

Feminism and a Healthy Work Culture

Many people are bothered by this word the *feminism*, and I admit there was a time that it bothered me. Back then my interpretation of the word was *women trying to overpower men*. With that definition, why would any man be in favor of it?

Now I understand that word simply means *equal*. I've educated myself and learned more about feminism because I'm married to a strong and independent woman who stands up for what she believes in, and also because I have three daughters who deserve equal rights and opportunities. I've also learned a lot about equality and fairness and I'm becoming more outspoken about how to make them a reality.

I have been a part of this prestressed concrete industry for 25 years and the companies I connect with are dominated by men. I never really thought too much about it until the #metoo movement. Since then I've had countless conversations with women in our industry who have been impacted by our male-dominated culture, and I'm now more aware of things that I used to ignore. On the whole I see the men and women in our industry treating each other with dignity, kindness and respect. But there are some issues that several women have brought to my attention, including:

- Harassment, which is defined as *behavior characterized by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances in a workplace*. This can be explicit or be understated, like a non-consensual hug.
- Women are interrupted earlier and more often in meetings than their male counterparts.
- Women are sometimes ignored at meetings. One specific example: my female friend was part of an interview team with a male applicant. 60 minutes into the interview she realized the applicant had only made eye contact with the men in the room. It was so obvious she had to literally stand up to be recognized by the applicant.
- Women are under-represented both at the company level as well as an industry level (of the 31 Board Representatives, 4 are female-) I believe we can do better.
- Women constantly hear side comments whenever the Erection Committee is mentioned.

What can I do about this? I can do my best to listen and acknowledge women's experiences. I can also be thoughtful about my own behavior, including calling out jokes that are sexist or offensive. I now ask permission before I hug someone (man or woman). When I see something that looks like harassment, I speak up, and I do my best to treat everyone equally in a meeting. I also suggest that we rename the erection committee the installation committee.

As a member of the newly formed Diversity Committee I offer these suggestions and insights. I see them as opportunities to learn more about our community and make sure that all voices are heard and respected. This will create a more cohesive and trusting culture, one that benefits all of us.

Todd Adams

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