

purple construction

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE REALITIES
OF BEING A WOMAN IN THE
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

BY MELANIE DEPAOLI



INSIDE

Purple Construction is an article series based on interviews that I have conducted with women within the construction industry to unveil the realities of being a woman in a male-dominated industry. The women featured have *been there, done that* and are now sharing their stories and advice to the public and to the next generation of women entering the field. These women have revealed the challenges, emotions, and lessons learned from being a minority and offer courage and strength to the next generation.

My intention is that this series will inspire more women to enter the construction industry as well as open the door to making construction more a more diverse industry, including women, minorities, and the disadvantaged.

MEET THE LADIES

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MEET MEL



Mixing brand development, strategy, and implementation, Mel DePaoli, MBA works with her clients to build brands worthy of going viral. As Founder of Omicle LLC, she is a powerful, sought-after speaker and international author of three books on culture-driven brands. For more on Mel DePaoli, please visit www.omicle.com or join her Facebook Group, Brilliant Branding.



AMANDA GRINDLE MUIR CONTRACTING

Muir Contracting, Inc.'s owner and president, Amanda Grindle, has more than fifteen years experience in the construction industry.

Before forming her own business, she worked for over ten years in both construction and engineering during which she developed an extensive knowledge and expertise for a diverse range of construction activities.

Over the course of her career, she has established relationships with numerous jurisdictions and regulatory agencies, ensuring fast and flawless coordination of permitting issues. Together with her project experience, Amanda has earned a reputation as being highly responsive, stringently compliant, and completely committed to the client's needs and goals.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Be assertive!

***It's not possible
to be successful
if you don't
speak up, sit at
the table, and
engage!***

***Leaders in the
construction
industry, who
are mostly men,
expect women
not to be these
things and thus
won't take you
seriously until
you do.***



AMIE RIGGS SWARTS RIGGS CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

Since Amie has been with Riggs, she has been successful in many roles within the company including: pioneering the selections coordinator and cabinetry design positions, which she created by observing the needs of our clients. In 2002, Amie moved in to a remodeling sales position, and then in 2004, accepted the positions as Vice President and sales manager. In addition to her responsibilities as sales manager, Amie is also our marketing director. After graduating from Kirkwood High School, Amie attended St. Louis Community College and has earned her Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR) and Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) designations. Amie is currently the Chair for the Home Builders Association Remodelers Council Steering Committee and holding her third 3-year elected position as Advisory Commission Member for the Special Business District (SBD) of Downtown Kirkwood. She is also currently working as a volunteer on the SBD Facade Improvement and Street Banner Programs.

Outside of work, Amie loves to be outdoors. She and her Husband, Jim, take their son Kelly, 3-1/2, and daughter Natalie, 15 months, hiking every chance they get. When not hiking, you can find them at their family lake house in Ste. Genevieve, MO.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

If you don't know the answer, have the confidence to admit it and let your client know you have a team of professionals that do and you will get them the answer they are looking for.



CATHY SUMMERS KORSMO CONSTRUCTION

Cathy has been working in construction for the past 25 years. She has worked her way through the industry from office manager to senior project manager, managing projects that range from small retail tenant improvements to \$30M medical office buildings.

Cathy currently works with Korsmo Construction as a project manager. Her emphasis has been on medical office buildings and her portfolio includes everything from small family practices to ambulatory surgery centers.

She has also worked on projects of all different sizes, construction types and uses ranging from banks to carbon fiber plants data centers to children's museums.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Take the time to learn from the people you work with in the field. There are some wonderful men and women in all of the trades that can teach you so much about the industry if you let them.



DARIA L. VAN LIEW, PE, DBIA

Daria L. Van Liew has over 20 years of experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District and is currently the Deputy Chief, Construction Division.

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

In this position she is responsible for providing senior management oversight for the Construction Division Branches and Bay Area Office construction staffs as the District executes a \$1 billion construction program. She serves as the Account Executive for the Ft. George G. Meade Installation and serves on the SAME Baltimore Post Board of Directors. Prior to her current position, she served as the Administrative Contracting Officer and Area Engineer for the Bay Area Office leading a staff to execute assigned military and civil works mission. Areas of Responsibility included Ft. Meade, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Adelphi Army Research Laboratory, Washington Aqueduct, and surrounding municipalities for civil works mission. Previous assignments include Resident Engineer for Ft. Meade Resident Office, civil works Project Manager for Programs and Project Management Division, and Project Engineer for Bay Area Office. She is a registered Professional Engineer in the State of Maryland, a certified Design-Build Professional, and a civil engineering graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park.

