

Deborah de Lange

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Deborah has more than thirty years' experience in industry and consulting. Originally she studied electrical engineering, and her work in that field is still integral to her career today. After receiving her PhD in strategic management from the University of Toronto, she centered her research on sustainable development. Deborah has published three books and is a tenured professor at Toronto Metropolitan University. She focuses on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and contributes to addressing community issues such as the environment and human rights.

Her academic research is extensive, including numerous published peer-reviewed journal articles and three books: *Cliques and Capitalism*, *Research Companion to Green International Studies*, and *Power and Influence*. She also writes articles designed for public consumption that can be easily understood by a layperson. Her professional experience covers many areas, including climate change mitigation through clean technology, circular economy trade, and responsible corporate governance. She has been a Massey Scholar and won many awards for excellence in research, service, and writing.

As much as she invests into research and communication, Deborah mentors entrepreneurial start-ups as well. She has been a judge for case and start-up pitch competitions, and is willing to entertain professional inquiries related to her specialties.



Why is the energy transition important to you?

The energy transition is important because we can solve so many problems and realize a brighter future by transitioning to clean energy. Energy is a basis for sustainable development and there is bountiful clean energy to power our world many times over. Lower-cost clean energy systems permit access to energy for everyone no matter where they reside, reducing inequality. Renewable energy would pull millions out of poverty, prevent mass migrations that will otherwise occur as a result of climate disasters, reduce war and conflict, improve human health, and result in a healthier planet, overall, so that all flora and fauna can flourish. Clean technologies are scientifically fascinating, opening up new, safer, and more advanced types of industries with more

employment opportunities than our current fossil fuel system can offer. With almost limitless clean energy, our capabilities to solve many other issues are vastly increased.

What are the key challenges you've faced in your career, and what are your thoughts on their solutions?

In Canada and elsewhere, many have been influenced by a big oil and gas industry with deep pockets, to a point where that industry and those who have chosen to associate with it have sought to destroy the careers of many opponents telling the truth about climate change. Canada has a diversified mixed economy and we have had no reason to be held hostage by any single industry, but this has happened with grave consequences.

Growing up in Toronto and as a business professor and accountant, I was a professional trained to be objective, and fair, and to facilitate transparency. In such an institutionalized environment, it has dismayed me to watch an industry get away with such ruthlessness and corruption. No matter our relatively strong Canadian institutions, including democracy and a free press, intended to protect the public, institutionalized corruption spread like a disease. The fossil fuel industry has worked within a system of crony capitalism that ignores scientific evidence, determinedly investing to conceal the disastrous effects of carbon pollution leading to the climate emergency and the terrifying worldwide consequences we face now.

I am proud to have survived as an unexpected challenger to an ensconced but established

Canadian status quo not realized until I took a "side" that to me was scientifically evident. As a Canadian educated in a public system, I thought we valued science, but to my surprise, that is not what our history demonstrates. My experience has further confirmed to me that honest words, thoughtful intellectual discussion, and rigorous evidence-based education make an impact – knowledge is power - no matter that opponents have tried to defund education and demean the educated. In Canada, government cronies aided the fossil fuel industry by muzzling scientists. We have to protect against anti-democratic, anti-intellectual policies in the future, just as we stand on guard for our country.

Furthermore, women in male-dominated fields, including energy, have always faced inequality. Inequality will not be solved for women until we legislate equality into our institutions and put prejudice on the sidelines. Prejudice still sits squarely in the center of mainstream Canadian society today. We have to stop the denial and shed light on the inequality, for example, by making firms report and resolve their gender wage gaps, by ensuring that there are equal numbers of women and men at all levels of organizations, and by seeing that women are equally represented in our political systems. Canada has noticeably reversed course as we watch women in politics being harassed and disrespected, hamstringing our democracy so that it cannot resolve inequality. Canada still has not elected a woman Prime Minister in a general election, yet countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Ireland, among many others, have elected women as leaders. Canadian attitudes towards women in positions of power are archaic and need to progress.

What does a successful energy transition look like to you?

A successful energy transition means using 100% clean, renewable energy within circular systems that reuse materials and eliminate waste. For example, the full lifecycle of a solar farm is planned so that the solar farm enhances its environment while in operation, and at the end of its life, solar panels are fed back into recycling/reuse systems. Moreover, a damaging level of carbon pollution is stopped everywhere, forever.

Such a transition leaves no one behind and must be inclusive of women on an equal basis. Workers in old dirty industries would transition to new cleaner, safer jobs. A successful transition would reduce wealth inequality and increase human security by making clean energy affordable and accessible to everyone.

We still have yet to build sufficient sustainable housing for the homeless and working poor, as a human right. Building affordable housing would be facilitated by lowering energy costs through a clean energy transition. Once housed, people could afford the costs of living in their homes. No one would have to worry about being warm enough in winter, being cool enough in summer, or having enough energy to do all the things they love to do. The costs of city systems such as transportation, waste management, and water filtration would be lower after initial investments so, all of these costs of living would be lower for all of us. We would experience greater human security.

A clean energy transition moves us closer to attaining the freedom to realize our potential.

What book is on your nightstand?

I have authored/edited three books, all related to sustainable development including my dissertation dedicated to my late father, Jan H. de Lange, so these are part of my and my father's legacy. These books can be found [here](#).

What is the proudest accomplishment of your life?

On several occasions, I walked away from "the powerful" to do what I saw as "the right thing". My proudest accomplishment is being strong throughout my life and surviving decently even though I walked away. I say this now so that others will not be afraid to walk away and do the right thing. If everyone did this, we would achieve so much more together. And please remember to support those who are taking risks for a better world – they need you, just like I

needed support from those who understood. Believe in the "power of the individual" because it adds up to the "power of many" and the results most of us would prefer. Don't listen to the naysayers – they are just the weak ones who let us all down. I say, "yes, I can" and "yes, you can, too". Be strong, believe in yourself, look towards the light, and turn away from the darkness.

If you were granted one wish to make the world a better place, what would it be?

I would reinforce and improve the resilience of democratic institutions while strengthening international laws so that the world would never see another dictator and corrupt special interests could not erode democracies. Stronger democracies and international laws would mitigate state terrorism and wars, such as the Russian attack on Ukraine today and other senseless conflicts. Stronger democracies backed by robust international laws would be more likely to resolve inequality and avoid crimes against humanity and the earth. Our human-caused climate catastrophe is a crime against the earth that needs recognition in the International Criminal Court. Democracies need to be more effective and proactive to collectively address the UN sustainable development goals and prevent other future problems.

Describe the future of energy in one word.

Clean.



**WOMEN IN ENERGY
TRANSFORMATION**

This interview has been edited and condensed. It was prepared as part of *Women in Energy Transformation*, a national dialogue on gender equity and the role of women in leading Canada towards a net-zero carbon future.