

**Remarks of Wendy K. Neu,  
Executive Vice President, Hugo Neu Corporation**

**before the**

**Association of Women in Metal Industries (AWMI)**

**June 2012**

Thank you and thank you for inviting me tonight.

When I was first invited to speak to a group of women in the metals industry, I thought, “Wouldn’t it be easier to just take the 3 of us out for drinks?” But I am impressed with the number of you here and am proud to be among you.

Seriously, though – this is the world I come from. And perhaps my journey can in some small way inspire some of you to believe that what we do makes a difference.

My journey began as an immigrant. I came to this country from England in the late sixties with my parents and siblings, and we literally came with the clothes on our backs. But my parents had big dreams of not only aspiring to a better life but one in which their children could both achieve their potential and also make a difference. As someone who grew up in the seventies I truly believed that I could change the world. I had largely been influenced by the particular issues of the day – the war, the environment, social justice, feminism, drugs, sex and so much more. 40 years later these issues (well, maybe not sex and drugs so much) still keep me up at night. I still think, however, I was so lucky to have been part of that cultural revolution.

My first real job after college was working as a social worker in a prison, a maximum security one at that. I had no idea what I was doing, and the inmates figured that out much sooner than I did. I was the first female social worker other than a nun, Sister Mary Beth. In that prison I learned probably the most important lesson of my young 21 years – that life was not fair. Luck had as much to do with one’s situation in life, as much as any other factor. My family (five siblings) still tells stories of the many times I would bring home work release inmates to dinner. Inevitably they would ask afterwards just what our guests’ crimes were, and I would evade answering. I only worked with violent criminals and sex offenders.

So after 6 long years working in corrections and at the ripe old age of 27, I was totally burnt out, emotionally drained, and reluctantly ready to move on. Changing the world was hard work, and I wasn’t very good at it. My life was a mess, and I had suddenly for the first time lost my purpose. Plus I needed to make more money. My father, a marine surveyor in the Port of New York came to my rescue, sort of – he suggested I apply for a job at Hugo Neu Corporation, a long shot. How could they hire someone who had

only ever worked for the state, and in the prisons no less? My resume though interesting dinner conversation left most people puzzled at best, and Hugo and John Neu were the smartest people my father had ever met. Well, after a grueling interview process they (Hugo) hired me with one stipulation, and it was mine – I would not have to work for John Neu, who intimidated me and was a little frightening. That's saying something from someone who had worked with death row inmates. John would later become my husband and lifelong partner.

Those years working in the prisons laid the foundation for who I am today and prepared me well for what would come next. They also helped to guide me in all that I would do.

So that's how I ended up in the junk business and what I thought of as the dark side, the corporate world. Little did I know how events would unfold, but still how long would it take for them to figure out I had no idea what I was doing. I felt like a fraud!

When I joined Hugo Neu Corp., there was a group of German Jewish males and John who was managing the scrap yards that had been started in earlier decades and selling steel scrap and metals to customers in the USA, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Hugo Neu in the late seventies was largely diversified. We were heavily invested in the metals side of the business but also owned substantial interests in shipping and industrial real estate. The only women that worked at Hugo Neu Corp. were in secretarial positions, but I survived, and during the next 30 years I was lucky enough to participate in its explosive growth. We added shredding plants in Hawaii, Utah, Rhode Island and New Hampshire. We launched a trading business in Russia, the Netherlands and Canada. We started selling to India, Pakistan, Greece, Turkey and Egypt and most importantly China and eventually Vietnam. By 1990, we became one of the largest metal recyclers in the world and the largest exporter of recycled metal from the US to end users throughout the world.

I learned the business from the bottom up. My first position was in traffic, preparing documents and collecting millions of dollars under letters of credit.

I later moved into sales and went on the road selling our own production of Prime western zinc and 380 aluminum alloys to galvanizers and steel mills throughout the country. Frankly, I have no recollection of actually having sold much. There were few women if any at the time selling industrial accounts, and I became somewhat of a novelty amongst the purchasing managers at Bethlehem, Sharon Steel and others.

