

Aloha kakahiaka kākou,

‘O Tuia‘ana Scanlan ko‘u inoa. ‘O wau ka pelekikena o IATSE ‘Eono ‘Eono ‘Elima, IATSE International Trustee, a he lālā ‘aha kūkā ho‘omohala limahana o ka moku‘āina o Hawai‘i

Good morning, everyone,

My name is Tuia‘ana Scanlan. I’m the president of IATSE 665, IATSE International Trustee, and a Hawai‘i state Workforce Development Councilmember.

This place is the ancestral home of Na Kanaka Maoli o Hawai‘i - the native people of Hawai‘i, who have stewarded these lands for centuries. We are wayfarers and farseekers; molders and shapers of earth. For Na pua o Moananuiakea - the children of the vast Pacific Ocean, Hokupa‘a, otherwise referred to as Polaris, or the North Star was and is a cornerstone of seafaring navigation. It represents guidance and steadfastness to this day.

Valleys and mountains are barriers that separate people. But the ocean is not. Our ancestors saw the water for what it was - a highway. A causeway of possibility, of adventure. Today, we embark on a great journey. Identifying our North Star is a critical first step to understanding what lies ahead.

But it’s not enough to just get our bearings. Without a deep understanding and unshaking belief in the position of Hokupa‘a, we are rudderless, sailing blindly into the dark to our impending doom. The same fate would await any who followed us. It’s not enough. It’s a cruel fate to know how to get to your destination and lack the means to get there. We need to not only build the ship and sail for those far distant shores. We need to empower others to do the same. We need to provide them with the tools and skills they need to give them ownership of the journey for themselves. It’s not enough for us to say “go that way, you’ll get there eventually. Pretty sure it’ll work”. It’s our responsibility to say “Follow me, I know it works because I’ve been there. Let’s find new paths together”.

I work in entertainment - film & TV, Tradeshow & Convention, Stagecraft, and much more. Jargon is a part of the job. If we didn’t have fancy terms for everything, no one would take us seriously. But when we say “workforce development”, the soundbite of its definition needs to be palatable and digestible in layman’s terms. We’re making it possible for the working people of Hawai‘i to earn a thriving wage. We’re making it so you don’t need to move away from here to support your families. We’re ensuring that local businesses and Hawai‘i’s economy thrive because of the skilled workers that are uplifted through these programs. We’re getting Hawai‘i’s workers prepared for the jobs of today and the work of tomorrow.

Anyone who’s attempted anything of significance can tell you that the path to success is anything but linear. The voyage to fulfillment and happiness cannot be charted on a map. Even if it could be, the significance of those elements is lost without a driving force propelling us ever forward. Sails need the wind, engines need fuel, and everyone in this room needs their “why”. If it’s ok, I’d like to share mine with you.

I didn’t have what you’d call an easy childhood. My father passed away when I was very young, 33 years ago this May. Our family was houseless for a time. Not long, but I can tell you that every day of that uncertainty and dread felt like an eternity. My mother worked herself to the bone to provide for her seven children. We moved around a lot. She fought like hell to get us to a better place, which she did. Give her her flowers, she did. But it wasn’t easy. I was lucky enough to go to college, where I studied theater performance. It wasn’t until the end of my college career that I realized - there’s no job placement program. They won’t hook you up with an agent, headshots, or auditions. And the prospects for a successful acting career in Southern California were so far beyond my reach, they might as well have been on the moon. I stumbled my way into behind-the-scenes work.

I was overworked and underpaid by a non-union employer for years. No healthcare, no retirement, and no future. Through sheer grit and determination, and no small amount of luck, I found my way to the Union. I chose to pursue union leadership because several of my mentors passed away in quick succession. Even though I was a young member, I knew at some point that I would be an elder to the young up and comers. I knew that if I didn't learn how to drive this thing right then and there, eventually there would be younger members looking to me for guidance and I'd have nothing for them, least of all a good excuse for not learning when I had the chance.

Sometimes, I look back on those days and think I survived out of spite alone. The world seemed like it was geared to grind me to dust at every turn. I just said, "No". I've been a union member for 18 years. I've been in leadership for the past 12. I have a loving wife, two amazing kids, and we're homeowners. At least once every day, I say aloud "I love my family, I love my house, I love my home, I love my life". I would not wish my path on anyone. But I'm happy I made it to where I am and I'm looking forward to where I'm headed. There are brighter days ahead. And I will make that a reality for others who are on similar paths to the one I was on. I will make it easier for the ones behind me. Every day, I am actively choosing to be the father, the mentor, and the leader that I wish I had so that the next generation can be empowered to do the same.

In the challenge that's laid before us, there will be hard truths we need to hear, stark realities we have to face, and seemingly insurmountable hurdles that we must overcome. There's a widely circulated quote from an unknown author that goes: If we do not face our demons, they will raise our children for us. Our excuses will be their inheritance.

I refuse to let that happen.

I'll leave you with a story I treasured as a child. A man walks up to a beach after a heavy storm. The wind and the waves have littered the beach with an immeasurable number of starfish. They're dying in the sun, just out reach of the water. Out of the corner of his eye, he notices movement in the distance. Someone's running frantically up and down the beach. As he gets closer, he realizes it's a child desperately throwing starfish back into the water. He gets closer. The kid's sobbing, exhausted, in a frenzy, but out of breath and quickly running out of steam.

"Hey kid, slow down, take a breath, how long have you been out here?"

In between the racking sobs, the kid barely gets out "they're dying...they need...help...the water".

"Hey, hey, it's ok kid. It's nobody's fault. But you gotta let it go. These starfish are gonna die. Nothing we do here is gonna make a difference".

Defiance burning in their eyes, the kid reaches down, grabs the nearest starfish, and throws it into the ocean with all their might, and says "it made a difference to that one"

I joined the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council because I want to make a difference. I volunteered without any prior knowledge of its history, its work, or its mechanisms because someone said people need help. I needed help once too. I know I can't save them all. But I can damn well try. That's my "why". I look forward to learning yours.

We are not the tip of the spear. We're the shovels and pickaxes that precede the road grader. We are here to clear the impediments that have hindered the creation of much needed pathways to meaningful wages, fulfilling work, adequate housing, and economic stability for Hawai'i's workers. I look forward to our journey together. If I'm not sailing right next to you, then I'll meet you on the next shoreline we're headed to. Let's make it a great day. Welcome to the Synergy Summit II.



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