

ROADBLOCKS AND MYTHS*

ROADBLOCKS

The whole idea of "men's" and "women's" jobs is a cultural one. It is based on tradition, and not on fact or on any natural difference in the abilities of men and women.

Traditional practices and attitudes have prevented the entry of women into many jobs in the trades. By ignoring women as potential trades people, industry is barring 50 percent of potentially competent workers. None of the trades call for skills beyond the ability of women, but stereotyped views about what women can do are common. These myths present roadblocks to women who want to enter the trades.

WHAT ARE THESE MYTHS?

Myth 1 - "Women are not interested in trades or technical work."

Responses prove interest. Response to pre-trade courses for women across Canada is growing. A growing number of women are not just interested; they are eager once they have been informed of these career opportunities.

Myth 2 - "Women are not qualified, lack experience and technical knowledge."

More young women are expressing an interest in entering industrial arts programs and becoming familiar with trade-type skills and tools from personal experience. The roadblocks must be removed to allow women to gain necessary qualifications and experience. Most people need training to be considered qualified for a job.

Myth 3 - "Women lack determination and motivation."

Research has shown that of the industrial employers interviewed about women working in the trades, 78 percent said that women's job motivation was better than male workers. Sixty-four percent said they would recommend women apprentices to other employers.

Myth 4 - "Women lack the physical ability for strength and endurance."

Heavy work is a matter of practice and technique and need not be prohibitive for women. In construction, hoists and mechanical lifting devices can be used and very heavy material is routinely handled by two or more workers. Physical limitations not only apply to some women but also to some men. Women as well as men condition themselves to hard tasks. Heavy, awkward weights such as three full grocery bags are handled efficiently by women every day.

Myth 5 - "Women only work for pin money."

Women work for the same reasons men do, economic need. Forty-one percent of all women who work are heads of households and of the married women who work, 59% do so to bring their family income above the poverty line. Women have the same needs and expenses as men do and work for the same reasons.

Myth 6 - "Working mothers cause juvenile delinquency."

This is not true. Studies show it is the quality of the time not the quantity which is important to a child's development.

**Myth 7 - "Women are naturally passive, emotional, dependent and indecisive.
That's the way they are made."**

Studies have shown that these characteristics vary more within the sexes than between them; that is to say, there is more variation between men in aggressiveness/passivity than there is between men and women.

Myth 8 - "Women are taking jobs away from men."

Women are not to blame for unemployment. They have the right to all jobs, including those in the trades. The situation today is similar to the thirties when attempts were made to blame rising unemployment on women. Women entering the work force are being absorbed into the service, clerical, teaching and nursing professions -- positions which have traditionally been occupied by women. The highest unemployment for men is found in mining where only about three percent of the female labour force is employed (Saskatchewan statistics).

Myth 9 - "Women need special facilities, i.e. toilets and separate bunk houses."

Many managers use this as an excuse not to hire women in construction sites but it is not a valid reason. Women can accommodate themselves to the facilities provided.

Myth 10 - "Women are not as reliable as men - they are sick more often."

Statistics show this to be untrue. Men and women have almost identical absentee rates.

Myth 11 - "Women will have more accidents because the tools and safety clothing they use are designed for men."

Research has shown that most industrial accidents occur in small companies with inadequate safety programs and personnel. At the present time women have trouble finding steel-toed shoes below size six. There is no evidence that women have more accidents because of the size of tools.

Myth 12 - "Women are better suited for some jobs - they have greater manual dexterity, are more tolerant of repetition and pay more attention to details."

This should make women good surgeons, architects and musicians but few people have suggested women should dominate those fields. Actually, women appear to have somewhat greater manual dexterity but the range within each sex far exceeds the range between the sexes."

Myth 13 - "Women will not be able to cope with hidden barriers such as teasing and prejudice."

Certainly these barriers exist and are hard to handle. As women on the job site become more common, hopefully all workers will recognize the advantages of cooperating with employers to maintain a working environment free of harassment, intimidation and ridicule.

Myth 14 - "Men will try to protect women from heavy work and give them cushy jobs resulting in poor working relationships."

This may occur at first. Research on women in industry indicated that 96 percent of employers interviewed said that women have a good working relationship with others. Women can handle the work and they don't want to be protected or coddled.

Myth 15 - "When I say 'he' or 'him' or 'man', of course I mean women too."

Language affects how people think or feel about themselves. If you call children 'stupid', they may begin to think of themselves as stupid. When women are not specifically included in statements such as, "A good tradesman is one who takes care of his tools", women don't think that the statement refers to them and may feel excluded.

WOMEN IN TRADES, KOOTENAY COUNCIL

Copyright 1983

* Sources: Adapted from "Women in Trades", Saskatchewan Labour, Women's Division, Regina, August 1980, and "Women's Employment Strategy Training Session", Canada Employment and Immigration, March 1982.