSWE team is excited to share their valuable learnings and main takeaways from the conference sessions!



Guidance for Student Teams: Encouraging them to Fly without Crashing

Notes by Sharon Ferguson

Session run by Diane Peters, Associate Professor at Kettering University

When to help and when to back-off? While it is important to let students make mistakes, we must be conscious of what these mistakes are. Always intervene when there is a safety concern, when a large amount of money is on the line, or if biases play into interpersonal issues.

How to manage team dynamics?

- Build a relationship with students where they feel comfortable coming to you with issues, but where they know you are not their friend.
- *Guide* the team on structure: get them thinking about succession planning, dividing tasks, and delegating.
- *Be transparent* about school, team, and financial policies
- Provide training for safety, technical skills and project management
- *Be a model* for the behaviour you want to see in the group: be respectful, value different perspectives and identities, and use prompt and clear communication

When to reward behaviour? Reward good work, even if the team doesn't win a trophy. It's the leader's job to help them *see failure as a learning process*. Doing so will help them to evaluate their own failures.



Gender in the Workplace

Notes by Sharon Ferguson

In this workshop, by Lauren Long, Project Manager and Mechanical Engineer at Treetown Tech, attendees split into groups of 10 to discuss EDI in the workplace and at school. These are some main take-aways from Sharon's group:

- *EDI targets* can be built into performance reviews, suggesting a deep *commitment* from the organization.
- Affinity groups help to build allyship.
- Students in various SWE chapters have recruited men as allies simply by spreading the word about SWE events.
- *Vocal support* by male university Deans significantly helps promote SWE membership to diverse genders.
- It is important to have involved and active required EDI trainings.
- Message to women: *teach people how to treat you!* If you are always being asked to take the meeting minutes, it is time to suggest that a man takes a turn.
- Create a safe space for men to learn about the issues that women in engineering face, without feeling judged.



Career Pivot: Expanding Your Engineering Skillset

Notes by Cindy Bui

Panel discussion with five women who **pivoted among careers** in manufacturing, entrepreneurship, finance, R&D, accessibility, and people management.

- **Considering a career pivot?** *Prepare* by making a list of what you want (and don't want) in your next job. Build a *support network*.
- **Challenges when pivoting careers?** The steep learning curve, *adjusting* to a new work-life balance, and being unwilling to *ask for help* and support.
- **Being forced to pivot?** Some panelists were forced to pivot by upper management and highlighted the importance of talking to a mentor to determine whether a pivot would be beneficial or detrimental. In some cases, pivots led to new *skill development* and were a recognition of one's current strengths, but in other cases, pivots were due to haphazard company restructuring, leaving panelists feeling unmotivated professionally.
- **Career paths are fluid!** The best pivots are running towards – not away from – something.



Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone – Managing Technical Experts

Notes by Cindy Bui

How-To: Going from technical expert to people manager

- Take the time to *listen and learn* from the new team in order to best match each person's skillset to the tasks
- Clear the way for the team and remember to *tackle small obstacles* like updating software, alongside *bigger obstacles* like changing the work culture
- Make sure to *delegate and teach*. This is easy to forget since technical experts are accustomed to getting things done themselves in their own way!



Soft Skills – Keys to Success by Brad Jordan

Notes by Anjula Mary Antonis

85% of job success comes from having soft skills and people skills!

Four major pillars of developing a strong soft skillset:

1. **Self-awareness:** Know your strengths and weaknesses, and things that affect you most, like sensitive topics or triggering conversations.
2. **Empathy:** “Odds are principle”, meaning that each person attends something or engages in a conversation for some selfish purpose. Most people have one question in mind, “WIFMe: What’s In It For Me.” Try to satisfy theirs as well as your own personal motivation.
3. **Positive energy:** Ask yourself, “What energy do I bring into the door?” We often have three *states of energy*: positive, negative or neutral. Try to bring a “net positive energy” into a room. Brad provided some suggestions on how to do this:
 - Create a *catch phrase* to tell yourself when things get difficult (“We got this” or “This too shall pass”)
 - Have a stress reducing conversation and *let out* all the negative emotion with someone you trust
 - Avoid gossip or two-faced conversations
 - Be over-*enthusiastic* (especially when speaking to people online, since the computer takes away some of your energy)
4. **Professionalism:** Find a *culture* that values you for who you are. Connect with employees and stalk your potential employers on LinkedIn to have a better understanding of their company culture



Find Your Inner Beyonce

Notes by Priscilla Lai

Crystal Allen took attendees on a **journey through Beyonce’s career** from Destiny’s Child, to her solo career, to her advocacy work. She summarized the 5 steps for emulating the success of the Queen B.

