

Member Communication Experience

What Women Want: Building a More Inclusive Future in Construction

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The construction industry is facing a critical talent shortfall. For every new worker entering the field, three are leaving. This isn't just a loss of labor; it's a loss of knowledge, experience, and leadership.

I recently attended the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) Tri-Region Forum in Atlanta and heard from an amazing panel of women in construction leadership roles, including the National President of NAWIC. The topic of the panel was: How to attract and retain women in the industry. Here is an overview of the discussion and the practical, actionable requests they made "of the industry."

Visibility Matters — Show Women There's a Path

One of the panelists was the VP of Innovation and Advancement for the National Center for Construction Education (NCCER). In addition to providing education and certifications, the non-profit conducts extensive research on the industry. According to a recent study of over 700 women in the trades, nearly 70% said they wanted to move into leadership, but didn't see a path in their company to get there. And 57% reported they had never had a female supervisor.

The fix? Show them the path. Develop visible career ladders. Highlight women in leadership. If your company has women in senior roles, make sure others know it. If it doesn't, that's a cue to look at your internal promotion practices.



Create a Culture That Welcomes Everyone

Also, according to NCCER, the primary reason women give for leaving the industry is workplace harassment and disrespect. It's not enough to have policies on paper — those policies must be enforced, modeled, and backed by consequences when ignored.

Here's a revised version that is clearer, more concise, and avoids the outdated phrasing:

Women on the jobsite often feel sidelined — utilized but not heard. Make it a standard practice to invite everyone's input during decisions and discussions. Field supervisors should understand and enforce your company's policies and values. One panelist shared the story of a female project manager who

asked to return from maternity leave on a four-day schedule. Her superintendent denied the request, insisting full-time presence was required. When she gave notice, a company executive asked why and learned of the denied request. He reassigned her to a different project and team, honoring the company's commitment to flexible schedules and retaining experienced staff.

Make the Jobsite More Human

Want to retain great women? Make it easier for them to work. For example:

- » Provide properly fitting PPE for all body types.
- » Rethink restroom accommodations to meet the needs of women and parents.
- » Allow flexible schedules where possible, especially for parents with caregiving responsibilities.

When employees feel seen and supported as whole people, they stay longer – and they perform better.

Look in New Places for Talent

NCCER research revealed something surprising: many women working in construction were former athletes. They've already demonstrated discipline, teamwork, and grit, which is exactly what you want in a construction worker. That insight alone opens new recruitment opportunities.


And here's a 21st-century strategy: some younger women who answered the NCCER poll said they were drawn to construction through TikTok. They saw real people doing real work and it looked rewarding. If you've got a younger, social media-savvy employee who loves what they do, give them the green light to tell your company's story online.

Support Doesn't Stop After Hiring

Support means ongoing mentorship. It means access to training and increasingly challenging work opportunities. It means offering someone in the home office as a lifeline when workers face challenges they can't resolve with their immediate supervisor.

One standout suggestion: conduct random worksite culture audits, just as you might conduct random safety checks or drug testing. Make sure what's happening onsite reflects your company's stated values.

It's Time to Walk the Talk

If what you've read here is intriguing, perhaps organize a lunch of the women in your company and discuss what's in this article. Do they agree? What else are you missing? What are the next steps you should take to attract and retain more women in your own company? Women don't want special treatment. They want safe, respectful, human-centered workplaces – and a fair shot at leadership. Creating that culture doesn't just benefit women. It benefits everyone. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is an expert in building ready and capable leadership teams for succession and exit.

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