



CELEBRATING
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The next chapter for women in construction - by Stacy Roman

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The construction industry, like many others, has gone through tremendous growth in recent years. We have seen increased self-awareness as a means of welcoming a more diverse group of people into an arena that provides tremendous opportunities. As an industry that adopted carbon reduction and prioritized employee health long before it became mainstream, we're more progressive than we get credit for.

But with all progress, there is also a chance to reflect on what comes next. As a female project executive, I have identified and pursued the opportunities presented to me to grow and achieve key milestones in my professional development. However, I can also look back and recognize that there were some hurdles along the way, and they may not be the "usual suspects" as it relates to some of the pathways I've had to navigate to get to where I am now.

What do I think we need to focus on next? I've talked a lot on my podcast, *Behind the Façade* (presented by the AGC's BWiC committee) about building your personal brand and what that means. How you present yourself to others should be a direct reflection on how you see yourself. Be kind. Be strong. Take up space. In the same vein as personal branding, I think there also needs to be more conversation around mentorship. The idea of "mentorship" means different things to different people. In my opinion, it should be an organic relationship that doesn't just occur with one or two people. Recently on my podcast we spoke about assembling your personal board of directors. Women should find leaders who can help them support and guide them through different aspects of their careers, from business development to innovation on the jobsite. And when we talk about mentorship, it should be done through a lens of how we bring our companies to the next level, and not just about when our next promotion will occur.

Taking a Whole-Self Approach to Development

When it comes to helping women reach their full potential in the A/E/C space, I see a few distinct opportunities that could represent the next evolution of professional growth.

Wear your BD hat proudly: I often tell female peers that they should be confident in sharing details about their work in personal spaces. Soccer games, neighborhood gatherings, professional events - you never know who has a project in the pipeline or is grappling with a jobsite challenge. Keep in mind, it's not about pouncing on a prospect or appearing hungry for a deal; rather, it's letting peers outside of work know what you do so you might someday be able to help solve a problem.

Collaborate with female peers: One aspect of corporate life that hasn't changed much despite the progress we've made culturally in recent years is competition. I still see too many young, professional women looking for guidance and support from female leaders get cut down due to a misplaced perception that they are competing for spots on the team. My early days in the industry were marked by limited mentoring opportunities and peers that didn't see the value of collaboration. There's still a lot of progress to be made here, so if you're a female leader, lead! And help fresh faces benefit from the value of your years.

Keep seeking opportunities - but not just for advancement: When we talk about being open to opportunities, re-framing this conversation to be about training programs, networking channels, board positions, and yes, being a mentor, are all far more important to the development of one's career and will inevitably endear you to your peers, male and female alike. Advancement can't just be about what's in it for you right now but more focused on how helping your organization succeed will pay dividends for years to come. Believe it or not, the opportunities for advancement will present themselves, but having it happen organically is far more rewarding.

The Need to Evolve

For those of us who enjoy being part of an industry that thrives on pushing the envelope, there is much to celebrate. Working for a company that prides itself on creating leadership opportunities from within fills my bucket daily when it comes to witnessing progress first-hand. Now, I hope to see women cross the next Rubicon and ensure they keep lifting others up and bring more capable individuals into the field.

If you already have a seat at the table, it would be a missed opportunity not to fill a few more chairs with the next generation of female leaders.

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