

BREAKING DOWN GENDER BIAS

A Toolkit for Construction Business Owners

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Defining the Challenge

Gender Diversity in the Trades

Why Bother?

Building the Workforce

Acknowledging Inequality

Gender Diversity in the Trades

Naming and confronting bias and discrimination in the workplace is a key responsibility for any business owner.

The construction trades have long been one of the industries with the lowest percentage of women in the workforce – as of 2018, 3.4% of workers in the Construction trades were women. Data on the percentage of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) workers in the trades is not available.

However, it is clear that many women and LGBTQ workers face bullying and discrimination as a result of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in the workplace.

Our goal in developing this Toolkit is to offer an array of suggestions and solutions to help small business owners and managers break down gender stereotypes and create companies that are inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations. We recognize that many other kinds of discrimination happen in the workplace- including but not limited to race, class, ethnicity and ability- but this Toolkit is specifically focused on gender discrimination.

Share of Workers in Construction Occupations that are Women, 2018



Why Bother?

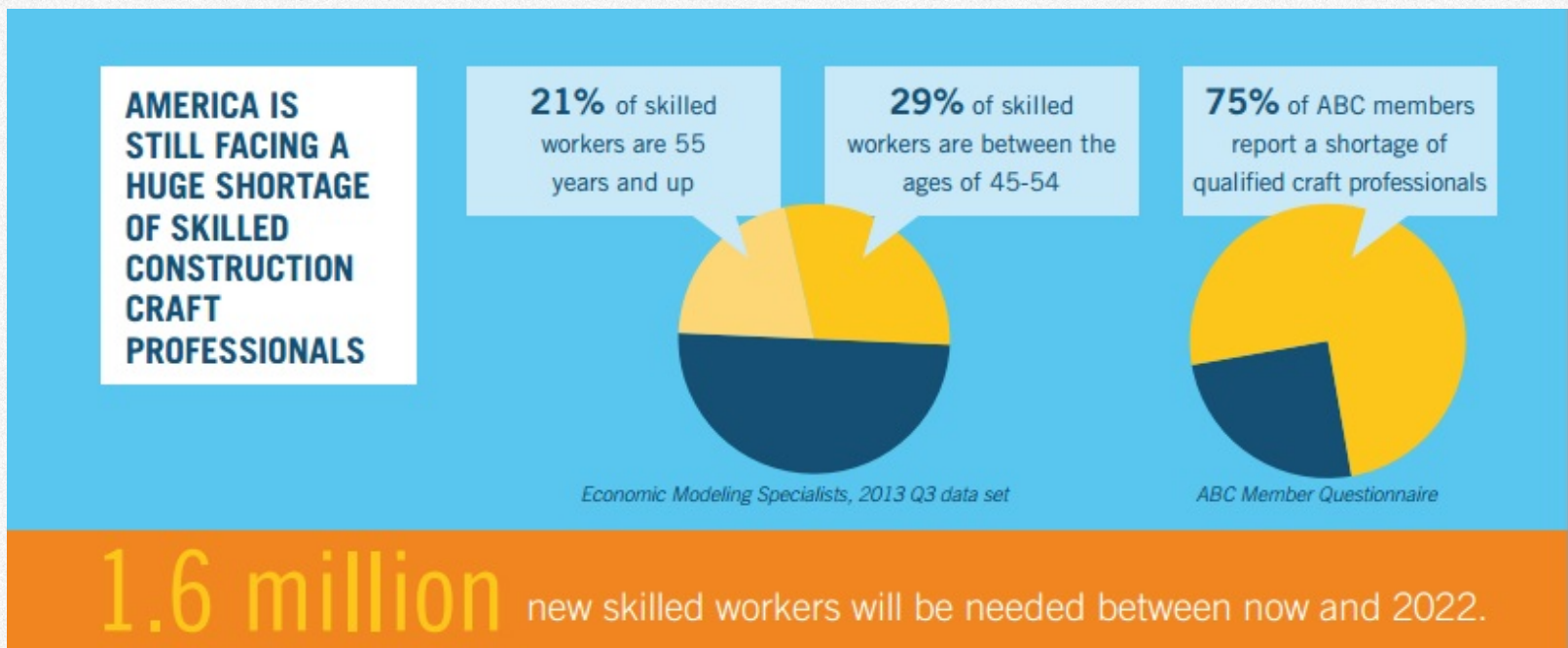
According to cumulative Gallup Workplace Studies, companies with inclusive cultures do better on several indicators than those that are not inclusive, with:

- **Customer satisfaction +39%**
- **Productivity +22%**
- **Profitability +27%**
- **Lower turnover -22%**



Building the Workforce

The construction industry is faced with an aging workforce and a shortage of skilled labor. By expanding your recruitment efforts to include women, trans and gender non-conforming people, you are expanding the pool of potential employees by over 50%!



