

# CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION





# OPPORTUNITIES ON THE RISE FOR WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

Women in construction provide diversity that is key to advancing the industry.

According to 2021 data, only 11% of employees in the construction industry are women. Of them, more than 45% have never worked with female construction managers, myself included.



BY ASHLEE  
STEDMAN  
SCHUCHART

Outside of a short time as an intern I've never had the opportunity to work under a female project manager, but I'm thrilled to see our presence in the industry increase.

However, I do feel fortunate to have worked with a number of men that saw me as a valued member of the team and treated me as such. Regarding me as an equal and supporting me — through mentoring, encouragement and promotions — has contributed to where I am in my career today.

I am one of six senior project managers at Schuchart, and three of us are women. I work for a firm that values and promotes diversity, and I've experienced firsthand how unique backgrounds and perspectives benefit the work we do. When the pandemic hit, it became even more clear just how big of an impact diversity makes. Lines between work and home became blurred. It was easier to see how an individual's personal experience outside of work affects the job they do, and how they do it.

I also became a working mother during the pandemic. When COVID-19 caused childcare centers to shut down and many businesses transitioned to remote, I found myself needing to more intentionally coordinate both work and personal schedules, priorities, and boundaries. As I adjusted to my new role, I realized the skills I use as a mom — clear communication, efficient time management and prioritization, setting expectations, and flexibility to pivot without



New construction jobs for women are on the rise and the industry is poised for growth.

IMAGE COURTESY OF SCHUCHART

much notice — were the same skills I apply to my projects at Schuchart. Suddenly, I was leaning into them across all facets of my day-to-day more than ever. And by looking at my job through the lens of my personal life, I was able to see what my experience as a woman and a working

mother brings to my role as a project manager in construction.

## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

While the construction industry has lagged behind others when it comes to workforce diversity, the onset of the global pandem-

ic has affected representation even more. Between February 2020 and January 2022, 1.1 million women left the construction labor force.

However, new construction jobs are on the rise and the industry

OPPORTUNITIES — PAGE 11

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# SOFT SKILLS ARE THE KEY ADVANTAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

People skills can move the construction industry forward.

**L**abor shortages. Supply chain hiccups. Global inflation.

Those are just a few challenges all industries face right now, but the construction industry is particularly hard hit. How can we overcome those barriers to meet current and future demand?



BY HEATHER POLIVKA  
HEATHER P SOLUTIONS

One key to success is leaders better equipped to meet today's talent marketplace. And the tools we need to build those leaders are now more available and stronger than before. But our industry is still slow to take advantage of them.

## BARRIERS TO GROWTH

Before we dive in, let's throw out two more key facts:

1. Generational expectations: By 2025, 64% of the workforce will comprise millennials and gen Z (people born from the 1980s to the 2010s). While you can't group an entire generation into a few characteristics, so far, they've been shown to have higher expectations for both companies and leaders, and lower tolerance for toxic work environments (which can be tied to leadership).

2. Diversity: Speaking of expectations, it's now an expectation, if not a requirement, that a workforce be diverse. All the data shows that diverse teams produce better results, and the population itself in the U.S. is becoming more multiethnic and multiracial.

How is construction doing with diversity? To look at gender alone, of all the people working in construction, women make up about 11%. That math doesn't make any sense, considering 47% of all employed individuals are women. That means that the construction industry is only benefiting from about 1.25% of women in the workforce.

Leaders are vital to creating workplace culture, a broad term encompassing all the aspects that will either meet or fail the kinds of expectations mentioned above. Culture is never neutral: it either attracts or repels. And leaders are the foundation to workplace culture. In fact, the

main reasons people leave a job can be linked to poor leadership. Whether it's a toxic workplace according to MIT Sloane Management, or feeling disrespected at work according to Pew Research, those can all be tied back to a lack of leadership skills.

The reverse is also true: to meet expectations for diversity, to be more productive, and to retain talent, we need to cultivate workplaces that create a sense of inclusion and belonging — the opposite of toxic. We need leaders who have high emotional intelligence and are aware of how unconscious bias can come into play, for example. Some people have those skills already, but most of us need training to develop and continue to refine them.

## GREAT LEADERS

Construction has a history of prioritizing technical skills over people skills, which means that many leaders get into those roles because of their on-the-job skills, not their people skills. Yet research from Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center shows that 85% of job success is linked to "soft" or people skills. Only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge ("hard" skills).

Leaders are crucial to recruitment, motivation, and retention. They're the ones who can influence so many small decisions (can I leave work early?) and large (who to promote), that have a direct effect on whether employees stay or leave.

Why don't we as an industry focus more on building the people skills our organizations need our leaders to have, for the whole company to succeed? One reason is a lack of good manager development programs for construction. What's mostly available are old-school desktop-based trainings that take too long, and don't include practical application for our industry.

Fortunately, like many other industries, COVID has forced the training industry to adapt. You can now find many more online trainings that are better suited for a highly deployed, dispersed workforce not sitting in office.

