

"WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN IN TRADESLAND"

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A DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

"What Happens to Women in Tradesland" was developed by WOMEN IN TRADES, KOOTENAY COUNCIL as an audio-visual tool for the seminar, The Workplace in Transition: Integrating Women Effectively. This seminar is designed to assist employers, job stewards, trade school instructors, foremen and employment counselors in dealing with the issues involved in women's increasing participation in the trades and technology workforce.

The seminar project and slide show development were funded by the B.C. Provincial Council of Carpenters, Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, the Carpentry Apprenticeship Joint Board, Secretary of State, and the B.C. Human Rights Commission. Additional funding for the slide show was provided by the B.C. Ministry of Labour Women's Office.

"What Happens to Women in Tradesland" is presently the only audio-visual production in Canada created to address a primarily male audience on the subject of integrating women into the trades and technology workforce. Although women can and do benefit from viewing and discussing the show, the material has been specifically designed to focus on issues which have been identified by tradeswomen, in terms and style easily understandable by their brothers, on the job or in the classroom.

A number of people who have viewed the slide/tape presentation suggested that it would also be a useful tool standing on its own, providing a stimulus for a shorter, less in-depth, discussion of some of the same issues presented in the day long seminar. The discussion guide which follows has been developed for this purpose.

The slide show presents an overview of the experience of working in trades and technology jobs from a woman's point of view. To quote Kate Braid, a Journeywoman Carpenter and author of the speech from which the script was adapted:

"Please keep in mind that every woman's experience in the field varies widely depending upon the individuals involved and the circumstances. For

every situation described here, I can also give you several exceptions. This (slide show) outlines the general, overall and most strikingly consistent patterns I observed as I spoke to women in the north of B.C. and in the trades, and at trade schools in the Lower Mainland."

The slide show provides some solid information about a subject often confused by myths and misunderstandings. As the material can generate feelings and questions that would be useful and important to address, the most appropriate format for presenting the show would include a facilitator and at least one hour for discussion. (If you are going to cover all the questions on page 3, 2 hours will be required. Leaving out #4 will save approximately half an hour. Page 5 may be better explored in a separate session.)

This method will help people retain the information and clarify their ideas. It is also useful to encourage the attendance of at least a couple of tradeswomen, to add the perspective of real experience to the understanding of the group.

THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The discussion guide suggests questions to assist facilitators in a variety of group situations. Some resource material from the seminar has also been included to assist you in responding to some of the questions that may arise. We hope you find these interesting and informative. Feel free to include other questions, perhaps some of specific interest to your group.

GENERAL DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

Before viewing the slide show, it may be helpful to ask participants to watch for and note down some of the difficulties that are mentioned in the show for discussion later. This will help people focus on the areas to be discussed.

It is useful to start the discussion spending 5-10 minutes with the first question, "Any initial comments or questions?" in the large group and then moving on to the 2nd and 3rd questions. Initial reactions to the show will typically include general comments about the show, and comments about the photographs, the slide show or technical aspects. Usually what surfaces next are specific issues which made an impact on viewers. They may seek clarification or challenge some of the points raised in the show.

In the course of the initial discussion, questions or comments may be made which sound defensive, such as, "Do women expect us to change the language that we use? If they want to come into a male world, they'll just have to accept the way we talk and the way we do things". One way of approaching this kind of comment is to suggest that very few tradeswomen expect the workplace to change immediately to suit their needs. But most tradespeople do have a strong sense of the dignity of their work environment. The slide show helps us to understand women's experience, and thus makes it easier to be aware of how to maintain that dignity in the process of integrating women into the trades and technology workforce.

After participants have covered both the attractions and the obstacles, ask them to break into small groups of 3-5 to discuss the questions which follow (as well as any others you may wish to add). Ask each group to choose a recorder and provide each with paper or flip chart and felt pens. For question 6, you may find it useful to divide the list between the groups.

THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions start with the general, identifying the issues, and move to the more personal, what individuals can do about them. It is important for the participants to have firmly in their minds what the issues and obstacles are, to assist them in productive problem-solving later in the discussion.

1. Any initial comments or questions?
2. Can you name some attractions, or reasons why women enter trades or technology work? (See Resource list; Women & The Labour Force presentation or handout)
3. What are some of the issues or obstacles, or barriers women face in entering or training for this type of employment? * (See Resource list, Mechanical Reasoning and Women handout)
4. What are the myths that are mentioned in the slide show that create some of these barriers? Can you identify any others? (See Roadblocks & Myths handout)
5. Which of the barriers we have listed are you, as an individual or as a member of an institution or group, responsible for working to overcome? Who is responsible for the rest?
6. What can you do to alleviate or eliminate the obstacles listed on the flipchart?

*Some additional questions for further in-depth discussion of issues arising from the A/V production, "What Happens To Women In Tradesland" have been developed.

After having facilitated the discussion on this A/V tool a large number of times, it is interesting to note that during the second question, re: obstacles women face entering this kind of work, harassment is usually the last item mentioned, and often would not be brought up without prompting from the facilitator.

As this is certainly one of the most significant obstacles, it would be useful, if time permits, to spend some part of the discussion looking specifically at what this issue is all about. It might be appropriate to spend a separate session altogether on this discussion, as it affects workers in all industries and all walks of life.

Questions:

1. What is harassment? (See Harassment presentation or handout. Other resources include: National Union of Provincial Government Employees' Booklet on Sexual Harassment; Sexual Shakedown by Lin Farley; Sexual Harassment on the Job by Leah Cohen & Constance Backhouse.)
2. What is sexual harassment?
What is gender harassment?
3. Why has it been so infrequently reported when studies have shown that as many as 90% of working women experience it sometime in their careers?
4. What are the different kinds of legislation affecting it? (See BCGEU Contract Clause (handout). Other Resources: Provincial & Federal Human Rights Codes, other Union contracts etc.)
5. Having experienced or witnessed these kinds of harassment, what are your possible avenues of action?
6. What do you perceive the repercussions might be?
7. What would happen if you tried to ignore it?
8. How do you feel about the results of questions 6 and 7?

Allow at least 30 minutes for the small group discussion. After some conclusions have been drawn, move back into the large group. Starting with the first question, ask the spokesperson for each small group to report their group's conclusions. Discuss any disagreements which arise, then move on to the second question, and so on.

POINTS TO REMEMBER IN FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS

1. It is not important that everyone comes to agreement.
2. What is important is that everyone get a chance to explore the ideas presented in an open atmosphere.
3. Encourage all present to participate in the discussion.
4. Do not allow "eager" speakers to dominate the discussion.
5. Some heated debate can be productive in debunking some of the myths people hold. If an argument begins to escalate beyond the point of useful discussion, it may be helpful to "agree to disagree", recognizing each person's right to their opinion. One way of responding to an unpopular minority opinion might be, "Yes, some people do believe that," and then move on to another topic.
6. It is important throughout the discussion to emphasize the need for individuals to collaborate and cooperate in dealing with issues that arise from women's entry into these fields.

For further information on use of the slide show or assistance regarding the delivery of the seminar in your area, please contact:

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