*ABC= Associated Builders and Contractors

Acknowledging Inequality

"We all want to live in a world where there's no question about why they picked you – you were the best, most qualified candidate, full stop. But we can't live in that world yet, because we haven't all had equal privilege and opportunity. Some of us start with clear, unfair advantages rooted in history. Failing to acknowledge that distribution and pretending there's an equality of privilege is a form of willful ignorance that maintains those biases."

- Rand Fishkin, co-founder of Moz and Inbound.org

Changing Company Culture

What You Can Do

*Gender Inclusive
Language*

*Pronouns and Self-
Identification*

*Behaviors that Create a
Hostile Environment*

Confronting Offensive Talk

*Zero Tolerance
Harassment Policy*

What You Can Do: Changing Company Culture

Develop and enforce a zero tolerance sexual harassment policy

Use gender neutral language in job postings and job descriptions

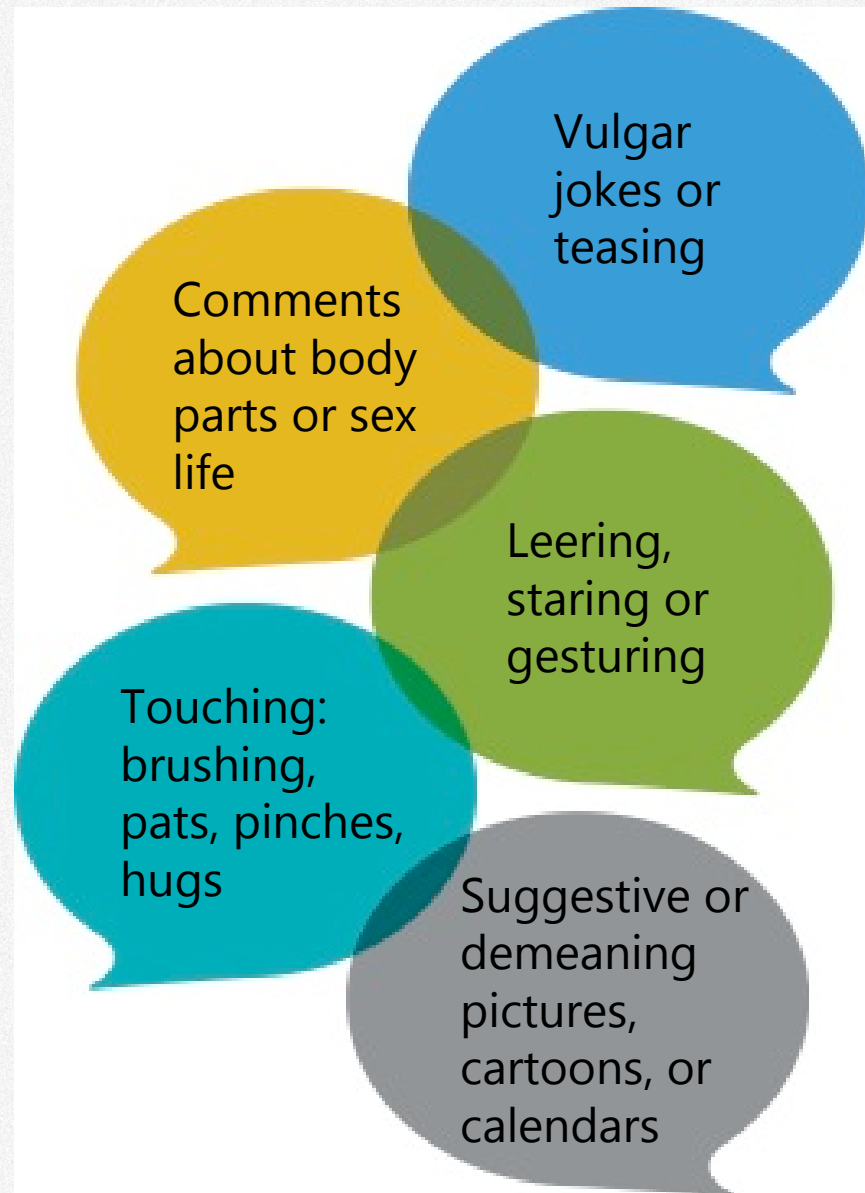
Ensure that adequate gender neutral restroom facilities are available on every job site

