



Thriving begins with you!

by Dr. Kathy Toogood, Educator, Professor & Author of Women Thriving in Leadership: Practices for Cultivating Wholeness and Community

Though many argue that one day in March is insufficient for recognizing the contributions of women, International Women's Day does provide an opportunity for us to notice and celebrate the importance of women. Approximately 78 per cent of NSTU members are women and our schools would not function without their skillful work, faithful care, and perseverance.

For women working from an ethic of care, invested in the wellbeing of students, their families and the community, the work is never done. To sustain ourselves for the long haul, we must find ways to prioritize our wellbeing by practicing self-care.

Our education system continues to grow in complexity, and the people who have the greatest influence on the student experience are teachers. When teachers are thriving personally, they are better equipped to respond with wisdom and insight to the changing needs of students and discern the next best step to creating conditions for all students to thrive.

I define leadership as taking responsibility for the quality of your own life, and then sharing your gifts with others in community. Exercising leadership in your own life involves cultivating wholeness so you can offer your gifts from a position of self-awareness and strength. We cultivate thriving communities by empowering everyone to contribute their gifts.

Cultivating Wholeness

Cultivating wholeness means taking the time to understand your strengths, tendencies, and preferences. Our definition of thriving changes over time with our age, health, and family situation. Reflection is essential to discerning how to live your best life right now. If you have a good day, take the time to ask why. Was it because you ate breakfast, got a good night's sleep, or chose to do something that you love and are good at? When you notice what contributes to a good day, you can adjust your actions to create those conditions more consistently. If you have a bad day, figure out what contributed to the bad day. How much of that was within your circle of control or influence?

We thrive by focusing our energy on what we can control, and that is our thinking, our being and our doing. You can shape your thinking by feeding your mind with inspiring reading or podcasts, by meditating or repeating a helpful affirmation. Try monitoring how much time you spend consuming news or browsing social media and consider the impact it is having on your wellbeing.

You get to choose your being—or how you show up. When you choose kindness, curiosity, and presence, over distraction, or judgement, you may be surprised by the difference it makes in

your interactions and relationships.

You get to choose what you do. When you decide how to spend your time and energy, do you consider what you **want to do**? Or are you driven by what you think you **should do**, shaped by other people's spoken and unspoken expectations? The world needs what only you can offer. When you choose to invest time in activities that light you up, you can be energized rather than drained by your efforts.

Cultivating wholeness also means prioritizing self-care. I learned the hard way that nobody could care for me but me. You are the only one who can determine what food you eat, whether you move your body, and what time you go to bed. It is up to you to determine which actions and conditions help you to be your best, and then choose to invest in your wellbeing. You have more agency than you think you do.

Cultivating Community

Another powerful choice that you have is to choose your companions. You can choose to be around people who encourage and see the best in you. And you can choose to be that kind of friend and colleague for others. Cultivating community is all about living a life in reciprocity, giving and receiving, working together toward big goals, asking for what you need, and offering what you can.

I love the sense of community that is part of life in Nova Scotia. Whenever I have needed a drive, a cat sitter, or an expert sewing buddy, people have stepped up. I have been a person who has tried to do it all, often to my detriment. What I have learned with age and experience is that there are many benefits to asking for help. The other person feels like they belong and have made a difference, and our relationship is strengthened. When we share the load for big projects, it increases the sense of ownership and commitment. If no one is willing to help, it may be a sign that it is not an activity worth investing in at this time. We can accomplish so much more with the strengths and insights of many than we can on our own.

You are what you consistently do. I invite you to incorporate practices into your life that bring you joy, increase your wellbeing, and strengthen your resilience. Spend time with people who believe in you and support you to live your best life. It is a great day to thrive, and thriving starts with you.

You can connect with Dr. Kathy Toogood through her website KanopyConsulting.ca, and be informed about ongoing learning opportunities. Her book, *Women Thriving in Leadership*,

provides many resources to support your personal and leadership development, including narratives from female leaders, practices to support thriving, and reflective exercises to enhance learning.

Dr. Kathy Toogood has been an educator for over 30 years. She is an adjunct professor for the University of Portland and worked for Edmonton Public School as a high school teacher, elementary principal, and district consultant; and then Alberta Education as a system leader. Her Doctor of Education (EdD) from the University of Calgary focused on the lived experiences of female principals and their paths and approach to leadership. She has a Master of Education from the University of Portland and a BEd and BSc from Dalhousie. She currently resides in Nova Scotia.