She is happily married to her husband Todd and they have two sons, Riley and Dylan.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Expect some discrimination and having to prove yourself. With that being said, don't tolerate people who are unprofessional. Strive for excellence and set the standard (a high one at that). Always do the right thing no matter what, your integrity is not negotiable. If you are not having fun and love what you are doing, you are in the wrong profession. Construction is a tough environment and the goods have to outweigh the bad. Find balance in your professional and home life, you can't be perfect at everything!



DEBORAH VAN HUIS

EXPERTISE ON DEMAND

With a rare combination of construction expertise and superior teaching and leadership development skills, Deborah Van Huis is Owner and President of Expertise On Demand. Her company is a licensed Class A, General Engineering Contractor, within the State of California.

Deborah has over twenty-five years of experience in large scale onsite construction management, business management, and land planning. Deborah formerly served as the West Coast Regional Land Manager for Centex Homes, Director of Forward Planning for KB Home and Vice President of Forward Planning for one of the nation's largest land developers.

Deborah serves her clients by developing recommendations to improve construction management operations and optimize project performance and provides feasibility and due diligence services to support her client's land acquisition decisions. She also teaches construction management courses at the University of California Riverside Extension and business management courses for the University of Phoenix.

Deborah holds a BS in Civil Engineering from the University of Illinois Chicago and an MS in Administration with a concentration in leadership studies from Central Michigan University.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Be confident in yourself and your own abilities. Don't let fear hold you back from tackling new responsibilities or from achieving your goals. You can do it! Learn to be your own biggest cheerleader. This is really important because, more than likely, there won't be a lot of other women working with you so you won't have a built-in support system. You're going to have to be able to feel good about your accomplishments and work through issues by yourself.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Be yourself!

*It's okay to be a
lady in
construction, yet
still be
competent,
dedicated,
committed,
efficient and
effective, and
strong.*

*I am proud to
say that, in my
construction
Resident Office,
I supervise a
total of 28
people, in which
7 are women.*

ELEANOR ENCINAS ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Eleanor was born in Long Beach, CA, and raised in Los Angeles, CA with her parents, two sisters and brother. She graduated Woodrow Wilson High School in June 1986. After graduation, her father suggested that, since she was good at math and sciences, to consider engineering as her college major.

She attended East Los Angeles College from 1986 thru 1989, as a Civil Engineer major, then transferred to Cal Poly Pomona. She worked part-time in college as a CADD draftsman in a small engineering firm. In June 1992, she graduated with honors, with BS in Civil Engineering. After graduation, she joined the US Army Corps of Engineers, in the Engineer & Scientist Intern Rotational Program for 18 months, rotating thru Planning, Design, Geotechnical, Hydrology & Hydraulics, and two different construction field offices.

After completing her internship, she was offered a permanent position in Construction Contract Administration Branch. Her primary responsibility was to negotiate construction change orders and claims. After two years, she accepted a promotion to Construction Management. After another two years, she accepted a transfer to Environmental Construction Branch, as a Project Engineer. She was responsible for the day-to-day administration of various HTRW-type remediation projects, including EPA Superfund projects and various UST removal projects. In 2000, she accepted a promotion to Resident Engineer, where she spent three years in Military Construction.



ERIN VERHOEVEN

CORNSTONE CONTRACTORS LLC

Erin VerHoeven was raised in the commercial contracting industry and while she did not intend to own a General Contracting business, she found that her skills fit well in such an environment. She graduated from Whitworth College in 1998 with a BA in Communications and minors in Sociology and Marketing. Her business partner and she worked together at another company before starting Corstone in 2002. They found that their combined skill sets made for a powerful partnership. She resides in Snohomish on a small hobby farm with her husband and two sons. She enjoys road trips in our RV and sports.

Over the years, she has worn a wide variety of hats as an entrepreneur, including HR Manager, Bookkeeper, Marketer / Business Developer, Legal Consultant, and Executive Director.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Stay nimble and listen to your instincts.