## PEOPLE SKILLS TRAINING

Training needs to keep pace with the rest of the workplace and the world. That means:

Of all the people working in construction, women make up about 11%.



PHOTO BY ANAM MEDIA

- Access at your fingertips for real help in real time.

- Consumable content that's quick and entertaining (how many people learn something they need to know on YouTube?).

- Available anywhere, anytime. If we've learned anything from remote work, it's that we all have other lives and other responsibilities. Why force-fit training into someone's day?

- Interactive and responsive. With instant messaging and collaborative spaces for everyday work, shouldn't training include that, too?

Specifically: Think small, look for learning in bite-sized bundles, for example 10-minute micro-learnings. Not only do shorter trainings have a higher chance of actually being completed, but they allow each person to learn at their own pace. Because they're short, people can easily repeat a training, too, which helps with retention of content.

## APPLIED VS. ABSTRACT

Look for training that includes real-time action strategies. You need to balance the "why" behind an approach with the opportunity to apply the theory. That's especially important for concepts like Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) and unconscious bias, where you need to absorb the history and concepts, then apply them, and

then go back to the material. A learning loop will be more helpful than a learning sequence.

## THINK COMMUNITY

Group learning adds value,

no question. Given we all learn at different paces, though, it's unlikely everyone will come away from the same training with the same knowledge. You need train-

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## ON THE COVER

Skanska and the Office of African American Male Achievement earlier this year hosted a Youth in Construction event that included a tour of Sound Transit's L-300 light rail jobsite in Lynnwood. Turn to page 6 to learn how Skanska is building its workforce. PHOTO COURTESY OF SKANSKA

## CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION TEAM

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# COLLEGE OR BUST IS NO LONGER THE ONLY OPTION

Candidates are in a position where they can be selective about where they want to work.

Between the Great Resignation of early 2022 and the wave of baby boomers retiring, we are amid one of the biggest opportunities of this lifetime when it comes to accelerating and choosing the trajectory of one's career in construction. The labor shortage woes of this year have been felt across all industries, but in one with an aging population, the construction industry will be forced into an unprecedented position over the next few years. Unfortunately, we haven't seen the peak of this labor shortage yet. According to NCCER, 23% of the construction industry's workforce will retire over the next nine years.



BY NIDA MOLODIH  
I&E CONSTRUCTION

The Associated Builders and Contractors reports that, assuming construction spending growth slows next year, the industry will still need to bring in roughly 590,000 new workers on top of normal hiring to meet industry demand. That is only if the industry slows down in the

next year. If the market stays on pace, the association estimates that the industry will need to add 650,000 workers on top of normal hiring.

This gap will leave companies at the mercy of the labor pool. Candidates are in a position where they can be choosier about where they want to work, what they want to do, and to what capacity, forever altering the industry's work model. Some will coast through this period, while others will seize the opportunity and thrive. In this new environment, employees with the right aptitude will be able to accelerate their careers at a rate never seen before.

Identifying these star candidates and ensuring low turnover has been a major focus for us in the last five years. Foreseeing this play out, I&E Construction has implemented many programs and incentives leading up to this period. These initiatives have helped us lower our turnover to an all-time low, well below this last year's industry average of 57.5% reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They are also a major contributor to the exponential growth we've experienced and become one of Oregon's top 100 fastest-



Identifying star candidates and ensuring low turnover has been a major focus for I&E in the last five years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF I&E CONSTRUCTION

growing companies for four years running. One of these initiatives has been recognizing and educating as many potential candidate pools as possible.

With the institutional education focus shifting away from the trades in the last decade, there is a lack of understanding and awareness at the entry-level,

when it comes to careers in construction. We have spent a lot of time speaking to high school and college students about career opportunities in the construction industry. What we have observed among the younger generation is that there is a shared misconception that pursuing a successful and rewarding career in construction can only be obtained through post-secondary education or union jobs. Based on the makeup of our organization, we know this not to be true.

There is a large population of students who are looking for options outside of college but don't know what opportunities are out there. Our focus in the last year has been to work with high schools and educate students on the different career paths. I&E has partnered with a local school district to help design its new Career Technology Education (CTE) construction program. Serving on the board allows us to help shape the program throughout the planning and implementation phase. This initiative will give thousands of students in our area the possibility of hands-on learning while still in school

Additionally, as industry professionals, we believe it is our responsibility to pay it forward to the next generation through education and mentorship. To fulfill that responsibility, we've established a paid internship program that is built to accommodate students from different educational backgrounds. Students are invited to participate at the high school and college levels. Each year is designed to give students at different levels the best real-world experience, so they are set up for a successful entry into the workforce.

The only way this industry makes it through this gap period favorably is with a collective effort in attracting new talent and bringing interest back to construction. With the right exposure, the construction industry will gain new traction as a worthwhile career path for many undecideds.

*Nida Molodih has been the human resource and safety manager of I&E Construction for more than five years and oversees the Oregon and Florida divisions.*



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## SOFT SKILLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

ing that provides community on your employees' terms. Look for training tools that offer a cohort approach including live interaction, as well as a peer group that can answer questions and act as a sounding board.

