

Embedding the Concept of Industry Mentoring in Education



By Cherry Marquez

Cherry Marquez has a bachelor's degree in Architecture and a master's degree in Environment and Planning. Prior to working at City of Boroondara, she worked as an architect for over 20 years in the private sector. She also worked as a project manager at the Department of Education and City of Yarra.

A Career in Construction

A career in construction is interesting but demanding. Whether it is a career as an architect, a carpenter, an engineer, an electrician, a plumber or an urban planner, it involves the application of many skills -- physical, technical, communication, problem-solving, office and business skills.

Working on the design or construction of project such as a kitchen, a house, a building, a road or a bridge, requires one's passion to conceive, create and innovate; the diligence to investigate, explore and analyse; the fortitude to examine, evaluate and negotiate; and the resilience to repair, remedy, renegotiate and resolve.

A career in construction is challenging but rewarding. It requires dogged determination to undertake projects with a view to doing things better, more effectively and efficiently. Over time, one learns to know the types of issues to address, the concerns to consider, the disputes to avoid and most of all the lessons to learn and apply. The right set of tasks, processes, activities and decisions could lead to the creation of something beautiful, something tangible -- a material, an object, a place or a space.

There are currently challenges and barriers along the way especially for women. It is a fact that men continue to dominate the industry. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, women comprise just under 12% of the construction workforce.

There continues to be a strong male culture in construction, a gender pay gap where women earn less, and ongoing discrimination in terms of employment opportunities and career advancement.

Women in Construction

What would motivate women to pursue a career in construction? What information should be made available to encourage women to join the workforce? How can we eliminate the barriers that continue to exist to enable women to have a meaningful and rewarding career in construction?

There are many different educational and professional pathways to acquiring the qualifications, aptitude, and experience necessary to develop and shape one's career or vocation in construction. After years of studies in a TAFE Institution or University, one would ideally need to get an apprenticeship or placement to be able to gain hands-on training and experience in order to develop the appropriate competencies and skills.

Education and training are essential to acquiring the appropriate knowledge and skills. A role model or mentor is also important to getting the relevant guidance and support that is specific to one's career. These are persons who can provide practical and professional advice that could boost women's confidence and self-assurance and also help identify potential pathways in their careers.

MENTORING PROGRAMS

There are a variety of mentoring programs offered by industry and universities. Below are some of these programs:

- The National Association of Women in Construction's Mentoring Program is a structured program for members who are in the early stages of their career and are partnered with other members who are practicing in the construction or building industry.
- The Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Constructive Mentoring program is geared towards young graduates of Architecture and those re-entering the workforce. It is a structured 12-month program for members of the institute.
- The Society of Construction Law facilitates professional development in the field of construction law through industry events, academic and research activities. Its mentoring program are open not just to lawyers but to everyone in the construction industry.
- The Civil Contractors Federation's Women in Civil Mentoring Program, launched in 2016, is designed to encourage women to join and remain in the NSW civil construction and maintenance industry.
- Master Builders Australia has a 9-month national mentoring program for women where support and advice from experienced individuals are provided through virtual and face-to-face mentoring partnerships.

- The New South Wales Government's Safe Work is a free mentoring program where small construction businesses with up to 20 full time workers are matched with peers from medium to large construction companies.
- The University of Melbourne has an Industry Mentoring program geared to helping students build a career through networking, facilitating a better transition for students from university to professional life. In 2018, a pilot program was introduced for female students pursuing a master's degree in Construction Management.
- The University of Queensland's Alumni-to-Alumni mentoring program is an online platform exclusive to the university's network of alumni. The platform promotes mutual connections allowing the sharing of career development opportunities that could lead to potential connections to other professionals outside the network.
- Victoria University has a structured Workplace Mentoring program where students who are matched with senior industry professionals in their specific fields are required to complete a self-assessment report and present their mentoring experience. The successful completion of the unit program is equivalent to 12 credits.
- RMIT University's flexible Career Mentoring program promotes student-led mentoring relationship with domestic and international industry professionals. The students are provided a list of industry mentors and are empowered to reach out through one-off meetings or a longer term 3-month partnership.
- Swinburne University has a Speed Mentoring Program where experienced professional alumni conduct 30-minute chats with students to provide professional and general career advice.
- The University of New South Wales' Co-NNECTIONS professional development program is a structured partnership with industry. Students participate in mentoring workshops, industry events, and networking that could lead to paid industry experience.
- Monash University's Access Monash Mentoring program is open to students from their partner schools, where Year 11 and 12 students are partnered with experienced Monash student mentors for a period of 9 months. Another program in the university is a staff-to-staff Women's Mentoring program where new female teaching staff are partnered with a senior teaching staff who can support them in their career progression and help them grow their leadership and professional skills.
- Deakin University piloted a Future Leaders of Industry mentoring program in 2018 for Year 11 high school students in Warrnambool City. They also have an Engineering Future Leaders program where PhD students are connected with industry partners.

Formally embedding the concept of industry mentoring in the educational system is an important early step. Awareness of available opportunities and resources in one's career path is key.