This new economy requires you to stay on your toes and be able to respond to a market condition rapidly. Be conservative regarding your expectations and listen to your instincts: if a project feels like it has too much risk, don't take it on because you feel like you need the volume.

Listen when your gut tells you to pass on a project; there will be others to come and there is likely a very good reason to pass on it.



MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Start your own company. Don't throw yourself against a wall and expect it to fall down.

IRIS HARRELL HARRELL REMODELING

Raised in the south, Iris once worked in the tobacco fields as a child. Iris obtained both Bachelor's and Masters Degrees and began her career as a teacher. It was her life partner, Ann Benson, who introduced her to her true talent and passion when she presented Iris with an electric drill to hang pots and pans in their home. Iris proceeded to take every course available in home design and construction, earning her general contractor's license. Unable to find employment in the field because of her gender and age (34 at the time), Iris started her own company, producing small jobs for neighbors, relatives and friends.

After relocating to Menlo Park and determined to succeed in an industry "owned" by men, Iris became an entrepreneur in 1985. Her values and ethics have translated into a highly respected, award-winning design + build remodeling company. She continues to teach and has spoken to groups such as NAHB, NAWBO, and NARI to name a few. Iris has received numerous personal awards, including Mountain View Chamber of Commerce Women in Business Athena Award and Silicon Valley Business Journal Woman of Distinction, to name just two.

For 25 years Iris has exceeded the expectations of her 700+ plus clients and employee owners and is considered one of the best executives and remodelers in Silicon Valley.



MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Follow your passion. I believe women have to work twice as hard as men to build credibility and trust. Grow thick skin and a good sense of humor (it pays dividends in your personal life too). The great news is that what starts as an obstacle (being a woman) ends up being a marketing advantage if you stick with it. I don't look like the normal construction "guy", so I stand out at industry networking/marketing events and am easily remembered. There are numerous challenges to being in a non-traditional role, but when you overcome the obstacles... the victories are twice as sweet!

KAREN SAY SAYBR CONTRACTORS

Karen Say is the president and owner of Saybr Contractors, Inc., which she founded in 1997 as an environmental construction company specializing in commercial and industrial fueling systems.

Karen's background in the industry began at age 19 when she was hired as a receptionist at Omega Environmental. Over the course of the next nine years, she moved into several administrative positions, transitioned to Estimating/Project Management, followed by the Operations Manager role and, finally, to the Branch Manager for Omega's Seattle Office.

When Omega closed its doors 14 years ago, Karen utilized the experience that she had gathered there to begin Saybr Contractors, along with three of her former coworkers. Since its inception, Saybr has diversified its business and grown from a small, four-person company to a \$25-million, 40-employee general construction contracting firm. Saybr's relationship driven customer service model has cultivated a client base that includes federal, state, county and municipal agencies as well as many Fortune 500 private sector businesses.

Saybr Contractors has received numerous awards regionally and nationally, including several Associated Builders and Contractor's Excellence in Construction Awards.



MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

***Use your skill
sets to your
advantage.***

***To gain respect,
you have to
earn respect. Be
helpful.***

LINDA MINDE TRILITE BUILDERS

Linda Minde is the co-owner of Tri-Lite Builders, a thriving 29-year old design/build remodeling firm based in Chandler, Arizona. Tri-Lite Builders has become one of the most successful remodeling firms in the Phoenix-Metro area as a result of its quest for excellence and its impeccable reputation for outstanding customer satisfaction and delivering quality projects to each and every client.

As one of the most successful females in the highly male-dominated remodeling industry, Linda's work with Tri-Lite Builders, began as an office managerial capacity, quickly grew to encompass spearheading the company's sales and marketing efforts.

Linda has also been instrumental in Tri-Lite Builders being named as the recipient of numerous community and industry awards. Recent awards include NARI (National Association of the Remodeling Industry) 2010 Contractor of the Year Award for Bathroom Remodel over \$60,000 & 2009 Contractor of the Year Award for addition over \$250,000, Guild Quality's 2011 Guildmaster with Distinction Award (for the 4th year in a row), BBB Finalist, and NAWBO Unsung Hero award. Linda was also named a 2009 Athena Finalist.