I often got in the door but after that I felt at an enormous disadvantage. It was as though I couldn't understand the language and try as I might, I never completely figured it out. Fortunately, Hugo had other plans for me, and I ended up working in a scrap yard in NJ. Now, finally I felt as though my prison experience might come in handy. And it did. This was an environment I was comfortable in – and this is also where I learned my metals. I finally learned the difference between copper and brass, zinc and aluminum. I was on my way!

But I was still haunted by my past. Not only had I sold out to the corporate world, but I also ended up marrying the boss. Try explaining that one.

I couldn't, but what I could do was also try to marry my values with my work and find a way to fulfill my need to make a difference. This industry presented the perfect opportunity. Moving the industry from a junk business to a scrap business and then to recycling required changing the culture as well as the mindset. And I wanted to get ahead of that.

So using my new role and status I started to figure out how we as a company could do business differently. My first opportunity arose in the midst of planning a dredging project in the Claremont Channel. I wanted to try a different approach. Everyone knows how contentious and costly these types of projects can be. And often for good reason. Part of the permitting process requires public hearings whereby all the stakeholders have the opportunity to object and delay the project for months if not years. Once John was convinced, we decided to invite one of the most influential stakeholders, the Baykeeper to our facility for a tour and hopefully engage them in the process long before any public hearings. Now today this might not sound so revolutionary, but back then the only time an organization like the Baykeeper came into your yard was to deliver a notice of intent to sue. Naturally our general counsel thought we were crazy, and even the state DEP advised us against it. And sure enough, the Baykeeper showed up but with their counsel – not a good omen. As I later learned, they were very skeptical of our intentions and had joked amongst themselves as to whether they might end up in the shredder – they had never once been invited to participate in a process such as this. And we got our permits, thanks to the Baykeeper. Within a short period of time the Baykeeper was invited into strategy sessions with our consultants and contributed their expertise to not just the dredging project but other aspects of our operations. All without the Baykeeper compromising their mission and certainly not being coopted by the process – they kept on suing polluters.

By the way Andy Willner, founder of the Baykeeper, now works with us on all our projects and has been invaluable providing us with a different perspective.

So I was on my way. Nothing could stop me now. Understand there was much resistance within Hugo Neu Corp. to open up our facilities, but the upside was tremendous. And never more so than with the curbside program in New York City.

In the spring of 2002, Mayor Bloomberg dismantled the curbside program in New York City resulting in enormous backlash from the residents, claiming it was too costly for the city to run. By this time I had developed a wide array of relationships within the environmental community and grassroots organizations in the city. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), one of the leading environmental organizations in New York, as well as the country, were mobilizing their constituents to reinstate the program but acknowledged the program was too costly and were seeking a recycler, not a waste company, to come to the rescue. During a small luncheon with John and me, they convinced us we should consider taking over the program, and we did! A

new business for Hugo Neu Corp., and one we would never have considered but for the NRDC.

The examples of working with versus against – the Baykeeper and the NRDC – demonstrate that often we can align our values with our work. And, in fact, enhance the value of our businesses in the process. By trying to stay ahead and integrate our values around the environment and social justice, we've discovered new areas of recycling, such as electronic recycling, food composting and new regions where recycling rates are minimal, like Puerto Rico, where we are building a state of the art recycling facility designed to process 25,000 tons per month.

In the course of the last 10 years, we have not only worked closely with environmental groups, but we have also engaged politically on both the federal and local level, always trying to improve the standards of our industry and level the playing field for responsible recyclers. In fact, I have had the opportunity to testify before several committees in Congress on behalf of our company expressing our view that regulations promulgated and enforced by the EPA have been essential to our growth, diversification and sustainability of our operations. For example, we are now working actively to support federal legislation prohibiting the export of unprocessed electronic waste to developing countries, though it is never popular to advocate for more regulation. Don't we wish that people and corporations would just do the right thing? But sadly we have found no better way to protect the public and the environment and our own company than thru proper legislation and regulation. And we need to protect the public and the environment – now perhaps more than ever.

So have I set out to do what I intended, that is, to change the world? So far from it. But I have learned something very important along the way – I have learned that life is not fair, that luck matters as much as anything and that I have been indeed been very lucky. But I have also learned that doing what we women do best – engaging with our communities and constituents, supporting and caring for each other, and keeping our eye on the ball (whatever that is for each one of us – environment and social justice for myself) – can open up all sorts of opportunities and ultimately make a difference.

Thank you.