

Quarry Gals Rule

By Correspondent Tonia Jurbin

...And then there's the dance, that moment of awkwardness when you first meet someone and you can see that you're being checked out, sized up. Or the collective eyeball rolling when you address a room full of men... you can almost hear the 'now she's going to tell us how to do our job.'

These days it may be barely perceptible, but women have made great strides in non-traditional roles. However, until the number of women reaches a critical mass, they will continue to face unique challenges in construction, and in the aggregate industry in particular. Many of these have been addressed as the number of women slowly climbs, but a few more challenges continue to be uncovered as they enter the ranks of senior management. The women who do stay agree that once they have demonstrated their competence, the opening bid to sitting at the table, most of their peers accept them.

Everyone was emphatic on the need for young women to seek out mentors early on in their careers. These mentors would ideally be someone that they did not report to. The difficulty, of course, is that if they seek out a female mentor, the only one around may be her supervisor.

Moreen Miller, (40), Regional

Manager of Resource Development for Lafarge (Eastern) Canada Inc, set out ground rules with her female mentees, who she also happens to supervise "Once we're outside of work, it's friends," she says.

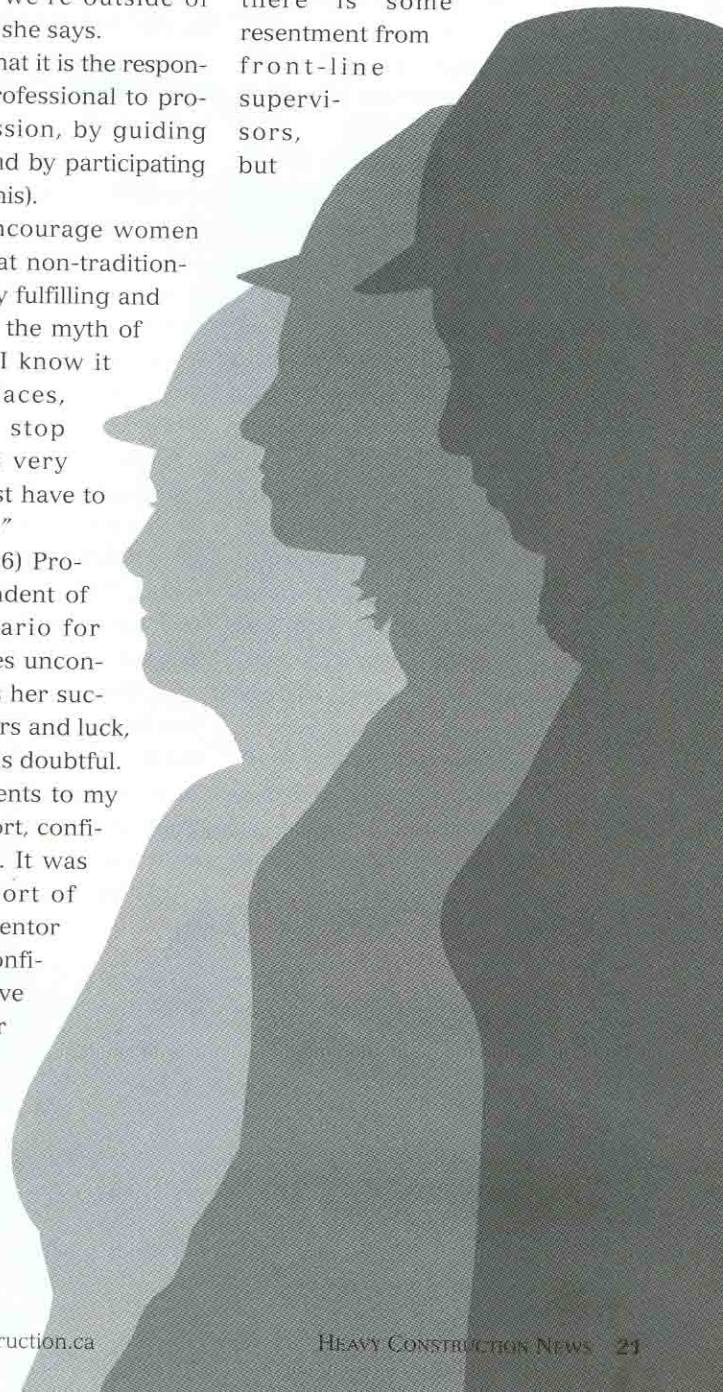
Miller believes that it is the responsibility of every professional to promote their profession, by guiding younger people (and by participating in articles such as this).