***Find ways to
help other
owners grow
their businesses.
Pass on quality
leads. Be a
resource.***

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Discuss your views, vision, and goals before entering into the partnership. Second, do hands-on work in the trade of your business. Thirdly, check out the many trade/networking organizations. Join carefully and slowly! Your selected organizations will require a significant amount of your time if you realize value from them, and you will have precious little time or money to spare. Unlike many other businesses, construction success is heavily dependent on networking and relationships.

MARILYNN MOCH PHOENIX BUILDERS LLC

Marilynn Moch began work as a social worker with New York City. She quickly focused on the workers and that the quality of work that the workers do depends very much on how they are trained as well as how they are treated.

She went back to school, to obtain a PhD in Organizational Sociology while working full time and raising a daughter as a single parent. She moved into management with the NYC Department of Sanitation Motor Vehicle Repair Division, managing a program where committees of labor and management worked together (with some head-knocking here) to run the twenty-four repair shops in the department. She was responsible for maintaining the Profit Center reporting system—this was the best job she ever had!

Moch graduated from the Turner School of Construction Management and the ABC School of Construction Management and construction has been the focus of her life since then.



ROZANNE GARMAN

RHD ENTERPRISES

Rozanne Garman has worked in the construction industry for the past 17 years. She began her career as a receptionist for a local fire sprinkler contractor after high school and successfully navigated her way through the industry receiving promotions and career opportunities. After creating amazing results for other companies, Rozanne founded RHD Enterprises, Inc., a successful 8(a), and HUBZone certified general contracting firm that specializes in federal government construction. After spending the last year committed to her personal growth and development through experiential seminars, training and coaching, Rozanne committed to her dream of giving back by bringing this work to her community. She is also passionate about supporting local and global charities for women and children. Married to the love of her life for the past six years, they are raising their dynamic 4-year old son and just welcomed a daughter in October.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Don't bluff, don't pretend to know something you don't. Ask questions and always follow through on what you say you're going to do. Due diligence goes a long way...know your projects.

Go to the job sites... dressed appropriately to spend time with your supers and get to know the subcontractors onsite. Develop great relationships with your subs because people like to know you care.



SANDRA OLSON MEYER CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING COUNCIL OF WA

Sandra Olson-Meyer has the distinction of being the first woman to be inducted into the Construction Hall of Fame. Olson-Meyer served for 23 years as executive director, and later president/CEO, of the Construction Industry Training Council of Washington (CITC). She also participated in national craft training committees of the Associated Builders and Contractors, Associated General Contractors of America, and the National Center for Construction Education and Research.

She and her late husband, Mike Olson started their own construction firm called MDO Group. Olson-Meyer was responsible for taking in bids and other office work while occasionally visiting job sites. They operated MDO until 1991, when she began to look for another challenge. She felt she needed to make a change and needed to do something different.

She was its first woman member of the CITC board when she got on in 2006. Through her persistence, the CITC became the first organization in the country in which multiple competing associations came together to create a craft training program. Olson-Meyer is most proud of the percentage of students that have graduated from CITC and their ensuing success.

She has also served on the local Rotary board and has worked on committees focusing on workforce issues, such as the Seattle Construction Advisory Council, Pierce County Construction Partnership Council and the Port of Seattle.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

If you are going to start your own business, make sure you have some business training and get a mentor.

Be aware of the obstacles ahead. It's hard work especially that first year. Know the challenges ahead so you can succeed. Construction is a tough industry for both men and women.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

*Find a mentor
and stick with
the industry.*

SHANA PESCHEK CONSTRUCTION CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Shana Peschek, M.B.A. has been the Director of the Washington State Construction Center of Excellence, Renton Technical College since 2010. Shana's experience is varied, she began her career in government, working for the Department of Social and Health Services from 1992 to 1999. She started her own business painting murals, faux finishes and signs for both residential and commercial clientele.

She went on to work as a speech therapy assistant for the Rochester School District and in 2008 took the position of Administrative Assistant for the Construction Center of Excellence. When not working she enjoys hiking, backpacking and mountain biking with her husband and sons.



TAMI ST. PAUL

OPERATING ENGINEERS

REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

After High School, Tami went to Washington State University looking for a way to make a good living (preferably working outdoors). Being unable to find anything that met her requirements, she left after 2 years, to make a new plan.

