

# MENTORING IN ACTION:

## supporting the next wave of female resources talent

Almost five years since its inception, Australia's most innovative and awarded mentoring program for women in male-dominated industries, the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) e-Mentoring program, continues to break barriers for emerging female talent in the sector.

In this Diversity feature, *Resource People* talks with three participants – two mentors and one mentee – about their experiences with the program and gender in male-dominated industries more widely.



Jeff Fitch

### HEAVY INDUSTRIES VETERAN FACILITATES FEMALE GROWTH

WITH MORE THAN 25-years' experience, there are few people more familiar with the rapid changes to gender within the heavy industries than Jeff Fitch.

The Caterpillar District Manager began work within the industry in 1992, spending time in Canada and the United States before moving to Melbourne in 2012.

During his time with Caterpillar he's held a variety of technical and management roles, and has witnessed significant change surrounding female involvement in the heavy industries.

He reflects on a time when the majority of women in the sector's primary purpose was to hold

secretarial and administrative positions, viewed as 'typing aids' to their male superiors. But this is now 'a thing of the past. There were a few in technical or management roles, but additional barriers needed to be removed', Jeff says.

"I've seen that change tremendously, and it still needs to grow even further. I long for the day where we don't need to 'have a day' in order to celebrate the role of women in our industry," he says. "I long for the time that my daughter can be fully accepted into the industry without question, same as my sons."

Caterpillar is dedicated to growing its female in leadership population through creating diversity within every rank in the organisation. The company's global success is perhaps best demonstrated by the appointment of a woman – Denise Johnson – as its group president for Resource Industries, and targets growing women in leadership roles throughout the company.

At the local level, Jeff believes his capacity as a mentor with the AWRA e-Mentoring program will assist other women in achieving success, both inside and outside Caterpillar.

His pairing with information technology specialist Sherry Woodhouse has seen him both pass on knowledge and provide invaluable male insights into gender and career matters.

"Sherry wasn't looking for me to do

her job," Jeff says, praising Sherry's work ethic.

"Being a mentor isn't about having the answers, it's about being willing to share our experiences, whether they turned out well or not.

"Literally all that I did was just unleash what was inside of her already and learn from her."

Jeff hopes the mentoring program will allow for young women to follow the leadership journeys experienced by other females who have 'blazed the trail' in this industry.

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He emphasises the importance of providing support and guidance in accomplishing career goals, and providing encouragement through 'reaching a hand out to the next female coming up'.

"And that's ultimately what it's going to take, is every single one of us reaching out to that next person and helping them take that next step in their journey," he says.



Sherry Woodhouse

### HARD WORK BEST BET FOR BRIDGING GENDER GAP

SHERRY Woodhouse already had a decade of experience in the construction and manufacturing sectors before she reached out through AWRA's e-Mentoring program for a fresh perspective on her career development.

Newly armed with a degree in information technology, the proposals coordinator for construction firm Seymour Whyte is using the mentoring experience to push toward more strategic roles.

"I'd been in the industry for a while and wanted some direction as to how I might be able to grow my career further," Sherry says.

While a female mentor may have been the obvious choice, Sherry instead opted for a male mentor – Caterpillar's Jeff Fitch - and has since benefitted from his guidance and feedback.

"Women will bring a certain perspective, but I was actually looking for a male perspective of how women are perceived," she says.

"Jeff was able to, from a senior manager point of view, contribute to what he thought my career would look like."

Sherry describes Jeff's outlook as 'incredibly upbeat' and has had such a rewarding experience, hopes to continue in the program as a mentee and one day, as a mentor herself.

"Mentoring is vitally important to everyone at any stages of their careers. It's about more than merely seeking help and resolving issues," she says.

### BREAKING DOWN 'THE RULES OF THE GAME'

OVERCOMING male saturation within the heavy industries to become a female advocate for inclusion, diversity, and leadership, appears to be all in her stride for Brisbane-based Teagan Dowler.

After a decade working within the mining, construction, and engineering industries, Teagan's many current roles are needed to satisfy her self-proclaimed 'restless' nature.

As capability manager for STS Consulting Australia, Teagan draws on her experience to assist companies with leadership execution and overcoming workplace challenges.

She also acts as Treasurer for the not-for-profit organisation Diversity Practitioners Association in Queensland, linking employers to improve diversity and inclusion across industries.

In 2012, Teagan founded the social media movement Blue Collared Woman in a bid to provide support to organisations on diversity and inclusion in traditionally male-dominated industries.

Teagan says she owes her success to overcoming significant challenges within the workplace, and embracing the advantages that come with 'being more visible than your male colleagues'.

"We do things differently. We think differently. We get judged differently," she says of women in the workplace.

Teagan's recently published book, *Rules of the Game: Women in the Masculine Industries*, delivers an honest account of the realities faced on a personal and also general level by women operating in heavy industries.

The publication provides insights into her personal experience with sexually-laden and inappropriate comments from male colleagues, the discrediting of her ability, and overcoming self-doubt in a traditionally male-saturated environment.

It was only when she began research for her book that she discovered the majority of women she spoke to had experienced similar experiences.

"Hearing the challenges that they were going through made me realise that it's actually an industry thing, a cultural thing that needed to shift and change," she explains.

With three years of informal mentoring under her belt, Teagan describes the AWRA e-Mentoring process as 'invaluable in encouraging self-reflection', and encourages other women to consider mentoring.

She describes women as 'the minority' within the mining and construction industries, yet encourages them to take advantage of this through learning to adapt and be resilient in the workplace.

"Currently, in all workplaces we aren't completely accepted yet... it's a matter of 'fake it until you make it'," she says.

"I've managed to be somewhat successful in the industry, and I'm now in a position to be able to influence.

"I feel it's my obligation to do this, and to be accessible, and to help others that are coming into the industry."

Teagan comments on the progressiveness towards female inclusivity already being seen within the heavy industries, and described women as a 'rare commodity'.

"Sometimes in an environment that's challenging us, we can forget the value that we each have," she says. **RP**

Teagan Dowler with her book 'Rules of the Game'