Ensure that all crew members have properly fitting PPE

Connect with tradeswoman organizations and post your jobs there

Create opportunities for mentorship

Examples of Behaviors that Create a Hostile Environment



Pronouns & Self-Identification

Respect everyone's self-identification. Call everyone by their preferred name/s and pronoun/s. Use language and behavior that is appropriate to their gender self-identification.

If you don't know what pronouns or gender-labels someone prefers (and there's no mutual friend around to clue you in), just ask them. Politely. And respectfully. For example: "What pronoun do you prefer?" or "How do you like to be referred to, in terms of gender?"

If you misrecognize someone's gender, it's okay, don't freak out. Apologize once and get it right the next time. Misidentifying or being unable to classify someone's gender does not have to be an awkward or shameful experience.

Some transgender or gender non-conforming people are bravely making more space for gender diversity by using language creatively. Respect these efforts and don't dismiss them as silly, funny, weird or too difficult. For example, some people prefer to be referred to as 'they', or as both 'he' and 'she' interchangeably. Some people prefer to be referred to only by their name. Some people use non-binary pronouns like 'ze' and 'hir'.



Inclusive Language

Our everyday language can often unintentionally affect the people around us. By making small but intentional choices to use inclusive language, you can make the workplace more welcoming to women, trans and gender non-conforming people.

When greeting others

Avoid:

ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys etc.

Consider using instead:

“Thanks, **friends**.
Have a great
night.”

“Good morning,
folks!”

“Hi, **everyone!**”

“And for **you?**”

“Can I get
you **all**
something?”

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Be mindful of language

Confronting Offensive Talk

1. Stop an offensive remark before it happens.

You might have heard statements like these: “I’ll probably be accused of being a sexist for saying this, but . . .” or “Some people might be put off by this joke, but. . .” If you hear that language, you might try nicely stopping the remark before it gets off the ground.

Here are some possible rejoinders:

“Go ahead, and then I will tell you why I think *it is* sexist.”

“If you’re saying it’s going to be offensive, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t say it.”

Confronting Offensive Talk

2. Respond indirectly.

When someone makes an offensive remark, we have to weigh the costs of a potentially uncomfortable confrontation against the benefits of addressing the remark directly.

Here are some alternatives to saying nothing:

"Wow."

"Yikes."

"Ouch."

"Hey, let's keep it PC, ok?"

"Could we elevate the conversation?"

"Now that the sexist part of the conversation is over, can we move on?"

Confronting Offensive Talk

3. Respond directly.

Answering offensive comments requires forethought, judgment, and courage, and it often works best when we keep our responses simple.

Consider responding with brief statements like these:

“What do you mean by that?”

“Do you really think that?”

“It doesn’t seem like you to say something like that.”

“No, I don’t think about it that way.”

“I don’t find that funny.”

“Would you want to have that said to/about your wife, daughter, or sister?”

“That type of remark about people makes me uncomfortable.”

“Wow, I didn’t know you felt that way about women (or trans or gender non-conforming people).”

“I’d rather not talk that way about people.”

“I don’t like to think about people that way.”

Confronting Offensive Talk

4. If an offensive remark is repeated, nicely ask for what you want (and don't want):

When someone repeats a remark after you've previously asked them to stop, try politely telling them that you'd prefer they not share their sexist/racist/homophobic/transphobic comments when they're with you.

For example, if someone is calling you "honey" in a setting that makes you uncomfortable, tell the person that you would prefer to be called by your name.

What Does Zero Tolerance Mean?

If your company has expressed its harassment prevention policy as a “Zero Tolerance” policy, be certain that supervisors and managers all understand what the “Zero Tolerance” represents. If it means that we will not tolerate unprofessional, disrespectful conduct whether or not it is illegal, and we will terminate anyone who engages in such misconduct, then everyone also needs to understand the elements of the law of “hostile environment harassment.”