In 1986, she completed the ANEW (pre-apprenticeship program) and was accepted into an apprenticeship with the Operating Engineers where she learned to operate construction equipment. She completed her apprenticeship and worked as a journey level heavy equipment operator running earth moving equipment, cranes and doing site control work.

In 1999 her local was looking for a new dispatcher and she decided it was time to give back to the system that had provided her to have such a rewarding career. She applied and was hired as the dispatcher at IUOE local 302. When a position in training opened up, Tami was then hired as a training coordinator in June of 2000.

Tami is now one of the people in charge of the Apprenticeship and part of her job is to recruit, select, educate and mentor our future work force.

Two of the things she is proudest of are the work they've done to enhance retention in the program through educating apprentices about financial planning, unemployment and L&I systems, and appropriate work place behaviors and attitudes; and the work we did to help bring apprenticeship utilization to Washington State. This has been very rewarding work and I enjoy being able to help people improve their quality of life through apprenticeship.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

f you like to work outdoors and take satisfaction in building things, enjoy the idea that – at least in a union trades worker construction position – you will be paid the same as anyone else doing a comparable job, go for it. Don't get entangled, as much as possible, in petty job site politics or personal relationships with your co-workers (don't sleep where you eat) as that can be awkward at best.

No pouting or over analyzing, just correct the problem and move forward.

Don't expect praise and compliments, it's not, generally, how men work. Your paycheck is your thank you. If you continue to receive one, it means that you are doing a good job.

TAMMY STEMPEL ADAPT ENGINEERING INC.

Tammy Stempel was recently a licensed general contractor, specializing in; stucco, plaster, drywall, framing and manufactured stone and greenwall applications. Her background is in environmental studies, construction/project management and interior architecture/design.

She has always been passionate about improving sustainability in the built environment, and working at Adapt has given her the ability to apply her past experience and education in this direction.

Stempel brings 18 years of project management experience in construction and renovations to the Adapt team. She is also currently on the Gladstone Planning Commission, acting as a sustainability adviser, and consult for other local jurisdictions on sustainability issues.

MY BEST ADVICE FOR YOU...

Be strong and don't back down.

Definitely don't use the fact you are a woman as a crutch or excuse, that will only prove the stereotype that women don't belong in construction. Approach your business interactions with grace and knowledge. Don't let their preconceived opinions get under your skin...prove them wrong!



WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TODAY?

This has become a “chick” question. The female stereotype is that we obsess over this question every day and every time we need to change our outfit. But in reality, it is a question that we all ask ourselves every time we get ready to leave the house. Men tend to ask it subconsciously; women give it more conscious thought.

Working in a male-dominated industry makes this question even more stressful! As a minority, you are constantly under a microscope for things that are relevant and irrelevant to your job. Being a minority makes the majority wonder why you would want to work in this industry where there are very few “like you” around. Unfortunately, what you choose to wear can lead to questions about the most irrelevant issue of all: sexual preference. As if a person’s sexual preference has absolutely anything to do with their ability to perform a job. A discussion of this ridiculous prejudice could easily fill a book, or two or even three, so let’s just put that aside, and recognize that it is something to be aware of.

Overall it’s not about “should I wear my Jimmy Choos or my Gucci shoes today?”. Instead, **it’s about where am I going to be, what perception do I need to project, what should I wear to visually say I am a credible person, what objections can I overcome by how I am dressed, and am I over or underdressed.** These are some of the things that women in construction need to consider before they even leave the house.





Melanie DePaoli
Purple Construction

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TODAY?

Many of the ladies I interviewed shared the same story with me about when they get dressed in the morning. Things they have to consider include: who am I going to meet with, who will see me today, what is my role (am I a boss, am I meeting with a client, or will I be in the field), what clothing is acceptable, what shoes are acceptable, is my shirt too low-cut, do my shoes have too high of a heel, how much make-up should I put on, and what jewelry is acceptable?

The answers to the first few questions drive the answers to the rest and even then women are still faced with the reality of being a minority and consistently having to prove themselves over and over again.

