

Interflow Training Content Manager
Robyn Alderton.



Women in trenchless: A promising future lies ahead

Historically, many women have been deterred from 'male-dominated' fields such as civil construction or water services due to underlying systemic cultural factors; however, the tides are fast changing. More women than ever are entering these fields with unbridled enthusiasm and passion for what they do – bringing with them potentially world-changing new ideas and innovations.

Promising careers in construction

In Australia, the construction and utility sectors have remained two of the most male-dominated major industries for more than 20 years. While the gender gaps in other industries are closing, these fields have unfortunately not seen the same progress.

This means few organisations are reaping the benefits that female participation in their workforce can bring. Similarly, many women are not realising the bountiful opportunities

that can arise from a career in those fields.

For many women, deterrents include a lack of family role models, stereotypes around the nature of 'women's work', discouraging workplace cultures and structural problems within those organisations. A business that acknowledges the importance of equality in the civil construction and water industries is Interflow, a leading pipeline infrastructure company.

The company's success over its more than 80-year history has been underpinned by its

people, drawing from the strength and diversity of their ideas. Interflow recognises the societal, organisational and cultural benefits that female participation in the construction industry can bring, including increased employee engagement, productivity and profitability.

Breaking down the barriers to entry

One woman shaking up the industry is Interflow Training Content Manager Robyn Alderton. Ms Alderton is a strong advocate for equal opportunity and has championed women

in construction at various stages throughout her career.

“I believe diversity is paramount to the long-term growth and prosperity of our industry,” she says.

“How can a business expect to become (or remain) an industry leader if the organisation does not welcome new ideas, perspectives or innovations?”

Ms Alderton is a firm believer that to accomplish transformation across a national industry, cultural change must first take place at an organisational level. One key way to accomplish this is through leadership and mentoring programs.

Ms Alderton has acted as a mentor to a diverse range of workers over the course of her career. Through these programs, she has sought to advise budding young professionals on the opportunities a career in construction can bring and guide them to broaden their skills and horizons simultaneously.

Paying particular attention to young women emerging into male-dominated fields, Ms Alderton hopes to play her part in initiating large-scale change.

“Mentoring is a constructive way to attract and retain good people with ability and drive within a business,” she says.

“All of the most valuable role models I’ve had throughout my career, whether they were male or female, acted with honesty, integrity, and led by example – I’m proud to do the same.”

The power of education and leadership

Bringing more than 13-years’ experience in the construction industry, Interflow HSE Business Partner Mivvi Turner has been on the other side, participating in a mentorship program run by the National Association of Women in Construction as a mentee in 2020. For her, the experience proved to be invaluable.

“It was great to receive guidance and support from someone completely impartial who had experience within the same industry,” she says.

“I could bounce ideas off them or work through professional concerns... their experience and advice has had a profound impact on my work.”

There are proven benefits to professional mentoring, particularly for women in male-dominated fields. These include identifying career goals, increasing confidence and opening doors to leadership.

“As the industry is exposed to an increasing number of women and societal attitudes towards gender polarisation in construction begin to shift, we will surely see more women take the leap into civil construction and utilities,” says Ms Turner.

Shaping the future of the industry

The more that organisations, industries and society break down the barriers preventing women from seeking employment in ‘male-dominated’ fields, the more genuine choice women will be able to exercise over how they participate in the workforce.

Creating a path for gender equality in the construction industry is undoubtedly the best way forward, as it ensures employers have access to a complete and representative pool of talent to guarantee the best candidate is selected for the job.

Ms Turner hopes her career as a HSE professional will help to pave the way for other ambitious and talented women to have a go in the construction industry.

“Upholding a strong culture of safety in any organisation is essential,” she says.

“I do hope that my participation in this industry champions that fact, but also reinforces that organisational attitudes towards equality should be treated with the same rigor and respect as safety.”

Ms Alderton shares her vision for the future of the civil engineering and construction industries.

“The future is looking bright,” she says.

“Together, we’re striving towards an equitable construction industry where women feel empowered to engage, fully participate and thrive.” ●

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