

SPECIAL FEATURE
WOMEN
IN CONSTRUCTION



By Sue Dyer,
OrgMetrics LLC,



Women Leaders: WE NEED YOU!

The Evolution of the Construction Workforce

Too Many Jobs, Too Few Workers

As we celebrated the 75th Anniversary of D-Day on May 6th, I was reminded that just like in WWII, when there was a shortage of crafts people in the industry, many women joined the trades and projects. My mother was in fact a welder on battle ships in 1942. She was highly sought after because she was small enough to fit into the hard to reach areas of the ship.

Today, we face a similar demographic in construction. Over 200,000 jobs that pay a starting salary of \$60K sit empty and no college is required! Seventy percent of construction companies nationwide are having trouble finding workers. The U.S Department of Education says there will be 68 percent more job openings in infrastructure-related field in the next five years than there are people training to fill them. Construction along with Healthcare and Personal Care will account for 1/3 of all new jobs through 2022. To top it off, the current workforce is aging out, shrinking the workforce even further. If you look at the number of jobs needed, we are in a similar situation as we were during WWII.

Women, We Need You!!!

But we have an untapped resource that could bring enormous benefit to construction. Out of the over 10 million construction workers in the U.S., less than one million are female. If you look at females in the trades it is only 1%. On your average jobsite, there is approximately one woman to every 100 men. By adding women to your workforce, you will be far ahead of your competitors! And the time has never been better to bring on the female approach with the way construction is evolving. There is increased use of digitization, robotics, artificial intelligence and these are changing the face of the industry and how we do business. The need for collaboration has never been greater so these new technologies can take hold.

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How can you attract and keep women in your workforce?

You might ask yourself, what can I do to bring women into my workforce —

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and keep them here? The best way to look at how to attract women to construction, and keep them, is to be FASCINATING! Think about it. Construction is one of the coolest places to work. We build things. First, we have to think them up, and then we get to bring these ideas into the three-dimensional world. We build the things that makes society work. The people who work in construction are the salt of the earth—they are not pretentious, they are practical, and entrepreneurial. Construction is super awesome! It is totally fascinating! You've got to love what you do to attract people, and women are people! To help you, I've created the Fascination Trifecta, three fascination principles you can use to attract women to join, or stay, in your construction workforce (see trifecta below).



Don't Tolerate "Intolerance"

Of course, everyone has the right to their own opinion and every organization has its own policies. The question is, do they include bias against having women on the team? Tolerating "intolerance for women" is going to be a challenge you must work to overcome if you want to fascinate women to come to your jobs. For some managers they don't see the benefit of hiring women at the cost of disenfranchising their current workforce. So, they work to minimize the number of women.

Overcome Public Perceptions of What Construction is Like

You will have to work to overcome public perception that construction is hot, dirty, manual labor that is unhealthy. This is not very fascinating! Instead share how construction is dramatically changing how it works with the onset of new technologies and highly collaborative approaches to working together. Women are a great addition to our evolving and fascinating industry!

Here is what some women working in the trades said about their jobs:

- "This is the best job I have ever had."
- "It beats working in retail or hospitality and I get paid more."
- "I hated working in administration, here I get to work outside."
- "Every day is different"

We also need to encourage the Unions to engage women into their apprenticeship programs. And we need to overcome the pay gap between men and women doing

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1 Fascination Principle #1: Overcome Biases

Work at all levels to Identify and Neutralize Biases

We need to work on the personal, organizational and public levels to overcome biases against women working in construction. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it. In a 2017 NAWIC study they heard the following:

"Women are not interested in the roles we have"
"Our HR (or union) doesn't give us any women candidates"

"It's a lot of hassle"
"Women on crews cause management issues"
"We don't have any facilities for women"

OVERCOME
BIASES

INVITE
WOMEN IN

MEET THEIR
UNIQUE NEEDS

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the same job at the same level. It is better in construction than in most industries—but women earn 95.7% of what men earn.

2 Fascination Principle #2: Invite Women In

Broadcast That You Have Jobs for Women!!