The construction industry is full of talented individuals. If we want to multiply that talent, we need

to help those individuals develop into great leaders, who in turn can build great companies.

*Heather Polivka is a trusted business advisor accelerating the growth and success of progressive SMBs through practical leadership, employee performance, and thriving workplace cultures.*

# BUILDING BUSINESS: STORYTELLING, DESIGN AND BUSINESS CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION

Marketing and business development in the construction industry offers a variety of career paths depending on your skills and interests.

When you think of careers in construction, does your mind go to construction management, the trades and craft labor? What about those of us who have business, marketing and communication degrees as well as a passion for the built environment? Enter



BY MELISSA RICHEY  
ENGLISH  
MIDDLE OF SIX  
and there is a strong community of like-minded professionals who are ready to guide you on your journey.

the marketing and business development professions that are vital to the construction industry. Successful and rewarding careers are plentiful in the construction industry, and there is a strong community of like-minded professionals who are ready to guide you on your journey.

## FINDING YOUR WAY

If you ask just about any marketing professional in the construction industry how they got their start, you'll hear some version of, "I just fell into it." Marketing and business development in the construction industry offers a variety of career paths depending on your skills and interests. From positions that call on strong writing and storytelling, to creative graphic design endeavors, to coaching team members on public speaking and building relationships with clients, there's a place for diverse professionals.

## MARKETING ROLES

If you're early in your career, you may enter as a marketing coordinator or proposal coordinator. This is an essential role for producing the proposals and statements of qualifications (SOQs) that construction firms need to secure projects. From there, the next progression could be into a marketing manager or proposal manager overseeing a team of coordinators. Because of the depth of industry knowl-

edge acquired in the coordinator role, another progression from that position is a move into communications and public relations, where you tell the stories of your company to external audiences to strengthen the brand in the marketplace.

Marketing directors play a critical role in the success of construction companies. Managing marketing teams, creating marketing plans and budgets and overseeing the execution of those plans make for a professionally challenging and rewarding career. Marketing directors may also find themselves representing their firms through service on boards of industry professional associations.

## GRAPHIC DESIGN IN SPADES

Regardless of the industry, the Adobe Creative Suite is the gold standard for graphic design yet working in construction as a graphic designer is not a well-known career path. The advantages of our industry for graphic designers are the wide variety of projects you may design early in your career. Designs for proposals and advertisements, graphics for social media, large scale pieces for jobsite signage, and display boards for award submissions are just a few of the myriad design projects that graphic designers work on daily. Opportunities to create and refresh brands are plentiful, too, as the construction industry has been slower to recognize the importance of branding when compared to other business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) industries.

"Whether your focus is on visual or written communications, I encourage all AEC marketers to get comfortable with both writing and graphic design," said Wendy Simmons, founding principal of Middle of Six Marketing Consultants. "Being able to compose a compelling caption for an infographic or sketch out an illustration for a case study will amplify your career opportunities in AEC," she said.



Members of the SMPS Seattle Chapter at the Amplify A|E|C Conference in Atlanta.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDDLE OF SIX

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

While nearly every other industry calls it "sales," the construction industry has dubbed it "business development" and there is huge demand for business development professionals. As marketing professionals advance in their careers, some make the move to business development. These roles involve building and maintaining relationships with clients, potential clients and project partners to ultimately win project work for your firm. This can involve attending professional association events and conferences, participating in community events, hosting clients at social outings and researching upcoming projects. Business developers work closely with marketing teams to share what they've learned so that the knowledge can be applied in the firm's marketing strategy.

Business development roles are also a natural progression for project managers and other construction professionals who want to evolve their career toward helping capture new work for the firm. The knowledge, relationships and networks that construction professionals build in their careers lend themselves well to successfully pivoting into business development.

## A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

The architecture, engineering, and construction industry is fortunate to have a strong professional association to support people at every step of their career in marketing and business development — The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS). The Seattle Chapter is one of the largest,

STORYTELLING — PAGE 10

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Skanska and AAMA earlier this year hosted a Youth in Construction event that included a tour of Sound Transit's L-300 light rail jobsite in Lynnwood.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SKANSKA

# BUILDING CAREERS WHILE BUILDING BUILDINGS

There is no one-size-fits-all path into a career in construction.

**T**he growing diversity in the construction industry and within our own company is something that we at Skanska are particularly proud of. Every day on jobsites and in our offices, we see more people of color, more women, more young people, more people who have chosen construction as a second career, and more who have taken



BY KEVIN MCCAIN  
SKANSKA USA  
BUILDING

non-traditional paths into the industry. Because of that, we are a more creative, resilient, stronger company and industry.

Just like every construction worker is one of a kind, there is no one-size-fits-all path into a career in construction, especially given the diversity of roles avail-

able across the broader architecture, engineering and construction industry, and even within our own company.

