

Diversity in the Construction Sector

Discuss the following sentence:

“Apart from meeting a business case for diversity and inclusion in the construction industry, it is simply essential that the construction industry aims to become increasingly diverse.”

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10 August 2020

Introduction

Although the construction industry is slowly expanding to allow a more diverse range of individuals, the profession is still mainly male dominated. Of the 40 trades listed under the construction and mining category, more than half didn't include enough women to muster up a statistically significant percentage. But why are women avoiding this industry? The profession has a high demand for workers, whether one is working on the residential or commercial side, and has an average annual salary of £45,946, so why is there such a lack of representation for women?

The Statistics

Statistically speaking, in 1996, the percentage of women working in this field has been lingering around 9% and 10%. The consistency of the low percentage clearly shows that there is a lack of advertisement for women in construction or if there is enough advertising, then there are multiple reasons why they are not attracted to the sector or interested. In 2016, out of the 2.3 million construction industry workers, only 296,000 were women. Within the last three months of the same year, 12.8% of females represented the industry, which is better than nothing, however, this has only risen by 0.7% (when the data is compared to 2006 data). (EasyBuild).

Stereotypes - Large built, white male in stained clothes?

These statistics may be a reflection of the stereotypes that we, as a community, have held against women across the centuries. If you heard about the word “construction”, the image that would come to mind would be a large-built, white, man in dirty, smelly clothes on a construction site. (EasyBuild) This is because this is the type of imagery that has been represented by the media for decades. Having these figures as the only type of depiction does not make the industry sound like an inspiring and pleasant place for a female. This may lead them to believe that they would not be successful in that job.

Another stereotype that is taught at a young age, is that men are bigger and naturally stronger than women, so they are more suited for the position, which is biologically correct on average, but this should not be the reason why women are limited to certain parts of the construction industry. With many tasks being automated and reduced manual handling, this would not

reassure girls that they can be a part of a hands-on career. Rather, it discourages them from applying for an apprenticeship.

Recruitment and Advertising

As mentioned previously, the recruitment and advertising aspect of the profession has not been as successful as companies would have wanted and plays a large role in explaining the lack of representation in the industry. For example, the number of sexist advertisements that have been approved and aired on television across the country for construction is still a recurring problem in 2020 (Easybuild). The general lack and avoidance of having women in the advertisements is just as detrimental.

Attractiveness of the Construction Sector

Arguably, you could say that alongside inadequate representation, there is also a low amount of encouragement and special targeting for girls to join the industry. Most children have a faint idea of what they want to be when they are older, but if the industry portrays itself as rough and unapproachable along with the highly gender-biased stigma, who would want to be part of such a community? However, despite the negatives, companies are actively trying to show representations of successful women with a view to motivating the next generation. Indeed, it is the companies themselves that should actively work to make the trade more diverse (Refinery29). This is just one of many steps that can be taken in the right direction.

Examples of Successful Female Progression in the Construction Industry

Even though there is no denying that there are significant challenges to women accessing opportunities in the sector, there is no doubt that there have been a number of females that have impacted the history of construction workers across the globe. Just one example is a lady named Emily Roebling. Emily, born 1843, was married to one of the chief contractors in New York at the time. He was in the middle stages of building one of the greatest structures in the world. But once he took sick, it was up to her to plan, compromise and negotiate with the swarm of men that doubted her every move. Despite this, she excelled and gained the title of ‘Surrogate Chief Engineer’. Through his window in his home where he lay sick, Mr Roebling could see the structure grow day by day. Emily was able to transmit his ideas and thoughts into a reality. Years later, in a 1898 letter, Emily wrote to her son with her famous words: “I have more brains, common sense and know-how generally than have any two engineers, civil or uncivil, and but for me the Brooklyn Bridge would never have had the name Roebling in any way connected with it!” The bridge opened in May of 1883 and she was the first person to cross, along with her rooster for good luck (New York Times).

Conclusion

Emily Roebling is just one of females who have changed the world of construction. Having her example along with the positive influences of other similarly minded women of all races and ethnicities can have a significant and positive impact on the younger female generation. Telling their stories in an interesting manner can change the industry’s perception and will encourage more females to join. Closing with a quote: ‘Women are becoming the new faces beneath the construction industry’s hardhats’ (Construction Labour.com).

Are you willing to change the face of the construction sector? The choice is ours.