"We have to encourage women and show them that non-traditional roles can be very fulfilling and we have to banish the myth of the glass ceiling. I know it exists in some places, but we have to stop naval gazing, it's very debilitating. We just have to get on with the job."

Janet Bherer, (26) Production Superintendent of three pits in Ontario for Dufferin Aggregates unconditionally attributes her success to good mentors and luck, although the latter is doubtful.

"The three elements to my success were support, confidence and balance. It was through the support of my family and a mentor that I gained the confidence to be assertive with my career path. It was a big adjustment for my supervisor to deal with people who weren't used to dealing with women."

Companies are also evolving as many are starting to bring engineers in as managers instead of recruiting from the ranks, and there is some resentment from front-line supervisors, but



it is not gender specific. It's just one more thing to deal with.

"There was a big adjustment for me entering the workplace because there were no role models, many unknowns, and I was no longer surrounded by my friends. It took about three years for my colleagues to respect me," says Bherer.

"It wasn't until I moved closer to my quarries that I realized I hadn't been doing anything for me!"

Bherer has found a balance in her life between work, family and personal interests. She does admit that balance will change when she starts a family, and is uncertain how that will be received.

Today women can take up to one year for maternity leave. It's a tough call to be out of sight and out of mind for a year, but how many working mothers who derive great fulfillment from their families as well as their careers wouldn't want to?

Teresa Malpage (36), also with Dufferin Aggregates in Ontario, is on her second maternity leave. When she left she was the Quality Assurance Manager. Her early work as an inspector gave her a solid background in quality control and before taking her leave she was instrumental in developing a marketable product by blending some of the high quantities of mine waste.

When she returns, the title Product Development Manager will have been created for her.

"I am very assertive and clear in what I need to accomplish my job. Recognize and try to figure out whom to communicate with either inside or outside of

your circle when you're pumped about some new idea. Hopefully, as you move up, your expertise will be recognized. There will always be those who won't see your talent, just work them the best that you can.

"Obviously being a female in a male-dominated industry has its challenges. I'm only five foot two so when I was an inspector, men tended to stereotype me as not being capable of doing my job. At other times, the issues on site were as much culturally based as gender based. As the inspector, it was not difficult for me to assert myself. I decided that it wasn't my challenge, but theirs."

As the numbers of women in the workforce increase, many companies have adjusted to attract recruits and more importantly, to retain the more experienced women. The more women you have in the workforce, the easier it becomes to offer flex time, telecommuting, and part time work.

Tammy Cummings (39), Vice-president of Human Resources and Organizational Development for Luck Stone Corporation in Richmond, Virginia, discusses cultivating the natural leadership skills in women.

"I think that to be a good leader, you have to be visionary, trusting and confident, but you also have to be able to articulate that vision. Women are good at that. You have to be sincere with and empathetic towards the people that you work with. Women are

good at that too. You also have to be competent to gain the respect of your peers."

As women continue to move up the ranks of the industry, the number of role models increases, "but we should not fall into the trap of letting women field all the work and take on two demanding roles... the work of learning their jobs, and teaching men how to work with them. Frankly, not all women are nurturing and supportive, some are demanding and blunt. The men have to shoulder their load, promote the industry and encourage the young women who do enter the fold," says Cummings.

While nobody openly supports quotas, we all know the numbers are not large. Research in the Netherlands has demonstrated that when efforts to recruit women into non-traditional roles are relaxed, there is not enough momentum to maintain an interest and the number of women drops.

The aggregate industry is a long ways off from the critical mass of about 30% that is considered necessary to make lasting changes. There may never be 30% of women in these jobs just as men will probably never make up 30% of the nurses.

Most of the women who have survived in the industry are stimulated by their jobs and wouldn't move into a traditional role for anything. They take the ribbing and face the challenge head on because they love the work and over time they become strong and valued members of the teams that they join. The music is becoming more legato, and the moves are getting smoother....and the dance continues. ♦