A Woman’s place is every place

By RHACHAL BAREN

In the mid-80s, I was a student at the UW, considering a major in construction management, so I took a job as a student helper in the Department of Civil Engineering. It was a taste of the work, where I could see how hardworking jobs were, and I was performing other administrative duties.

One morning, I walked into the trailer as a meeting was starting, and a man asked if I was there to make coffee. I was taken aback — while the question was fairly innocuous, the tone of delivery made it clear that I did not belong. As a young woman, that type of exclusion wasn’t unusual, but it could be interpreted as sexist.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized they aren’t used to seeing women engaged in that type of work. I realized I need to be part of that, and I need to rethink my career options. It took a small incident made me wonder — while the question was fair and the tone was just a matter of what’s available, it could create a space for open conversation and honest feedback. It is a small change, but it can make a big difference.

EARLY DAYS

When I was enrolled in the University of Washington’s construction management program, out of a cohort of 40, only 12 of the students were women. In my graduating class, we were very few women in project management. I was the only woman in my graduating class. Likewise, when I did my internship with a large national general contractor, I noticed there was an antiquated world view that regarding gender roles. Women had to prove themselves and their actions weren’t an act of their own. I realized they aren’t used to seeing women in those roles.

If I could be taken seriously in this industry, so I left the UW to rethink my career options. It took a small incident made me wonder — while the question was fair and the tone was just a matter of what’s available, it could create a space for open conversation and honest feedback. It is a small change, but it can make a big difference.

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I joined BNBuilders in 2005 and, at that time, was the only woman in project management. I loved the company, loved my coworkers, and the energy that was there. They were dedicated and passionate, but they didn’t have a place for women. I knew I belonged. In the nearly 20 years I’ve been with BN, we’ve had tremendous growth. In 2005, only 1% of our staff were women. Women are still judged differently in the workplace, and I still need to prove myself to be heard.

CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

Women hired and move up the industry. The more women we have, the more likely they will stay. I’ve noticed there are more women being raised up the leadership ranks, and that is a shift.

This increased integration of women has had a domino effect of progressing construction culture. With more and more women entering the field, their presence is becoming normalized, and their contributions recognized. Women bring a different perspective to the workplace — they tend to look at things from a different angle. By working alongside women, we have a chance to move the needle.

CONTINUING THE RIGHTS FOR EQUALITY

Women have a right to be heard and to be seen in the workplace. They have a right to be taken seriously, and they have a right to be heard. It would infuriate me, until one day I realized there was no space for women in their workplace. They were being taken seriously, and they were being heard. I knew I needed to do something.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized the need to be taken seriously in the workplace. They were taking notes, and the company was taking them seriously. I knew I needed to do something.

EVILOVING OF AN INDUSTRY

When you become accustomed to being the only woman in the workforce, it is easy to feel a sense of isolation. I know how I felt when I first started at BN, we’ve had tremendously growth. In 2005, only 1% of our staff were women. Women are still judged differently in the workplace, and I still need to prove myself to be heard.

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Paving the way: Our next generation of women construction leaders

By DARBLE SEPTELKA

RIC DONNELLY/PHOTOGRAPHER

Women in Construction Week is a time to celebrate and raise awareness of women’s contributions to this traditionally male-dominated industry. At the University of Washington, a dynamic cohort of women pursuing degrees in construction management within the College of Built Environments are embarking on the journey to become leaders in their chosen field. Their vision, leadership, and determination serve as inspiring examples to other young women who may be considering entering the industry.

In this article, we will celebrate and explore the personal journeys of women each of whom has carved their own path to success in the industry.

CASEY LAHLER

Casey Lahl, a senior majoring in CM and architecture, shares how she became interested in the construction industry. Her passion for design and architecture, coupled with her interest in construction management, led her to pursue the dual degree program at the University of Washington. "I was incredibly positive. Working alongside other women in a supportive environment was contrary to my expectations of being one of the few women," she said.

McKAYLA BURKE

McKaila Burke, a senior majoring in CM, describes how she became interested in the construction industry. "I was inspired by my friend's father who worked in the field," she said. Despite being interested in various career options, she discovered the CM program through her cousin, who was in the program.

CATHARINE DANG

Catherine Dang, a senior majoring in CM, discovered her interest in construction through a variety of experiences. "My introduction to CM came through my cousin, who was in the program," she said. "I took a CM course during my first year and enjoyed it. A chance encounter with a company representative at a career fair led me to apply for an internship, widening her interest in CM. She enrolled as a CM major and will graduate this June.

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Women at Skanska hold industry’s ‘keys to the future’

By MADELINE GELLER

The construction industry is evolving to see more and more women at the forefront of this traditionally male-dominated industry, offering new opportunities for women to excel and bring diversity and inclusiveness to the forefront.

Fraga (Skanska USA Civil), a project manager on the Seattle Department of Transportation’s Big Picture Project, said women are representation in the industry.

Petterson (Skanska USA Commercial Development), a director of real estate development, said the emphasis on cultural alignment and the ability to see the big picture are keys to success.

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Michelle: My key to success has been recognizing that you can't change others. We can foster personal growth and reflect on our behavior influences outcomes and different reactions. One must also make sure not to lose themselves. You can be successful exactly how you are if you listen to your gut.

Mary: My key to success is my ability to see the big picture, while also paying attention to details — big and small. Additionally, I provide support for significant transactions on our projects in the Pacific Northwest.

Fraga: To foster true inclusivity, companies must acknowledge the diverse challenges women encounter throughout their careers and adapt their approach accordingly. While adhering to industry standards is important, flexibility is key. By accommodating the varying needs of female employees, companies create a supportive environment that fosters success and engagement.