Amie Riggs-Swartz shared a slightly different spin to the challenge of women's fashion in construction. She is a five foot blonde with spunk, an unmatched personality, and she loves to wear heels. She had the blessing of being the owner's daughter so within the company, she wasn't aware if people looked at her or questioned her ability differently than they did her brother or any other men that work at her company. **But from prospective clients, customers, and suppliers she has heard everything from, "You're not wearing the right shoes," to "You're a woman," to "We selected your company because you were the only woman we met in this industry."**

When faced with objections or questioning comments, Amie learned to respond with "would you like to start talking about the job or learn a bit about me first?" Being a strong woman, she never took these objections or questions personally; instead, she dealt with the situation at hand and then moved on.



WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TODAY?

Amanda Grindle shared a different story, “I deal with this every single morning as I get ready for work. I love fashion and I love clothes but I have a very hard time dressing for this industry because I am fulfilling many roles. As the owner, I feel it is necessary to wear corporate appropriate clothing, but I also go out into the field where heels are never appropriate. I feel my competence is conveyed through what I wear.”

Yes Amanda does own a set of steel-toed boots that, “when I put them on, make me feel very official particularly if I’m also holding a clipboard! But those same boots do not go very well with a dress and jewelry, or in a business meeting with clients.”

Erin VerHoeven had to learn the hard way about how fashion can affect a business’s bottom-line. “There was a time when I felt pressured to dress up more than I really wanted to. At the time, I was under the impression that meeting with a potential customer meant you need to be dressed as you would for a job interview—wearing skirts, nice slacks, and blouses. However, this backfired a few times when the customers felt my company must be too expensive if I was wearing such nice clothes. A kind architect finally recommended to me that I needed to look more like a contractor if I wanted to be seriously considered a contractor. So now my usual uniform consists of nice jeans, heels of some kind and a dressy jacket or shirt. If I am attending an industry networking event I may dress a little nicer.”

Each of these women has had different experiences, but they all had to learn the same lesson—how you look and how you dress is under a microscope. Like with food, prospects, clients, suppliers, co-workers, and your boss will judge your capability first by how you look. You need to ensure that their first impression is a positive one, so there is one less expectation or assumption you need to overcome in making your way through this industry where you are a minority and unfortunately, need to consistently “prove” yourself every day.





Melanie DePaoli
Purple Construction

DOES PAY DETERMINE WORTH?

IT IS NO SECRET THAT EQUAL PAY DOES NOT CONSISTENTLY EXIST IN OUR COUNTRY. TO THIS DAY, WOMEN STILL EARN LESS THAN AN EQUAL MALE COUNTERPART REGARDLESS OF THE INDUSTRY!

On average women earn 77 percent of a man's pay, according to Census statistics released in September 2011. To put this in perspective, fifty years ago, women earned 61 percent of what men earned. While it is not equal, it is progress!

To break it out further, in 2010, African American women were at 67 percent of all men's earnings; Latinas' at 58 percent, and Asian American women were at 86 percent. What is interesting is that the younger generations are

seeing significantly better numbers! Women under 25 working full-time earn 93 percent of men's salaries. This could imply that once the oldest generation of women has retired the wage gap will shrink considerably.

In 2009, President Obama signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which allows victims of pay discrimination to file a complaint with the government against their employer within 180 days of their last paycheck. Prior to this Act, victims were only allowed 180 days from the date of the first unfair paycheck. President Obama has vowed to reduce the wage gap between the genders. His intentions are honorable, but it still requires that women speak-up and say this is unacceptable.

DOES PAY DETERMINE WORTH?

Honestly, when I was putting together the questions to ask the women, I would light a candle. There were a lot of some of Garman than

not an
the same

expected this to be a topic that cannon and start a fury of ranting. few rants, but I was surprised that them had answers like Rozanne saying, “I was never paid less than my male counterparts” or Daria VanLiew with “Working in the federal government, equal pay is an issue that I have experienced. I receive the same pay for the same work as my male peers.”

Instead of opening a can of worms around equal rights, a difference between how women were treated between union and non-union companies was revealed. “In a union, it’s about skill so no, there is no difference in pay,” Amie Riggs-Swartz explains. This isn’t to say that only unions pay women fairly. Amanda

Grindle has had a completely different experience, “I have always been well-compensated for my work, but this may also have a lot to do with working for a woman-owned construction firm. I think part of the problem with the difference in wages is that women typically don’t stand up and defend their work and what they should be paid for it. I think owners strive to pay someone the least amount they can get away with—regardless of the worker’s gender.

