

editor's note



AT THIS YEAR'S FABULOUS NASCC: THE STEEL CONFERENCE, I HEARD THE PRINCIPAL OF ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST AND BEST-KNOWN STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING FIRMS REPORT THAT WHILE NEARLY 40% OF THEIR STAFF UNDER THE AGE OF 32 ARE WOMEN, THERE ARE NO FEMALE STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 32 AND 52 AT THEIR FIRM.

He was one of four men (and half of them were editors) at an otherwise well-attended session titled "Women in Construction." While the session was ostensibly aimed at women, I think most of the advice from the five panelists was good for anyone looking for a career at an engineering or fabrication company.

One theme from all the panelists was the need to get out in the field and familiarize yourself with what's being done and how it's being done. When Babette Freund first started in management at Ritner Steel, she learned how to weld. Nina Choy, a structural engineer with Caltrans, likewise went out into the field. "You need to experience the jobs you're supervising," she explained. "Go out to the shops and see what the guys are doing." Freund said it this way: "To manage a process, you have to understand the process."

Or, as Carrie Warner from Halverson Partners put it: "You grow by expanding your comfort zone." And Turner Construction's Lynda Leigh added: "Gain knowledge and experience. Take a risk. Risk is a catalyst. Take a risk to move forward. Never stop taking chances."

Choy also stressed the need to find a great mentor. "Be active in seeking a mentor," she explained. "They won't come to you."

Other topics covered by the panelists ranged from appropriate clothing to controlling emotions. Freund advised that "as a woman, don't respond emotionally. It won't get you ahead. You can have feelings,

but remember it's business." And Angela Stephens, an attorney with Stites & Harbison, added: "You need to deal with perceptions and use them to your advantage when you can."

The speakers noted that women need to be aware they are a minority in most workplaces in the construction industry, but they can use this to their advantage in terms of being noticed. I was reminded of one of my daughter's favorite musicals, *Legally Blonde*, and the song *Chip on My Shoulder* when Freund told the audience to "convert intimidation into a challenge." Or as Warner said, "Sometimes you can't find an answer until you try something."

If you want to hear more great advice from these panelists, or from one of the more than 200 other speakers at the conference, visit www.aisc.org/2014nasconline. As we've done for a number of years, we record most of the sessions and synchronize them with the speaker's PowerPoint presentations (note that the recordings are not expected to be available until June 1). You can also read more about the conference on page 59.

And if you missed this year's conference, mark your calendars now for the 2015 NASCC: The Steel Conference, taking place in Nashville March 25-27.


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