While many roles do require a college education, just as many begin with a high school diploma, a willingness to learn, and hard work. Many senior-level employees here at Skanska and in the larger industry began their careers in the construction trade, for example, as a carpenter apprentice, before becoming a journeyman with apprentices working under them, and then moving on to higher levels of leadership.

Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and other learning and career growth opportunities continue to afford the more than 7 million men and women in the construction industry—people of every race, creed, and national origin—a well-paying future with good benefits. Skanska has several programs in place to help

bring awareness to the many career choices that exist for people interested in the construction industry.

## YOUTH IN CONSTRUCTION

When working with school districts and administrators, we often hear how great it would be if we were able to help show students the wide range of careers available in our industry, as many students have no idea the breadth of roles available. Many assume that the construction industry is populated primarily by folks who excelled in the industrial arts (aka, “the shop class kids”).

In 2021, Skanska established a partnership with the Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) at Seattle Public Schools, forming Skanska's Youth in Construction program. The partnership is designed to raise awareness of and bring



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equitable access to career paths at competitive salaries in the construction industry.

Since then, Skanska and AAMA have hosted three highly successful Youth in Construction events, which showcase the breadth of careers available within the industry, including jobs that literally can take them around the world.

Through Youth in Construction, AAMA and Skanska are helping showcase roles including civil engineers, building information modeling technicians, environmental health and safety officers, estimators, quality control professionals, superintendents, project managers, financial managers, marketers, human resources professionals, labor relations specialists, apprenticeship coordinators, and, yes, tradespeople — carpenters, ironworkers, plumbers, electricians, HVAC specialists and dozens more.

Many students have no idea how extensive the construction industry really is. Building a building is complex and it takes an extensive team of people working together utilizing their diverse skill sets to make it all happen. We want to make sure these kids understand that and can envision a future where they're the ones designing, engi-

neering, and building the next school, airport, highway, office tower or shopping mall.

To that end, this summer, Skanska's inaugural class of high school interns will begin a groundbreaking new program with us. These students, selected from participants in the Youth in Construction program, have shown drive and dedication to the craft and we believe this new internship program will help further prepare them for a rewarding career in construction.

**ACE MENTORS**

Skanska has been a proud participant in the ACE Mentor Program here in the Puget Sound region since its inception in Seattle in 2001. Since then, it has expanded to Bellevue in 2006 and Tacoma in 2016. ACE is a free after school program open to any high school student with the curiosity and drive to learn about the various career paths in the design and construction industry.

The program runs November through May each year and typically pairs a group of 10 to 15 professionals with 20 to 25 students. Over the course of 15 two-hour meetings every other week, the students learn about the various disciplines and then

they put that learning to the test by responding to a mock RFP. This is high-level, career-building work.

ACE pairs architects, engineers and contractors with high school students, and introduces them to people in related fields — interior design, urban planning, marketing, law and more — to give the students real world experience prior to graduating high school and provide a head-start confirmation of their career path before entering college.

Since its inception locally, more than 1,500 industry professionals have volunteered as mentors to nearly 3,500 students. The ACE Mentorship Program has awarded more than \$1.1 million in scholarships to local students pursuing a college education in one of the ACE fields.

**SWINGING A HAMMER**

People who don't work in construction often get a certain mental picture when I mention that I work in construction, but as those of us in the industry know, this field encompasses a wide variety of career paths. At Skanska alone, we have three main divisions in the U.S. — Building, Civil and Commercial Development — all of which offer wonderful opportunities for peo-

ple looking to get into this business.

For example, careers in development are not limited to those who studied real estate but have an interest in the built environment. The team at Skanska USA Commercial Development have degrees that span across real estate, architecture, finance, urban planning and design. They welcome people energized by creative problem solving and working amongst diverse mindsets that will bring forward highly sustainable and resilient buildings.


Roles on their team include development, leasing, sustainability, innovation/emerging technology, safety, finance, strategy, legal, asset management, communications, marketing, HR, diversity and inclusion, and office management. What's more, they have two current employees who started in administrative roles and have since completed the USC Ross Minority Program for Real Estate, progressing to now become development associates.

Another thing I love about this industry and our company is how many people have joined us from areas outside of construction. Case in point is Margot vanSwearingen, one of our senior project managers.

Margot initially wanted to be an architect. She went to UW, majored in architecture and spent six years at an integrated design firm on their architecture staff working on K-12 design. She was really invested in designing for how kids learn and the best environments for teachers — the very things we value at Skanska, as well. Her interest in construction operations was piqued while performing construction administration on projects she worked on while at the firm and talking with a friend who worked for Skanska gave her the confidence that contracting would be a right fit, so she made the move.

On Margot's most recent project, she was senior project manager overseeing construction of the new Highline High School. She oversaw client contact, cost management, schedule management, mitigating risk, COVID mitigation, estimates, working with design team on preconstruction, course setting, owner communication, establishing processes and methods, labor negotiations and more.

Another job people normally don't associate with the construction industry is strategy. Addy Duffany certainly didn't.