Q: How has the industry evolved in terms of gender throughout your career?

Michelle: There has been a notable increase in the number of women in day-to-day project management and in the construction industry. To speak up. Prior to George Floyd's death, women had various "backed-up" by male counterparts — and this change reflects a growing recognition of the value that women bring to the table in the decision-making process.

Mary: We're seeing a notable increase in the number of women in construction across the United States, growing more and more women at the forefront of this traditionally male-dominated industry, offering new opportunities for women to excel and bring diversity and inclusiveness to the forefront.

Q: What are your keys to success in the construction industry?

Michelle: My keys to success are my ability to see the big picture, while also paying attention to details — big and small. Additionally, I provide support for significant transactions on our projects in the Pacific Northwest.

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Fraga: To foster true inclusivity, companies must acknowledge the diverse challenges women encounter throughout their careers and adapt their approach accordingly. While adhering to industry standards is important, flexibility is key. By accommodating the varying needs of female employees, companies create a supportive environment that fosters success and engagement.

Q: What strategies do you believe are most effective in breaking down the barriers women encounter when pursuing careers in construction, and how can companies implement these strategies?

Mary: To foster true inclusivity, companies must focus on embracing cultural alignment and the ability to see the big picture. By accommodating the varying needs of female employees, companies can create a supportive environment that fosters success and engagement.

Q: What have you considered “keys to success” in the construction industry?

Fraga: To foster true inclusivity, companies must acknowledge the diverse challenges women encounter throughout their careers and adapt their approach accordingly. While adhering to industry standards is important, flexibility is key. By accommodating the varying needs of female employees, companies create a supportive environment that fosters success and engagement.

Q: What do you hope for the future/nest generation of women getting started in the construction industry today?

Mary: We hope to see more and more women at the forefront of the industry, offering new opportunities for women to excel and bring diversity and inclusiveness to the forefront.
A myriad of opportunities for women in the trades

By JESSICA PASSMORE

When we think about women in the trades, one common visual is the all-American cultural icon, Rosie the Riveter, who represented the women who worked in factories in the United States during World War II. At the time, so many men went into battle, women were encouraged to take over the industry jobs that were left behind. This period in the history of the United States remains a pivotal moment in time for the women who work in the trades today.

Today, opportunities-for women in the trades are increasing by the day. What was once a male-dominated field is now seeing more and more women on job sites. Women are eager to gain the necessary skills to become plumbers or electricians, helping to prelearn under our lead plumbers learning in a simulated environment. Women are essential to keeping our communities safe and healthy.

Harts Academy is a paid training and apprenticeship program for future tradespeople.

Harts Academy is a paid training and apprenticeship program for future tradespeople. Here at Harts, we host training and apprenticeship programs that equip future tradespeople with the training and requisite practices they need to obtain their Washington state license. During the three years required to earn a license, apprentices participate in classroom learning, hands-on training in a simulated environment, and on the job training while learning under their lead plumbers or electricians. Skilled plumbers and electricians are a vital service that with so many men going into factories in the United States during World War II. At the time, so many men went into battle, women were encouraged to take over the industry jobs that were left behind. This period in the history of the United States remains a pivotal moment in time for the women who work in the trades today.

Once the apprenticeship is complete—they have accrued the state-required training hours and have passed the licensing exam—participants will go on to run plumbing and electrical jobs on their own.

POTENTIAL EARNINGS, BUSINESS POSSIBILITIES

Across Western Washington, skilled labor is in high demand and, as a result, can be a particularly lucrative career. Plumbers, electricians, and heating and cooling professionals can make well over $50,000 per year in service sales and installation. Along with the high earning potential, becoming a licensed trades professional ensures a secure future for ensuring that the right technician is deployed to the right project based on their specialty, across all areas of expertise and the location of the job. Our dispatchers continually communicate with customers before the appointment and follow up with customers after the service is complete. We prioritize customer outcomes for our customers, and with the right person on the right job, we achieve just that.

Along with these two critical areas of expertise, there are additional support areas including install coordination, municipal coordination, and leadership roles. Starting tradesperson is an excellent opportunity for women— and everyone—a stable career, high earning potential, unlike any other profession. Women are essential to keeping our communities safe and healthy.

Our trades are a vital service that with so many men going into factories in the United States during World War II. At the time, so many men went into battle, women were encouraged to take over the industry jobs that were left behind. This period in the history of the United States remains a pivotal moment in time for the women who work in the trades today.

The perception of the trades as a “male-centric” industry is continually shifting as more and more women find themselves thriving in this career choice. For those who are willing to work hard, aren’t afraid to get dirty, and are interested in continuously learning, the trades offer women—and everyone—a stable career course, high income potential and unlimited opportunity for professional growth.

Jessica Passmore is COO of Harts Services.

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HKK Architects is delighted to support Women In Construction Week, highlighting the advancement and achievements of women in design, engineering, construction, and construction management.

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SAY IT BEST
This created a habit of being overworked and unintentionally enabled those around me to take advantage of that. Today, I know that many women across all industries struggle with this — myself included. My key to success has been to learn when, where, and how to say no.

I hope the future/next generation of women continues to create workplace cultures where women feel like they can set boundaries and not fear they will be seen differently.

Courtney: I hope they aren’t afraid to try. If I learned one big thing while going to school for civil engineering, it’s that it gave me the capacity to try many different roles. Additionally, know that your career is long — you can start in one place and easily shift to another if it doesn’t fit. Construction is an ever-changing career. If it bores you or doesn’t fit, try another role within construction. Find where your passion leads you and try it on!

Madeline Geller supports communications for Skanska in Seattle.