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NAWIC President

It's About Character

Does an industry have a heart, a soul, or a character? If the construction industry has any or all of these things, then they reflect, at least in part, the contributions of the women who work in construction — as support staff, company owners, project managers, professional advisors, and most of all, in its tradeswomen.

character of construction, and contributed mightily to setting higher standards of quality and behavior. In this endeavor, we have benefited not only our female colleagues, but also ratified the efforts of the men who have tried individually to raise the bar for many decades. People like Ben Houston of TD Industries and Ted Kennedy of BE&K created companies in which behavior and customer service drew quality employee partners. As standard bearers, they saw the potential of women to contribute to the long-term profitability of their companies, and they created corporate cultures and hierarchies which were attractive to the women they sought to hire and then promote. Men like these made it acceptable to create high class companies, in which the same professionalism was expected of their employees as of any corporate vice president in any other business.

Women, as a rule, have refused to assimilate, to accept the worst of the construction stereotypes — the butt cracks, the booger-nosed, leering male chauvinist, the language of the street. Those of us who were successful by adapting to a military male hierarchy eventually

became confident enough to reverse the trend. I don't mean that we "feminized" the industry. We merely stopped tolerating its basest characteristics. We stopped being "good sports" and trusted our own instincts about acceptable working relationships.

Our customers are sophisticated, educated, and globally aware. They don't want to work with contractors, design professionals, suppliers or tradespeople who can't control their language or behavior, who are sloppy and low class. We're learning to use our diversity as a behavioral and cultural broom to sweep away the things we are least proud of — the language of the gutter (no, it's not "adult" at all!), the pornographic posters, the lewd jokes, and the failure to respect each other as people. What's unacceptable in other companies, in other industries, should be equally unacceptable in ours.

Women are often seen as a threat or a liability — the people who take the "fun" out of construction, who are looking for the handout, the easy road, who take jobs from worthy men, and then sue their employers over trivial things. None of this is true, of

course. Women have been remarkably stable employees, working their jobs through decades of amazingly imbecilic working environments, often just to keep their jobs and put food on the table for their families.

If women are to be blamed for something, then let it be for something real and positive. We'll take the blame for using our people skills to reshape the corporate cultures of our companies, to change the image of our industry, one person and one company at a time. We'll take the credit for helping the world to see us as a true profession, so that we will finally appear to be what we always have been, having shaken off the detritus of the stereotype.

The future of construction, its ability to survive and attract quality people, is really about the heart, the soul and the character of our industry. Women can help raise the standards, and bring our industry in line with the rest of the world. Can anyone in the world of 21st century global construction afford to waste this potential? **I**

Industries, and the companies within them, have identifiable cultures and personalities which are built from the collective characters, hearts and souls of the people who work within them. By choosing the construction industry as a career, each woman contributes to this collective identity the strengths of her gender — team building learned as a girl at play, facilitation learned as a sister, daughter, or mother, the wider views and sensitivities which result from our biological and chemical brain patterns, as well as our highly developed sensory systems.

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