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# INNOVATIVE NEW PATHS IN CONSTRUCTION CAREERS

Never before has the AEC industry offered so many diverse career paths to so many.



BY WIL ADAMS & PRUTHA CHIDDARWAR  
MORTENSON

It's no secret there is a shortage of new workers entering the construction industry. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 402,000 construction positions remained unfilled at the end of October 2021 — the second-highest level recorded since data collection began in December 2000. This issue has been compounded by the pandemic, the Great Resignation — leading workers to quit their jobs at near-record levels — and younger workers who just don't think the architecture, engineering and construction industry would be a rewarding career path. While a common misperception, never before has the AEC industry offered so many diverse career paths to so many.

## IMMERSIVE VIRTUAL REALITY

Case-in-point: Will Adams with Mortenson Seattle, who has carved out a unique position for himself based on his interests and passions in both technology and architecture.

While pursuing his master of architecture degree at the University of Minnesota, Adams discovered immersive virtual reality and its potential to impact design and construction. During that program, he began researching real-world applications of VR with Mortenson. In 2013, Adams moved to Seattle to live in a VR/technology hot spot and work full-time for the top-20 builder, developer, and engineering services provider.

Adams is now living his childhood dream of being an inventor as a project solutions technologist with Mortenson, where he has been charged with building a division focused on developing and applying emerging technology. His passion for architecture, programming, and novel technology has led him to explore how the intersection of these fields can positively impact the rapidly changing building industry.

In his developer role, Adams has built VR models for almost every type of construction use — from health care projects where doctors and nurses can meet in the same virtual operating



In his developer role, Mortenson Project Solutions Technologist Will Adams has built virtual reality models for almost every type of construction uses, such as Seattle's recently completed Climate Pledge Arena.

PHOTO BY ALEX FRADKIN

The ASU project team asked Mortenson Seattle to create a mini hockey game to get recruits and students excited about the multipurpose arena



PHOTO COURTESY OF MORTENSON

room to fully immersive and collaborative virtual environments for complex, multi-use facilities such as Seattle's recently completed Climate Pledge Arena.

"At Mortenson, the projects

that we use VR-based programs for often reflect the first time we have ever used virtual reality in that way. There is a lot of ambiguity and invention required. It's very challenging, but also incred-

ably rewarding," said Adams.

A recent favorite project Adams worked on was creating a simulation of the new Arizona State University hockey/multi-use arena designed and constructed by

the Mortenson Seattle team.

"The ASU project team asked us to create a mini-hockey game to get recruits and students excited about the arena, and we ended



up executing their ask with a physics-based VR game that requires users to catch a pass and shoot it at a goalie. It was a great challenge that led to an entertaining game on an ultimately really fun project," said Adams.

So, what has it taken Adams to excel in his role? "While earning a master of architecture was the most impactful part of my education, teaching myself to code and experiment in game engines — as well as working and learning in the AEC industry for 20 years — has definitely been important."

### DIVERSE SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

Prutha Chiddarwar also found a rewarding career as a field engineer in preconstruction for Mortenson Seattle, where all her previous experiences coalesced into contributing towards her success.

Chiddarwar's path to the industry started early: observing her father working as an architect in India inspired her creativity. In college, she pursued a bachelor's in architecture followed by a master's in urban design from University College London. She soon realized that projects entail much more than designing — and decided to pursue a construction management master's degree at the University of Washington, when she also started as an intern with Mortenson.

### BUILDING CAREERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

While she is very passionate about our industry today, when she was studying urban planning at Arizona State University, she had given very little thought to working for a construction company ... and no thought to working in strategy.

But after joining Skanska and gaining experience in both preconstruction and in operations as a project engineer, she noticed that the company had a business need to plan our new business initiatives in the same way we plan our projects. So, Addy did what forward-thinking people do — she put together a business case for a role she called "Strategy Manager," which needed someone well-versed in the industry and with the technical skills to relate to our project teams while thinking futuristically to do the job right. We agreed with her analysis and recommendations 100% and then moved her into the role because she was the perfect fit.

At the end of the day, our industry is about building things. In construction, that can mean building strategies, building plans, building teams, building budgets, building consensus and more. Because without all of that, none of us would be building buildings or building our careers.

*Kevin McCain is executive vice president and general manager, Skanska USA Building.*

"My internship at Mortenson provided an exposure to construction means and methods, technical skills, company culture, and soft skills which have become essential in the construction industry — and definitely helped to put things in perspective," said Chiddarwar.

As a field engineer in preconstruction, Chiddarwar works with the estimating team and the design phase management team. Her role includes cost estimation for projects at various stages of design, bidding, cost modeling, value analysis, and assisting with target value delivery. In this role, her past professional experiences in architecture and urban design bring different perspectives and

help the team achieve common visions for the project and client.

One of Chiddarwar's most rewarding jobs was working on Western Washington University's new carbon-neutral Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Building, where she and the design and preconstruction teams worked towards value-engineering goals for the school. Her architecture background gave her the tools to dive deep into the details and recommend changes to get closer to the program the customer wanted.

