



**Associate,
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Trudi Kirk, AAIQS

Diversity benefits the industry as it encourages our young people to choose the career they're most interested in, and not what is perceived as appropriate, which in turn gives employers in the industry a wider range of talent to choose from.

As an Associate based in the Currie & Brown Melbourne office, Trudi is responsible for Cost Planning and Management providing a proactive and professional service to her clients.

Trudi has been responsible for facilitating numerous successful project outcomes and has gained a broad cross section of exposure and experience, in all aspects of Cost Management and Quantity Surveying on a wide range of building construction projects including, commercial, community service, religious, residential, education, health and aged care.

1. HOW DID YOU START OUT AS A QS? WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST ROLE?

My first role was as a graduate Quantity Surveyor. I remember my first few days was measuring up a country hospital project into functional areas. Prior to this I'd been working for many years as a book-keeper and was used to money balancing to the last cent. But no-one told me that measurement was not quite the exact science that I thought it should be. I

think after I measured my functional areas, and tried to balance to the overall area of the building, I spent a day looking for the mistake I'd made, as my functional areas added up to something like 5m² less than the overall area of the building which was something like 1500 m².

2. WHAT PROJECTS ACROSS YOUR CAREER THUS FAR ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I can't say that I've ever thought that much about my projects after I've finished them, unless I'm out somewhere and it's to show my 11 year old son some of the projects I was involved in. He's a captive audience that is easily impressed, doesn't realise that the component of the project I work on is just that – part of the overall process.

But I think the projects I am most proud of at the end are the projects that have presented challenges along the way, or that I have learned from.

My first project was the University of Adelaide New Engineering Building (now called the IngKarni Wardli Building). I worked on that all the way through from the

early cost planning stages right through to final account. At the time I worked on that project, I was barely out of University, but was given the opportunity to run with the Contract Administration with only about 12 months experience at the time. I learned a lot – survived the experience and there's probably not much more to say than that.

3.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU FORESEE IN THE QS PROFESSION OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I know what I'd like to see, and that would be better uptakes of technologies, and developments of programs to make the day to day that we do more streamlined. When I think back over the last ten years, I think the big change has been going from literally a scale ruler and printed drawings to computerised measurement. I think though, there is still a long way to go.



4.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE BENEFIT FROM BECOMING MORE DIVERSE?

At the risk of stating the obvious, I think diversity is simply a way of life now, and includes a lot more than just being a woman in the Construction/QS Profession. Diversity embraces all the qualities about ourselves that make us different from other people and recognizes that whilst we're all about delivering the same end result, we'll go towards that result with completely different agendas and from a different perspective. I'm of the opinion that this diversity encourages everyone to learn to communicate in a manner appropriate for the audience, which is an invaluable skill to keep building as you work through your career.

I also think that diversity benefits the industry as it encourages our young people to choose the career they're most interested in, and not what is perceived as appropriate, which in turn gives employers in the industry a wider range of talent to choose from.

5.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

There is definitely no one person who inspires me. I've worked for a number of different leaders in my career so far, and the people who have inspired me the most are those I've learned something from that may not even be related to technical skills, but are related to behaviours. Those people are the mentors who have taught me how to communicate, how to conduct myself in meetings, and how to adapt to client expectations

I've been fortunate to work with a number of people I would call both mentors and friends. I try to focus on the strengths of those people, as they inspire me to be constantly bettering myself.

6.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER WOMEN KEEN TO GET INTO CONSTRUCTION/QS PROFESSION? WHAT SKILLS HAVE HELPED YOU SUCCEED?

Have I succeeded? I think I'm still on the way, and am still building my skills (no shameless self-promotion here).

Act like a woman – I'd like to think we've moved on from the perception of women being required to act like men in the industry. A wise man once told me you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. Be feminine, be personable, you can always be taught technical skills.

Be enthusiastic, willing to learn, and not afraid to try and fail. When you are first learning, you are expected to try and fail. You'll be looked upon more favourably for trying and failing, than for not trying at all. Just own your mistakes, try and learn from them, and hopefully not do them again.

Be flexible and adaptable – that's how you get opportunities. Put your hand up and volunteer for projects, especially while you've got people around you to support you and teach you.

Communicate with your employer. In my opinion this is especially important if you have family obligations. I am fortunate in that I have a partner who can pick up my slack if I've got deadlines to meet,

but it also goes the other way when he is travelling. I have found that if you work hard and put in when you can, there will not be an issue when you have to take a bit of time out to meet family obligations.

Another wise piece of advice I received once upon a time, was to always keep calm. This can be hard, as I think (rightly or wrongly) that women may be inclined to take criticism personally when often this is not the case. In these instances we should all take a deep breath, and focus on the subject of the criticism which may in fact be as small as a rate in a cost plan.

ANY FURTHER COMMENTS OR THOUGHTS?

Don't underestimate the value of your University Education for the less tangible skills such as meeting conflicting deadlines, and group work. When you get into the work force, clients aren't going to care how many cost plans you've got due on the same day, and you're not going to like everyone you work with, so you'll have to learn to adapt and overcome. It's one of the most important, but less valued skills you learn when you're at University, and it's not until you have been working for a while that you'll realize that.

And finally, you may be an expert in your field, but that doesn't mean you know everything. It's perfectly ok so say you'll run something past a colleague back in the office if you don't know.

Always keep learning, updating your skills and taking on new challenges.

