

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION



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Women in Construction week, running from the 6th to the 12th of March, is an initiative dedicated to changing the stereotypes that women face when it comes to careers within the construction industry. Even now, women are still underrepresented across the construction industry, despite the great work from the NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) since 1953. In honour of this dedicated week, we've interviewed a selection of our own female employees to explore what life is really like for a woman working in construction and to understand what we can do as an industry to influence more women to make similar commitments in the future.

Times are changing, with the number of women working in construction on the increase. A survey conducted by GoConstruct found that 37% of new entrants into the industry that came from higher education are women and 14% of construction industry professionals overall are female.

Attitudes in recent years have clearly progressed as demonstrated by Keeley O'Neill, Geberit Business Development Manager who has 7 years of construction industry expertise. She says: "People look at you as a person and what you can offer. It's all based on experience and attitude rather than whether you are a woman."



THE BENEFITS OF A DIVERSE WORKPLACE

Misconceptions about traditionally masculine or feminine jobs are slowly diminishing with a growing number of women joining previously male dominated industries.

Charlotte Gordon, Geberit Customer Support Manager with more than 14 years' industry experience believes that attitudes within the construction sector have changed for the better. She says: "There's more diversity out there. With more people doing roles that were once more male dominated. You see women on construction sites and female plumbers on the road setting up their own business which is really great to see."

A diverse workplace is an asset to any industry. A report conducted by McKinsey & Co. found that the most gender-diverse companies are 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability than companies with less diversity. Sally Hulme is a Geberit Technical Sales Manager with 18 years in the industry. She comments: "I think diversity is really important in every environment, not just with gender but also culture, age, religion, sexuality and ethnicity."

ENACTING CHANGE

With so many rewards and benefits, and with plenty of room for career progression and skill development in the construction industry, the sector is certainly worth considering. However, these opportunities are often not communicated to young women. Addressing the low number of women in construction starts at school age. It's important that girls feel that a career in the construction sector is not only feasible but also desirable as a long-term career.

The power of a role model for young girls should not be underestimated, as not only does this normalise the prospect of a woman in a historically male dominated industry, but also inspires and pushes back against gender stereotypes. As Neelam Bala, Specification and Estimating Manager and member of The Women's Engineering Society with 13 years in the industry says: "Do not change your direction in a male dominated industry based on another's narrow mind."

Amplifying voices from successful women within the industry is more essential than ever, to allow young girls to be able to visualise themselves in similar positions and to know that these positions are attainable. Geberit Technical Sales Manager Jan Parker, who has been in the industry for 40 years, is yet another role model, passionately stating: "Yes, join the construction industry! I have girls and I have encouraged both of them to try an engineering degree. It's a great life and the experiences are fantastic."

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS AND SMASHING GENDER STEREOTYPES

However, there's still work to be done to drive equality across the UK's built environment. As time moves on it will become ever more crucial to encourage young girls and women to choose a career in construction, providing opportunities for everyone to thrive within the industry. It's important for organisations to bust the myths surrounding construction work and continue to spread the word around how anyone can build a prosperous and rewarding career within the industry. Joanne Ansell, Regional Sales Director with 35 years in the industry says: "Others recognise the knowledge I have gained over many years in the construction industry. I believe this has helped me enormously in my role to gain respect."

As a company, we value diversity and a culture that allows every employee to bring their full potential to their role, and we are proud to be helping to increase equality across the built environment.



Q&A CONTRIBUTORS

WITH OVER 100 YEARS OF COMBINED EXPERIENCE



Sally Hulme

Geberit Technical Sales Manager
18 years experience



Charlotte Gordon

Geberit Customer Support Manager
14 years experience



Keeley O'Neill

Key Account Manager
7 years experience



Jan Parker

Geberit Technical Sales Manager
40 years experience



Neelam Bala

Technical Pre Sales Manager
13 years experience



Joanne Ansell

Regional Sales Director
35 years experience

Q. DO YOU COME ACROSS ANY CHALLENGES IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY ROLE SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO YOUR GENDER?

Sally Hulme:

"Specifically on site, one challenge being a female is the physical challenge of carrying tooling, piping and fittings, which has a significant weight to it. I deal with this by ensuring I have a bag with wheels but when I'm on site and carrying upstairs I sometimes have to ask for help." "Also, there are still some sites where you don't find female WC facilities and that's a real challenge."



Charlotte Gordon:

"When we are answering the phone to customers, sometimes plumbers hear a female voice answer and ask to speak to the Technical team. We always push them to talk to us and see if we can answer their question, which nine times out of ten we can, which takes them by surprise. Although, we often find them calling back again in the hopes of getting a man to check that the answer is correct. That doesn't happen as much as it used to, but occasionally it still does".



Keeley O'Neill:

"I don't think there's anything that stands out. I've never been made to feel that I'm not as good at my job because I'm a woman."



Neelam Bala:

"Not so much on a day-to-day basis, however I have faced challenges to progress further up the ladder. I was told to change my CV, that I was in the wrong line of work and that the industry is not suited to women. I kept my CV the same, and within a month I was hired by Geberit. I firmly believed in myself, my education and my experiences."



Jan Parker:

"Some challenges yes, but not as many now as there used to be. One of the biggest challenges used to be toilets. In the male environment they just didn't have female facilities, or they would be locked and we would have to go and ask for a key."



Q. IN YOUR CAREER, HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE YOU'VE HAD TO WORK HARDER THAN YOUR MALE COUNTERPARTS TO PROVE YOURSELF?



Jan Parker:

"Every day, all the time. I feel you have to do more, be on the ball more, you have to be more organised."



Joanne Ansell:

"On some occasions yes, I feel I have had to know more to gain respect from certain individuals who, years ago, could be challenging and don't expect you to know anything about the products on an application level."

Q. DO YOU FEEL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY HAVE CHANGED DURING THE COURSE OF YOUR CAREER?



Charlotte Gordon:

"I think attitudes are changing. There's more diversity out there."



Jan Parker:

"Oh yeah, so much for the better now. I don't think it really matters as long as you can do your job. People used to say: 'I would rather speak to a man'. That doesn't happen now though."

Q. DO YOU THINK GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE INDUSTRY IS IMPORTANT? DO MEN AND WOMEN BRING DIFFERENT THINGS TO THE TABLE?



Charlotte Gordon:

"It's important to have representation, different thoughts, different ideas and different cultures so people can bring different ideas that might never have been thought of before. It's not about gender, it's about what skills you bring."



Keeley O'Neill:

"Yes, everyone has different ideas and opinions and ways of doing things."



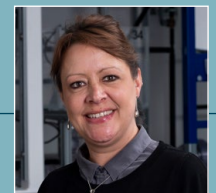
Joanne Ansell:

"I think it depends on whether women want to work in the industry, and I don't see there being any barriers to do this. Women, I believe, have skill in the ability to multitask which can be useful with the demands of this industry."



Neelam Bala:

"Gender diversity is extremely important, for both men and women, to provide gender equality. This must continue."



Sally Hulme:

"Diversity is really important. In the construction industry there are females in project management or managerial roles, but in my entire career I have never trained a female pipe fitter. It's still a hugely male dominated field."



14% OF CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS OVERALL ARE FEMALE.

AT GEBERIT WE ARE PROUD TO BE MOVING TOWARDS EQUALITY ACROSS THE WHOLE BUSINESS.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN:

External team

25.3%

Internal team

52.0%

Higher level mgrs

38.1%

Exec team

43.0%