"My job brings me fulfillment in many ways," continued Chiddarwar. "My role as a preconstruction field engineer helps me bridge the gap between architecture and construction. I enjoy

understanding the client's vision and determining the cost impacts of designs. All the skills gathered from architecture, urban design, and construction come together for me to make important contributions. It is very rewarding at the end to say: 'I helped build that.'"

### PURSUING A CAREER

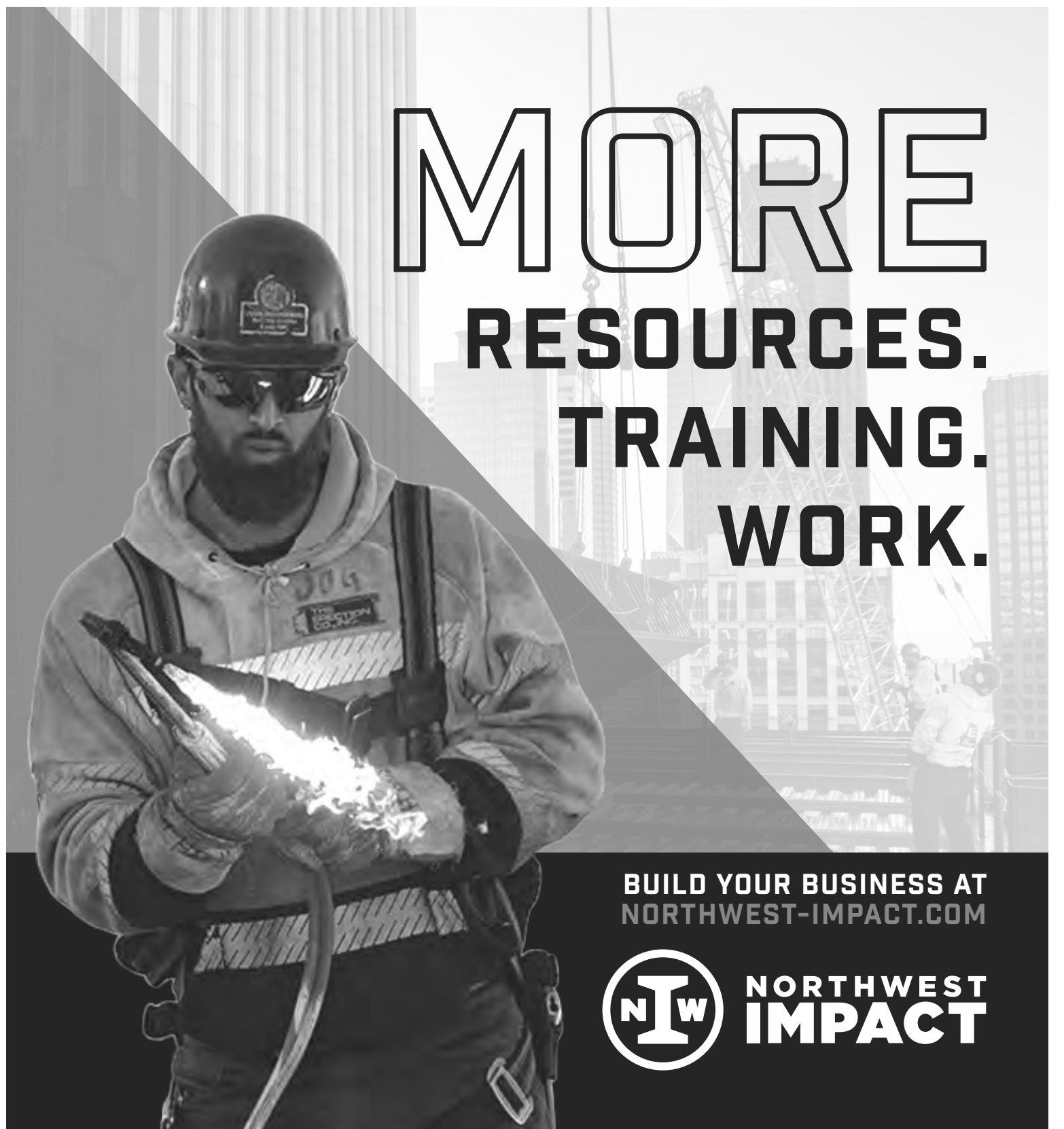
What should those who are interested in a career in the construction industry consider before pursuing their path? Talking to various professionals in the industry to understand the many available paths is a smart move before furthering education or choosing a role. The Washington ACE Mentorship Program also helps high school

students secure internships in the construction industry to help carve out their paths.

Chiddarwar agrees, "Construction involves people with different expertise, and everyone can choose a path depending on their passion."

When asked if working in the construction industry is a promising career path, Adams responded, "I think it's a great career path because it's interesting and there is a need for talented individuals who are interested in bringing a fresh perspective to an ancient profession."

