Name: Grace Tesa

Job Title: Senior Project Manager, City of Toronto, Basement Flooding Protection Program

STEM field: Engineering

1. What does a typical day in your position look like?

Most days include meetings and interacting with team members and internal clients to review the status of projects, to address questions/comments/technical challenges and to find ways to improve our projects. The projects I am involved in relate to municipal infrastructure improvements to address basement flooding and include Program Management, Environmental Assessment Studies, Preliminary and Detailed Design, and Construction projects. When not in meetings, I am reviewing technical reports and design drawings to ensure the City's standards, guidelines and policies and the project objectives are being met and writing staff reports or terms of references for new projects.

2. How did you get to where you are today?

I always describe myself as a late bloomer…it took me 9 years of post-secondary education, in various programs at various schools to find a profession that I really loved. In 2002, I graduated with a degree in Water Resources Engineering from the University of Guelph. My first full-time job was with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) where I had previously worked as a summer student. I was offered a contract position that turned into a full time where I fulfilled many roles within the engineering group. After 4 and half years at TRCA, I wanted to pursue a career in the private sector, and accepted a positon in the Water Resources group at Dillon Consulting. After 8 years at Dillon and after becoming an associate and a mom, I again was looking for a new challenge and a new career path. I became an engineer at the City of Toronto in the Policy and Program Development unit of Toronto Water. About a year later, I applied for and accepted my current position - Senior Project Manager in the Basement Flooding Protection Program in Engineering and Construction Services Division at the City of Toronto. Common to all these positions was working in the field of water resources engineering, surrounded by a great group of knowledge and supportive people, and solving problems and affecting change that people can realize in their daily lives.

It probably sounds cliché but key being where I am today is always working hard, taking pride in my work, focusing on solving big picture problems and helping others based on my strengths, technical skills and knowledge. Also, I made sure that I made positive, lasting relationships. People recognized these positive traits about me. I had confidence in my abilities and was willing to take a step back (i.e., taking a contract position or accepting a lower position in a new place) in order to get the position I am in today. Having a partner, a family and amazing girlfriends that really support you also helps!

3. Did you have to overcome any challenges or obstacles?

Coming back to work after having a baby was hard. I couldn't always work the same hours or with the same dedication as before because my life now had a whole new meaning and purpose. I had to understand and accept that the way I worked would be different but it didn't mean compromising doing a great job or that I was defined by my work or that I could still be me and an awesome mom. Living my life by being engaged at work and happy at home is the best role model for my daughter!

4. What inspired you to pursue this position?

I am passionate about working for the City in which I live and love and trying to solve problems that impact the quality of life of residents/citizens/businesses.

5. What advice would you give young girls who are interested in a STEM career?

Find a passion you truly enjoy in your life or your career and do not let anything/anyone stop you from pursuing it – including yourself. It is OK not to be perfect or to not to know everything. See the challenges and set-backs you face as opportunities that will make you grow and that will help you evolve into an amazing, strong woman that can overcome whatever comes your way. Just keep asking questions and looking for answers, be flexible to change and continue being inspired.

6. Did you have any role models growing up?

All the women in my family – my grandmother, my mom, and my older sisters were/are all very hard workers and very strong willed. They also has a lot of love and compassion. They showed me to never compromise what is important to you, to keep working for what you want and to be there for those you love and people who need your help.

Favourite quote:

“Say what you feel, and do what you say. Because those who mind don’t matter, and those who matter don’t mind.”

Photo of yourself (Optional: Can attach to email)