



INTERRUPTING SEXISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION WORKPLACE

Sexism Toolbox Talk Series – Part 3

Date: _____ Job Site: _____ Discussion Leader: _____

GENDER DIVERSE TEAMS CREATE BETTER OUTCOMES

According to AGC of America's "Business Case for Diversity & Inclusion in the Construction Industry", diverse teams are more creative, harder working and higher performing. This is because diversity typically yields a greater variety of viewpoints. Diverse teams also expect to hear new information and differing viewpoints and, therefore, team members are better prepared for discussion and consensus building. It is therefore unsurprising that teams with gender diversity make better decisions 73 percent of the time, while all-male teams make better decisions only 58 percent of the time. Having women as part of your team is not just good for your job site, it is good for the entire company. Companies with gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to see above-average revenue. Creating a culture with zero tolerance for sexism is not just the right thing to do: it is good for business, it is good for your team, and it is good for you.

WHY WOMEN MAY NOT SPEAK OUT AGAINST SEXISM

It is important to acknowledge that barriers exist for women who are the targets of everyday sexism. According to a 2018 ENR Survey that examined sexual harassment and gender bias in the construction industry, 66 percent of the respondents reported they have faced sexual harassment or gender bias in the workplace, and nearly 60 percent said they have witnessed it happen to somebody else. However, of the 66 percent who faced sexual harassment or gender bias, when asked how they handled the incident almost 60 percent either took no action or only spoke to a colleague informally about it. Reasons why women choose not to report an incident to their employer include:

- Fear of retaliation, jeopardizing their career
- Trauma triggered from past experiences
- Problem is ingrained in company culture
- Lack of faith in HR that abuser will face consequences
- Power dynamics – confronting a superior or someone well-liked in your company
- Fear of not being taken seriously
- Fear of making the situation worse

EVERYDAY SEXISM IS NOT JUST A "WOMEN'S ISSUE"

As previously mentioned, the construction industry is predominately made up of men. The lack of female representation contributes to feelings of isolation and fear for the woman who is the target of sexist behavior. Prevention is key. Making an intentional decision to have zero tolerance for sexism in the workplace is a core culture and leadership issue that requires support from men at all levels of the workforce. The hurdles men face when witnessing sexist behaviors are different than the barriers for women who are the targets of everyday sexism. Some common barriers to men speaking out include:

- Not knowing what to say or do
- Fear of being seen as weak or less masculine
- Wanting to fit in with coworkers
- Fear of making a mistake
- Failure to recognize incidents of sexism
- Not realizing the impact their actions can have on preventing future incidents

HOW TO BE AN ALLY AGAINST EVERYDAY SEXISM

Men play a critical role in disrupting everyday sexism in the workplace. Below are some ways that you can act as an ally against sexism.

Challenge Yourself:

- Don't accept the status quo and that things "just are the way they are." Challenge yourself and your colleagues to better understand the impact that everyday sexism has on women. The impact you can make in calling out these acts is significant.
- Assume women working in construction are capable and competent. Scrutinize your automatic, and often false, assumptions about women's strength, skill set, and ability to do construction work. Then, vocalize your confidence in your female coworkers' skills to other men on the job site.
- Reflect on ways you may have unintentionally silenced your coworkers' voices.
 - Who gets your full attention and who are you more prone to tune out, hurry along, or half-listen to?
 - Who do you automatically trust and who has to work harder to prove a point to you?
 - Who elicits sympathy, and who triggers frustration?

Mentor More Women on the Job Site:

- Individuals with access to a mentor obtain valuable counsel and support needed to accelerate their career. However, it is human nature to mentor someone who reminds you of yourself. In construction, where women role models are few, finding a mentor to help women grow their skills and expertise in their chosen profession is difficult. The lack of female mentors perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in construction leadership positions.
- Actively seek opportunities to acknowledge and spotlight your female coworker's knowledge, skills, and contributions. Recommend them for promotions and growth opportunities to managers and senior leaders.

Engage with Other Men:

- Going against the established "macho guy" culture in construction and overcoming your own barriers to speaking up takes courage. However, you have the opportunity to make large changes with small actions. By engaging with your male coworkers about women's experiences on the job site, you not only build awareness for the unique challenges women face in construction, but you also validate those experiences and encourage others to take those negative experiences seriously.

DISRUPTING INCIDENTS OF EVERYDAY SEXISM:

Directly Confront the Situation

- Remark on the inappropriateness of a sexist comment, either in the immediate situation or after it has occurred.
- Attempt to educate the colleague who made the comment.

Redirect the Conversation

- If you are uncomfortable addressing the situation directly, you can use a number of strategies to redirect the conversation including:
 - Change the subject by asking an unrelated question
 - Refocus the conversation to the current task
 - Use humor or sarcasm to diffuse the situation

Use Nonverbal Cues to Show Disagreement

- Use facial expressions and body language to convey your position.