One study showed the reason that most women don't apply for construction jobs **is that they don't know about them!!** They are not included in the outreach and recruiting process. So, a great first step would be to broadcast that you have jobs and that you want women to fill them! Your competitive advantage in the market will be your personal and organizational culture and policies that see the value in having women on the

team. Make sure your advertisements are worded to be fascinating to women—like “training will be provided,” “leadership opportunities are available,” etc.

Encourage Mentorship, Sponsorship and Leadership

Seven things you can do to encourage your people to encourage mentorship, sponsorship and leadership of women to their teams.

1. Create think tanks on how to structure roles for women in your organization/projects—remember people don't argue with what they help to create—get everyone involved.
2. Implement a “refer a female friend” incentive program—paying an incentive shows you are serious enough to put cash behind this effort. The same is true for paying for training for women so they can move into construction roles.
3. Promote Internal Female Talent—they already know your culture and can this show there is a path to leadership—this will do a great deal to show other women that you are the place to be.
4. Use a Mentor/Protégée approach to help women move into new roles—without women leaders you won't be as attractive to women. Women need to see other women in leadership roles to see the potential opportunities for their career.
5. Have key people in your organization “sponsor” a woman into their team and be responsible to mentoring them for the first year—encourage your key people to refer a female to the organization and model the behavior that you want.
6. Communicate stories about women in operational roles in your organization—show your female team members communicating their perspective.
7. Target key roles that are more widely understood by women and use these as a “feeder” to other less traditional roles over time.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Women have driven economic growth to a great extent during the past few decades. Their individuality and skills have increased incredibly and are likely to increase more. A lot of industries like financial services, telecommunication, and information technology have benefited due to the active participation of female employment. Now it's construction's turn!!
- According to the Peterson Institute, companies who were in the top 25% in **gender diversity of their workforce were 46% more likely to outperform** their industry average
- There are 939,000 Women in Construction in the US – 1% in the trades
- Women make up 9.1% of the construction workforce
- By 2020 it is expected that women will make up 25% of the construction workforce

3 Fascination Principle #3: Meet Women's Unique Needs

Offer Paid Maternity Leave

The U.S. has the worst maternity leave packages in the world. Paid maternity leave is 50 weeks in Canada; 44 weeks in Norway; 22 weeks in Italy; 20 weeks in the UK; 16 weeks in France, Spain, and the Netherlands; 14 weeks in Germany and Japan; 12 weeks in Pakistan, South Africa and Mexico; and 0 weeks in the U.S. If you are not going to give female workers the support they need after having a baby, then they are not likely to find you fascinating!

Because women in the U.S. are used to zero weeks of paid maternity leave, you can offer leave and become very attractive to women who will truly want to join your team.

Allow for Flexibility and Work Life Balance

The trend in other industries is to offer flex-time and flex-days. The benefits of offering employees work-at-home days can be a great attractor for women who are seeking work life balance. Make sure your flexible schedule is flexible – not a new version of 9 to 5. Women need the flexibility to pick up kids from daycare and adjust their schedules to fit in with parent/teacher meetings, doctor appointments and a hundred other complexities that a working mother must deal with. 86% of Fortune 100 Best Companies to work for offer some kind of flexible schedule.

You Can Lead the Way

The time is here where we need women to join our ranks and come into the great industry that construction is becoming. If you take bold steps, you will outshine others who are not yet seeing these opportunities. You will become fascinating to prospective women candidates! The demographics don't lie. You need women on your team! The time to start is now!! ♦

Sue Dyer founded OrgMetrics, LLC in 1986 as a firm dedicated to helping construction organizations and project teams develop collaborative cultures. Sue and her team have worked with over 4,000 construction teams and have seen what works and does not work in real-life! Based on this work, she created the Structured Collaborative Partnering system. Sue is the host of the "Construction Dream Team" podcast, which focuses on the people side of construction. Sue is also the founder of the International Partnering Institute. She is author of several books on construction partnering. Contact Sue at SueDyer@orgmet.com or call (925) 449-8300. OrgMet.com or ConstructionDreamTeam.com



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