*Will Adams is a project solutions technologist and Prutha Chiddarwar is a field engineer, both with Mortenson Seattle.*



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# TIPS FOR FINDING A SUCCESSFUL, FULFILLING AEC ROLE

Bring passion, positivity and grit with you to work, and you'll undoubtedly be a success.

The greater construction industry is full of benefits, but one of its greatest differentiators is the lasting impact it has on cities and communities. From the houses we live in and the schools our kids attend, to the offices we work in and the plazas we stroll through, all were developed, designed and built by this incredible AEC community. Driving past a project you've



BY GEORGE THEO  
COUGHLIN PORTER  
LUNDEEN

had a hand in creating and being able to do so for the lifetime of the building, is truly a special experience.

At Coughlin Porter Lundeen, we celebrate these contributions as much as possible. Several times a year, our office splits into small groups and explores past projects via neighborhood walking tours. Together we walk through plazas, explore retail spaces, and view classrooms. Experienced principals and project managers provide context and project details, and talk about the history of a neighborhood, how its current master plan came to be, and how we as civil and structural engineers have contributed. What better way to celebrate work than being able to physically be there and witness how it fits into the community!

## START SHARING

A career in construction involves so much more than traditional desk work, and one of the best and most rewarding out-of-office opportunities involves community support and giving back. AEC professionals can donate their time and talent to organizations like Sawhorse Revolution (where high school students are partnered with professional carpenters, architects and engineers, and work side-by-side to create needed community projects), ACE Mentor Program of America (an after school program designed to attract high school students into pursuing careers in architecture, construction, and engineering), and Washington Alliance for Better Schools (providing hands-on STEM learning experiences for grade and middle school levels). These early exposure opportunities are so valuable and allow staff to share their excitement and expertise with Seattle-area youth.

It's important to not be stunted on your own learning journey too. Once settled into a role, don't let the learning stop! Continued learning will keep you passionate, excited and inventive. Professional organizations can help greatly on this front, as they not only provide a platform for purposeful networking and industry collaboration, but regularly facilitate workshops, panels, conferences, and meetings. These allow members to share best practices, learn from others' experiences, and consider challenges as a team. Many companies are happy to cover employee membership fees or continued education costs. Take advantage!

## FIND A MENTOR

There's a reason apprenticeship has been around since the stone ages: it works! Great mentors will invest time in getting to know you, your strengths and your goals. They'll support your day-to-day work, provide constructive evaluations, and help you plan for career checkpoints.

Most likely, a workplace won't have one single person who represents everything you want to achieve. Diversify! Everyone at our office has something to teach you. If you find someone particularly competent in tough situations, study that. If you admire the way a coworker stays organized, take notes.

If you find someone you connect with, take responsibility for the mentor/mentee relationship and pursue it with intention. Take them to coffee and tell them you'd like to learn from them! Mentors very much appreciate seeing the mentee put in effort and take initiative.

Many organizations have established mentor programs, but if you're finding it difficult to find a mentor, talk to your manager. It undoubtedly will be well received, as it shows a commitment to growth and is an indirect way of saying, "I value our in-house expertise and talent and I want to build my career here."

## ASK FOR SUPPORT

Less than 20% of engineering graduates in the U.S. are women and retention is an industry challenge. Many in AEC are working to buck these trends, Coughlin Porter Lundeen included.

Women make up approximately 40% of our staff. A women's group was established to support this large group. The company-endorsed platform determines priorities, articulates suggestions, and helps the full team

Civil associate principal Kyle Malaspino stops at the Amazon Spheres during an intern group tour.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COUGHLIN PORTER LUNDEEN

understand how to create a better environment and opportunities to advance. Young employees should be on the lookout for similar opportunities at their offices. If there's no platform, don't be afraid to speak up and spearhead an initiative. Companies value fresh ideas and energy and your coworkers will be grateful for the avenue to be heard.

Additionally, many firms cover membership dues of staff in professional groups and support employee's out-of-office efforts related to women in STEM. Be sure to look beyond your own office! For example, my Coughlin Porter Lundeen team members serve as ACE mentors, encouraging high school students to pursue careers in STEM. We also sponsor and provide panelists for UW's WiSE (Women in Science and Engineering) Conference; and have staff serving on Structural Engineers Association of Northern California's SE3 (Structural Engineering Engagement and Equity) committee, working to improve engagement and equity in the structural engineering profession (nationally).

## BE INSPIRED

You are so much more than an engineer (or architect, or construction manager)! Embrace your out-of-office interests. Pursuing what you love, be it hobbies, travel, cooking, fitness, service, etc., makes you more creative, motivated and happy! Study after study reveals that when we are positive, our brains become more engaged, creative, motivated, energetic, resilient, and productive.

Finding the right work/life bal-

ance can be a challenge, especially when you're new and eager to learn and put in your time. Just remember that balance is good, and that pursuing interests beyond the office helps avoid burnout and improves our work product. Everyone brings a unique perspective to projects, and it's a team's varied backgrounds, interests, and talents that make our project teams dynamic and successful.

