



Issue #7: Celebrating STEM leaders during NAIDOC week



The Leader's Brief: Commanding with Care

July 2026 Edition

Dear Network,

Subject: Leading with Legacy: Celebrating First Nations Women in STEM this NAIDOC Week



This week marks NAIDOC Week across Australia—a vital time to celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Throughout my 37-year corporate journey from an electrical apprentice to a Global Chief, I have worked and managed teams across five continents. If that global footprint taught me anything, it's this: **true innovation requires diverse perspectives**. When we limit who is in the room, we limit the solutions we can engineer.

In male-dominated STEM and corporate sectors, the data pipelines can often feel rigid. Yet, some of the most profound, resilient leadership comes from those who marry ancient knowledge with cutting-edge technical execution.

Today, I want to spotlight an extraordinary Indigenous female scientist who is completely redefining what it means to lead in STEM

Dr. Kirsten Banks



Who She Is & What She's Known For

A proud Wiradjuri woman, Dr. Banks is an astrophysicist, science communicator, and author. Known for her work in "Aboriginal Astronomy," she highlights how First Nations people have been using the stars for navigation, weather forecasting, and agricultural timing for over 65,000 years—making them the world's oldest continuing astronomers. She is breaking down complex space science barriers for the next generation.

- UNSW Grad in 2018 in Physics , went on to complete her PhD in 2024
- Physics teacher
- Founder of AstroKirsten since 2015

What She Does for Up-and-Coming Engineers

As a science communicator, my mission is to make science accessible, fun, and inspiring for everyone. Through my work, I aim to:

- • Ignite Curiosity: Spark a sense of wonder and exploration in the minds of people everywhere.
- • Champion Diversity: Showcase the incredible diversity within the scientific community, ensuring every individual can see themselves reflected in the world of science.
- • Promote Accessibility: Break down complex scientific concepts into engaging and understandable content, making learning enjoyable for all.
- • Combat Disinformation: Provide accurate, evidence-based information to counteract myths and misinformation about science.
- • Celebrate Indigenous Knowledge: Integrate and honour the rich astronomical traditions of Indigenous cultures, particularly those of my ancestors, the Wiradjuri people.

(Note: Direct from her LinkedIn profile), [Kirstens LinkedIn](#)

The Chief's Take: Strategic Empathy in Action

In our corporate worlds, we talk a lot about "disruption" and "agile frameworks." But these First Nations women remind us of a deeper leadership lesson: **sustainability and connection matter.**

When we practice *Strategic Empathy*, we recognize that diversity isn't a compliance checkbox; it is a profound competitive advantage. These leaders aren't just succeeding in demanding environments; they are changing the architecture of the rooms they stand in and bringing their communities along for the ride.

That is the absolute essence of **Commanding with Care.**

The Chief's Monthly Book Recommendation

"Astronomy: Sky Country" by Karlie Noon and Krystal De Napoli

To tie into this week's theme, I highly recommend this brilliant book from the *First Knowledges* series. Written by two phenomenal Indigenous female astronomers, it explores how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have mapped the stars and predicted weather systems for millennia.

Why it's a must-read for leaders: It challenges us to expand our definition of "innovation." It beautifully demonstrates that Indigenous knowledge structures are not just historical artifacts—they are sophisticated, data-driven scientific frameworks. It's a masterclass in looking at complex systems through a completely fresh lens.

Over to You

This week, I challenge you to look at your own teams and professional networks. How are you actively creating a pathway for diverse, quiet achievers to step into their authority? How can you learn from the deep, listening-based leadership styles of First Nations cultures to build a more psychologically safe environment for your people?

Let's keep building legacies that lift others up.

Warmly,

Nikki McNicol

Founder & Principal Coach, *Commanding with Care*

The Compassionate Leader [LinkedIn Profile](#) [Website](#)