1. **Get yourself a herd/girl group:** Find those who can push you out of your comfort zone. Take *feedback* from this group, and determine who is your advocate and mentor.
2. **Prioritize your impact:** Use tools like the Eisenhower decision matrix, and Start, Stop and Continue lists to *reprioritize* what is important NOW.
3. **Connect to the business:** Know when to say no and know what is *driving growth* and profitability. Build cross-functional relationships and networks.
4. **Share the spotlight:** Practice selfless and *authentic leadership*. Use your mic to let others speak and identify the opportunities to build the credibility of others.
5. **Build from others:** Look for *mentorship and mentees*, and don’t be afraid to call someone for support.



Negotiating Your Worth in a Male Dominated Field

Notes by Aliaa Gouda

Despite having the same level of education, *women still earn less than men in engineering roles*. The COVID-19 pandemic widened this gap even further due to factors such as at-home schooling.

How to overcome common fears related to negotiation?

- *Be prepared*. Do your research, understand the macroeconomics of the industry, and *define your value* as a negotiator. Know your non-negotiables and data points that you can *use as leverage* in negotiations. Conduct line-by-line comparisons and develop a scorecard for holistic evaluation. Preparing thoroughly will help you approach negotiation confidently and effectively!

Other tips for successful negotiation?

- Engage with the other party in a *positive* and *confident* manner. This will help you to advocate for your worth.
- Consider internal negotiations, such as knowing the performance cycle and communicating your goals with your manager. Use a fact-based approach to strengthen your negotiation strategy.
- *Make yourself visible* to decision makers to increase your chances of success.



Partners Not Opponents: Turning Communication into Connection

Notes by Aliaa Gouda

This session taught **effective communication techniques** to build better connections with teams, leadership, suppliers and customers:

- It's important to *be curious and open-minded* to better understand others. Use “yes, and” instead of “but” to create a more collaborative and positive environment, and *minimize judgement* by focusing on “how and what” rather than “why”.
- Cultivate curiosity and avoid reactive habits, such as not taking things personally.



WE Local Detroit Themes: Empowering Self-Advocacy and Personal Board of Directors for Career Success

Notes by Guijin Li

Chelsea Bowen's session on "Managing Up: Career Self-Advocacy" and Mary Kinsella's session on "Impactful Career Messaging Brings the Opportunities You Want" both underscored the importance of advocating for oneself.

Many of us may feel uncomfortable with self-promotion due to cultural or other reasons. However, it is crucial to recognize that our work will not speak for itself unless we *actively speak up*. Chelsea provided compelling reasons for *practicing self-advocacy*, such as eliminating ambiguity, establishing visibility, taking control of our own careers, and avoiding resentment. Ultimately, nobody cares about our career as much as we do, and people cannot read our minds. Therefore, it becomes our responsibility to create and deliver **clear messages**.

To craft effective career messages, Mary suggested following **"the Magic 4"** approach, which entails communicating:

1. What we are working on,
2. Our role,
3. The impact we are making, and
4. Our future plans.

Once our message is drafted, it becomes essential to *seek feedback* from individuals we trust. This brings us to another *recurring theme* at WE Local Detroit: the significance of having a **"Personal Board of Directors"**: a group of trusted individuals who provide advisory roles on specific topics.

Depending on our goals, these individuals can include *career mentors, field experts, trusted friends, and family members, among others*. Most people are genuinely generous and willing to help others if they understand how to do so. Therefore, it is vital to establish clear goals and expectations to foster effective *ongoing support and guidance* from our personal board of directors. Additionally, it is important to note that as we progress in our careers, our personal board of directors should also adapt and evolve to meet our changing needs.