## BE YOURSELF

We saved the best, and arguably most important, for last. When beginning a new role, it's easy to be overwhelmed with the desire to make a good first impression. You want to impress, prove your worth, find your footing — we get it!

But you don't need to be the exaggerated extrovert if you're naturally shy. And you don't need to curb your friendliness if you

find yourself in a quieter office. Relax, trust yourself, you're sure to make a better impression than any facade would. Plus, you'll allow your co-workers to know the authentic you. The attitude you bring to work matters enormously. It determines how your co-workers interact with you, how you approach tough tasks, how open you are to growth and learning. It's contagious too, your attitude is a huge factor in office morale! Teamwork is a big part of every industry and there will be times where your product is dependent on how well your team functions. Bring passion, positivity and grit with you to work, and you'll undoubtedly be a success.

*A human resources and business manager at Coughlin Porter Lundeen, George Theo partners with staff of all levels to support team members, navigate the firm's growth and evolution, and shape the employee experience.*

## STORYTELLING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

most established and fastest growing chapters in the country. If you want to make the leap to marketing and business development in construction, SMPS Seattle will provide you with a network of incredible people to help you learn and grow.

The Puget Sound region is fortunate to have a deep bench of construction firms — from nationally recognized companies and regional firms numbering in the hundreds of staff down to small, locally owned firms with a handful of employees. Given this diver-

sity of companies, the sizes and compositions of marketing and business development teams vary widely, yet one thing is certain, there is always demand for talented business- and design-minded people who want to help set these firms apart in the marketplace.

*Melissa Richey English is a principal marketing strategist at Middle of Six, a marketing consultancy dedicated to the AEC industry.*



## OPPORTUNITIES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

is poised for growth. This presents a tremendous opportunity for women to effectively contribute their skills and experience to the profession. It also presents a responsibility for construction companies to support the advancement of our historically underrepresented demographic.

Examining the unique skills and talent women bring to the workforce isn't new, and many organizations continue to explore how women in construction management roles are helping advance the industry.

Women are natural relationship builders, which is essential when managing a diverse team of stakeholders and consultants. We tend to read non-verbal cues more easily, helping us quickly uncover project needs even if the client is having a hard time articulating them. We excel at communication and explaining things in non-technical terms. This helps build consensus around shared project goals. Women also embrace teamwork and group input. We understand what it's like to be underrepresented, and we support the views and talents of others.

While these traits appear to come more instinctively to women, this isn't to say these skills are exclusive to us. The key is to draw on the combined experiences of everyone to bring necessary balance to the construction industry. Embracing unique perspectives and knowledge leads to innovative solutions, identifies areas to improve efficiencies, and provides a collaborative and supportive process. And, it's good for the bottom line: gender-diverse companies are 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability than companies with less diversity.

With the number of women pursuing careers in the field continuing to grow, understanding and leveraging diverse skills will be paramount in maintaining a successful business and a competitive advantage.

### DIVERSITY STRATEGY

We've already seen how workforce diversity is changing the types of spaces we build. Lactation rooms, prayer rooms, and all-gender restrooms — to name a few — are quickly becoming standard components of many commercial office projects. When present on a project team, workforce diversity adds value to the process and end product as well.

I apply my organization, time management, and communication skills as a woman and working mother to my role at Schuchart every day. They are essential to my success, and the success of my projects. I also draw on my experiences using

the types of spaces we build to deliver projects that go beyond function. During preconstruction and through our value engineering process, I can question priorities when necessary and contribute a different perspective. My insights and lessons learned ensure these spaces are best suited for the end user.

Increasing the variety of backgrounds and experience we bring to our projects is crucial for the construction industry to evolve, innovate, and attract top talent. Employees in a diverse environment are more engaged, which is especially critical in a profession that relies so heavily on

communication and collaboration. Bringing unique ideas to the table encourages creative problem solving. And by cultivating a diverse workforce, construction companies can widen their candidate pool and open doors to even more qualified recruits.

At Schuchart, we understand the importance of attracting and supporting a diverse team. I am an active member of our Inclusion Action Group, which focuses on promoting inclusion and diversity throughout our organization and in our collaboration across the industry. We are dedicated to fostering an environment where contribu-

tions of diverse backgrounds and life experiences flourish.

### THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

Like so many other professions, the pandemic helped shine a light on the lack of diversity in the construction field. As the U.S. workforce continues to become more racially, ethnically, and gender-diverse, the future of our industry will rely on increased diversity and inclusion for its survival. We must embrace diversity now. By recruiting and supporting women and other historically underrepresented groups, construction companies will offer

their organization, their clients, and the industry as a whole the diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions needed to advance, re-invent, and thrive.

I take great pride as a female in the construction industry. I am excited to act as a role model for new employees entering the profession and to demonstrate that senior roles can — and should — be an option for anyone interesting in pursuing them.

*Ashlee Stedman is a senior project manager on Schuchart's major accounts team, and an active member of the firm's Inclusion Action Group.*



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