



The Power of Role Models

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We recently celebrated the inaugural International Women in Engineering Day (INWED) at NDY. As the only major Australasian consultant to embrace INWED, our celebration of the day included profiling a large number of our female engineers with extensive social media coverage.

I've been asked a few times 'why' and 'how does this help with anything?' My response was 'why not?' and 'why does it need to be helpful – can't we just celebrate a group of our people?'

Recently, I was also asked about my thoughts on why we haven't substantially shifted the dial on numbers of women in Engineering. I think more young women don't consider engineering because it just doesn't occur to them – they don't relate to it.

Personally, I never had Engineering suggested to me as a career option at school, and I'm constantly asked by family/friends to explain to their teenage daughters what engineers 'do' because they aren't sure themselves.



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I chose to study Engineering because I had always wanted to be a scientist, but had been concerned by wanting a structured career path (my brother had explained to me that he was going to 'become a chartered accountant' and mapped out his career path by year 12!)

I had an uncle who was an engineer who explained that you could become a 'chartered engineer' and that being an engineer was 'a bit like being a scientist'. I was sold!

It had never occurred to me that I would be in the minority, and at University, it didn't faze me.

I must admit that I felt intimidated during my first few times at a construction site, and I got caught out on work experience, wearing a flowing skirt to the office, which meant that I couldn't attend a last minute site visit (catching Hazard 101). Once I recovered from the embarrassment, I quickly adapted by keeping a spare change of (site appropriate) clothes in my desk drawer – and I've been sure to share the tip with other young women entering the profession.

In 2010, I visited a construction site in Bahrain and the men on site literally stopped what they were doing and stared at me. I can't blame them, seeing a woman on site would have been very unusual.

Fast forward to today, and we are currently undertaking renovations at our house: living upstairs while construction takes place downstairs. The noise has become white noise to me. I don't distinguish any of the voices or the sounds of the tools – it just all blends into one. Except last week my ears did prick up when I heard a woman's voice. It did stand out – it had been the only time I'd heard one over the six-month program.

Profiling our women as part of INWED provides wonderful role models for young women and girls. If a school teacher, a parent, or a young girl saw one of our women profiled on Facebook, twitter or LinkedIn, they might relate to the person and think 'I could do that'. When they read about the amazing impacts our women in engineering are having on our community they might think 'I'd like to do that'.

Besides, I think that we just so happen to have some of the most amazing female engineers working for us & I loved hearing their stories.

So, the question is: Why not?