Employees

need to recognize their value and defend their value to the owner. If they are a good worker, owners will then typically understand that they need to pay those employees more to keep them.”

“Equal pay has always been an issue for me. I constantly

had to fight to get paid what my equal male counterpart was getting paid” Karen Say says. Say continues, “It was



DOES PAY DETERMINE WORTH?

usually explained to me that they have more technical knowledge than I did even though we did the same job and had the same credentials! I had to over document and over-prove that I deserved a raise or promotion before I had my own company.”

“I was once told that my equal male counterpart had a family to provide for and that is why he got paid more,” Cathy Summers shares as if she didn’t have a family or her family was not as important.

“I have made sure that our employees have equal pay for equal work. In construction, companies make money if their employees do a great job, save the company money, and please the client. Employees are paid and rewarded based on performance and company profits. Male or female –it doesn’t matter. I run

my company with integrity, honesty and excellent client satisfaction.” Linda Minde responds.

“My personal experience became the foundation of my business. There were things I knew I was not going to recreate. Everyone needed good medical, has the opportunity to access the 401K, and has equity and merit in the company. If you bring value to the company, you will be paid well. Pay is based on performance,” Say says with passion.

Pay discrepancy that women face appears to be something that will probably stay until companies are required to pay male and female employees equal pay or through grassroots efforts. Many of these women after spending most of their career working for someone else went on to run their own business, and while that sounds attractive, not everyone has that opportunity or is willing to put their energies in that direction. The data indicates the gap is narrowing; women must continue to push forward so that the gap eventually disappears.





Unfair [An fee not fair, unju not properly not used to ty

JUDGED UNFAIRLY: IT'S A REALITY

**“OH THAT HAPPENS DAILY!”
KAREN SAY SAYS LAUGHING.**

Somehow along the way, our society has decided that certain types of people or certain genders know or do certain things. That is the reality women in construction have to face daily, the judgment that just because they are a woman, they couldn't possibly know anything about construction, the process, the tools, the technique, or speak the lingo.

When a woman walks into a room, “you start at a negative three. Men are taken at face-value and just begin talking about construction. But as a

woman, in particularly a young woman I would have to talk technical knowledge and use specific technical terms until the light bulb went off in their head that I actually knew what I was talking about and equally deserved to be at that table. Just then, I am at zero and we can begin talking business.” Say continues.

To be fair, this is not a trait that is unique to construction or even to men. It is something we all do. Our brains look to identify patterns and strive to identify what is familiar when there is something different we subconsciously react. Some are just more vocal and inappropriate about it than others.

JUDGED UNFAIRLY: IT'S A REALITY



Many women in construction admitted that they too are surprised when they see another woman. They are intrigued and want to know her story—a thought pattern that they do not have with the men in the industry. If women do this with other women in the industry, it is to be expected that men will do it as well.

“There always seems to be an underlying tone when I meet my male counterparts in the industry that I don’t know anything about construction. They feel they have to be careful of the things they say and how they say it. It’s extremely annoying and at times frustrating.” Daria VanLiew says. Being aware that you are what is unfamiliar, is something that women are unable to forget, but it also gives you the power to begin to ease the discomfort in the room. Give the men some common ground to talk to you about. Whether it is sports, hunting, or construction—by you providing the topic, you are providing the opportunity to bridge the gap over the hurdle of what do they talk to you about?

It can sound really easy to be a minority, but the everyday experience reminds you that it’s not. Women still hear phrases like, “You’re a woman what could you know?” and “Honey go get me a cup of coffee.” And if a woman walks into a meeting with her team of men, her team will still be addressed before her, regardless of her rank.



Melanie DePaoli
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“When the drywall crew that I had hired showed up, a young stocky guy got out of their vehicle. He asked where the contractor was. I said he was looking at her. He started laughing. I asked him if he wanted to get paid. He stopped laughing. I have continued to use that company for decades, but no one ever laughed again!” Iris Harrell shares one of the many experiences she has had. “There were also many times that I would not even be given the opportunity to interview for a job, let alone be hired just because of my gender. My solution each time was to start my own company.”

