



BUILDING UP FEMALE LEADERS

In Alberta, women make up 45 per cent of the overall workforce, however, in the construction industry that number is just 14 per cent, and five per cent in the skilled trades.

Attracting more females to the construction industry

By Shayna Wiwierski

Women are gaining momentum in the construction industry.

In 2019 there were 182,000 women in the construction sector in Canada, with a total workforce of 1.463 million, according to a recent Statistics Canada Labour Force report. Although the construction industry is an industry that women are now pursuing more jobs in, it's actually a drop from 2018's numbers, when there were 186,300 women out of 1.437 million.

When it comes to pursuing a career in construction, it's important to highlight that there are more than just the stereotypical construction jobs like carpenter, welder, plumber, etc. Trudy

Case, project manager at Ground Force Environmental Corp. in Kitchener, Ont., has been working in the industry for over 15 years. She got her start when she worked for a construction company doing accounting and payroll. From there she moved onto a different company where they moved her to an estimating position. After that, she moved through the ranks to project coordinator and then to project manager.

When it comes to women getting into the construction, Case says that more education is needed at a younger age as to what types of careers are out there.

"Educating girls at a young age is

necessary so they can understand that there are more career paths than just those people would consider 'stereotypical' female jobs. It goes for kids in general as well," says Case. "Did you know that you could be the person that designs the building you are in? Did you know the lights go on and off and dim in your house could be something you can design and not just install? What about the person who is in charge of that jobsite building houses? So, I think that at a much younger age it's important for kids to be exposed to all facets of construction and know they can be involved in many different ways."



Left: Trudy Case, project manager at Ground Force Environmental Corp. in Kitchener, Ont., has been working in the industry for over 15 years.

Above: Lisa Laronde, president of the road safety division at the Powell Group of Companies and president of Powell Contracting, has been involved in the road construction industry for the last six years and she also got her start working in the finance side of the industry.

Presenting these career options to young women is important and she mentions going into schools and doing career day-type fairs would be beneficial to showcase more hands-on types of jobs for girls in high school and middle school.

Lisa Laronde, president of the road safety division at the Powell Group of Companies and president of Powell Contracting, agrees. Laronde has been involved in the road construction industry for the last six years and she also got her start working in the finance side of the industry. Originally working at Powell in Finance, she was a controller and then quickly moved to vice-president of accounting and administration, and then became the executive vice-president. In 2020 she was named the president of the road safety division and manages multiple businesses now. She is also a board member with the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC).

Laronde says that girls should be exposed to careers in the construction industry at a young age. She says it's through sharing success stories and showing the career potential before them that our future generations of females will start to see themselves in these roles more easily. There are so many construction and engineering

pathways that are simply not known. We need to educate early on and make them more widely understood. Since the industry as a whole is open and ripe for change, a good way for companies to help facilitate this hands-on learning is by offering mentorship programs to help nurture females who want to break into construction.

"I hear consistently that there aren't a lot of women in construction, so there aren't a lot of mentors you can tap into. Those that I know who have been

successful have had a long and hard journey," says Laronde. "We came from a time period where women were not as accepted in the industry, they had to blaze their own trail and they want you to blaze your own trail as well. Why would we want to blaze multiple trails when we could all follow one and make it bigger, better, and more accessible, so that others could not only follow in our footsteps but surpass us."

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mindful females in the industry, the ECA offers WomenBuild, which was launched in 2020 and seeks to inspire, support, encourage, connect, and celebrate women in the industry. In Alberta, women make up 45 per cent of the overall workforce, however, in the construction industry that number is just 14 per cent, and five per cent in the skilled trades. Since women are underrepresented in the industry, the ECA offers unique networking events and educational opportunities for females. WomenBuild is a place of inspiration, support, and mentorship to women.

Since the industry has changed in the last 20 years, there are now more women to connect with. In general, it's not as male dominated as it once was. Both Case and Laronde say that it is still a bit of juggle when it comes to the work/life balance. One of the biggest difficulties that females can face in the industry is daycare and public transportation. If you are a single parent or parent of young children then it may be hard to get them to daycare or pick them up. Those solutions may be ways that could entice more women to enter the workforce and ease up on the labour shortage in general.

In terms of advice for those females looking to get into construction, Laronde says to not be afraid to ask for help and don't be discouraged when you don't get it.

"I consistently ask everyone I meet to help me gain some credibility in the industry and sometimes you get it, but sometimes you don't. You need to be confident to ask," says Laronde, adding that it's also important to not be afraid to be a woman working on construction. "I think women make great leaders because we are compassionate, empathetic, and it gives us a voice and power that will continue to grow the industry. We need to support women, share our experiences and knowledge, and get our voice out there. We are stronger as a group."

For more information on WomenBuild and to find out about future events, please contact Caroline Bowen at caroline.bowen@edmca.com. ♦



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