The perception by others both within the industry and from outside of it, is astonishing! People never consider that these women made a choice and that they want to work in construction. The assumption is it's because of their husband, father, son, cousin, brother or some other relative made them do it. Times have changed, women have choices and more importantly women can enjoy and thrive in what is perceived as a man's industry. They are doing it today and will be even more successful at it tomorrow!



WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE CONSTRUCTION?

ALMOST ALWAYS SAID IN A DISAPPROVING TONE OF CURIOSITY, PEOPLE SEEM TO HAVE A HARD-TIME BELIEVING THAT A WOMAN COULD BE PASSIONATE ABOUT CONSTRUCTION.

“If I got a dollar for every time I was asked how I got into construction, I would be a wealthier woman. People’s curiosity points to the fact that they mostly don’t know any women in construction now, so the fact that I started almost 30 years ago is considered an amazing happening....especially since there was no divorce or male family pressure involved.” Iris Harrell, founder, and CEO of Harrell Remodeling jokes.

When a woman is in a male-dominated industry, it is assumed that she is there because her father, brother, or husband made her. But in reality, the

women that thrive and succeed are too strong-willed and passionate for that to be the case. Yes, it’s true that some were exposed to it because of a family connection, but they ended up staying in construction because they wanted to!

For many women, it was an industry that they fell into. It was a temporary job they took or a transfer they had to take, but once they were there, they realized that they loved being a part of the industry—its constant changes, the problem-solving, personal pride, and the relaxed but high demand atmosphere is intoxicating.

“I needed to find a career that I could grow into and not get tired of; that was a scary prospect! I was afraid that I might be like my father....always changing jobs and getting bored or mad or both. When I met my partner, she was fixing up her new house with her mother who drove around in a Mercedes with her own toolbox in her



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trunk as if that was perfectly normal. It was through that experience that a spiritual light bulb went off for me and a new passion took rise; using drills and swinging a hammer was exhilarating.” Iris continues.

Daria VanLiew, the Deputy Chief, Construction Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shares how she got into construction, “When I came out of college I thought I wanted to be an engineer in the water treatment field. But I discovered my true passion was actually for construction when I completed my rotational assignment in the Construction Division. I started my assignment during the Christmas holiday when about half of the office was on vacation. I was given a quick indoctrination and run down of all the projects and then told I was the lead for the next week. I quickly learned that construction is dynamic and priorities can and do change on any given day. On my first day as the lead, the general contractor hit a gas line causing a leak and much to my luck the site was next to family housing. During that week, I discovered how much I loved the constant challenges, problem-solving, interacting with contractors and clients, and seeing physical progress each and every day in the projects we were constructing.”

What excites these women is one of the unique aspects of the industry—the ability to physically see and touch your creation. To watch it go from nothing to something, to an amazing building that has changed a community. An achievement you get to drive by every day. Construction is about hands-on tangible results; something that the rest of us rarely have the opportunity to experience



WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE CONSTRUCTION?

with our increased dependency on technology and the virtual world.

“When I graduated, I was offered two jobs; one as a traffic design engineer and another as a construction materials inspector for a highway construction project. I took the inspector job because I wanted to be on a construction site as part of a team building things. I love working in land development and home building because you get to see a piece of land go from grass and dirt to a beautiful community full of homes and parks with people living there. It’s great fun to drive around a neighborhood and be able to say, I helped build this.” Deborah Van Huis, president of Expertise on Demand explains.

Despite the growing number of women in the construction industry, society’s perception is largely that construction is still a “man’s” job, and women remain a minority. However, even with this stereotype, women are finding their place in the industry. For the woman that establishes her boundaries, earns respect and proves herself, a successful career in construction is inevitable.

“There were no jobs in engineering when I graduated so I took one in construction with the intention of transferring out as soon as I could. I have now been here for 18 years now with no regrets.” Eleanor Encinas Resident Engineer, US Army Corps of Engineers.

There has never been a better time to be a woman in construction. Many of the traditional barriers are falling, creating more opportunities for women. Management has begun to recognize that women bring different qualities to the table and that they can perform as well as men. As the workplace becomes more comfortable for women, they are finding the career choice to be easier. More and more women are discovering that regardless of how she ends up in construction, she chooses to stay because she wants to!