If “zero tolerance” means that we will not overlook more trivial violations of the company’s demand for respect in the workplace, then it is important that everyone in management understands that this does not mean we seriously discipline any violation of workplace etiquette. Rather, it means that we do not ignore even childish, immature, or unprofessional workplace behavior and we use appropriate progressive discipline, including informal discipline and coaching and counseling, for such behavior. In turn, when a violator has been warned and repeats the behavior or when behavior truly approaches a violation of the law, those in management need to understand the gravity of the situation and how to initiate appropriate serious disciplinary action, including termination of employment.



*It is **critical** for every employer to develop and distribute a written no-harassment policy.*

What You Can Do



- Create A Strong Sexual Harassment Policy
- Respond to Sexual Harassment Complaints Right Away
- Never Laugh At Or Encourage Inappropriate Jokes
- Keep Your Office Parties "PG" Rated

Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Team

Creating Fair and Inclusive Companies

Training Programs in the Northeast

Writing the Job Description and Ad

Tips for Retention

Places to Post the Job

Communication Styles

Creating Fair and Inclusive Companies

We understand that as a business you need to do what's right for your clients, employees and the bottom line. You can use fairness, inclusion and respect as tools to help stand out from your competitors.



Writing the Job Description and Ad



The images and language used in advertisements in male-dominated industries send a strong signal about whether or not a company wants to attract women, trans or gender non-conforming people to work with them.

- Be sure to use gender neutral language.
- Example: “ABC Builders is looking for tradespeople to work at a variety of construction projects. Candidates must have their own tools, have reliable transportation and the ability to travel.”
- In your ad or post, you might include the following intro: “We provide equal opportunities to all applicants and employees without regard to any legally protected status, such as race, religion, age, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, veteran status, sexual orientation, and disability.”

Places to Post the Job



National Association of Women in
Construction

<http://www.nawic.org>

Vermont Works for Women

<http://vtworksforwomen.org/job-listings/vww-job-bank/>

NESEA

<http://nesea.org/jobs-board>

Yestermorrow Design/Build School

<https://yestermorrow.org/jobs>

North Bennet Street School

<http://www.nbss.edu/alumni/jobbank.aspx?pageaction=updateCareerPostForm>

Construction Training in the Northeast

Connecticut

Capital Workforce Partners Jobs Funnel

Maine

Totally Trades Conferences

Massachusetts

Gould Construction Institute

Building Pathways Building Trades Pre-Apprenticeship

Community Works Pre-Apprenticeship

Timberframers Guild Apprenticeship

North Bennet Street School – Carpentry and Preservation Carpentry

New Hampshire

Heavy Construction Academy

New Jersey

Construction Craft Laborers' Apprenticeship Program

New York

Youth Construction Initiative Program

The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills, Inc.

Hammerstone School

Pennsylvania

New Castle School of Trades- Construction Trades Program

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Construction Training Academy

Vermont

Vermont Works for Women

Yestermorrow Design/Build School

Nationwide

YouthBuild

Tips for Retention

Working environments that are inclusive, safe and flexible benefit all employees.

Sponsor and offer an apprenticeship program to young women, trans and gender non-conforming people and promote the career opportunities available in the trades.

Offer a buddy system that starts from the job offer stage and assists women, trans and gender non-conforming people to form relationships, build networks and transition successfully to the company.

End isolation on worksites by assigning women, trans and gender non-conforming people, especially those new to the trades, in pairs or more.

Guarantee pay equity within your company.

Change the company's culture to embrace diversity and flexibility as an ongoing commitment to the entire workforce – not just 'special treatment' for women, trans and gender non-conforming people.

Communication Styles



Tip: At company meetings, encourage all employees to share their feedback and create space for constructive criticism that can help EVERYONE do their job better.

Acknowledge that there are common differences in communication styles between genders.

Effective relationships depend on understanding communication differences.

Men tend to be authoritative and direct, both qualities which are commonly associated with leadership, which commonly lead to men being promoted more quickly than women.

In group conversations, pay attention to different communication styles and create space for quieter voices to be heard.

What is Privilege?

White Male Privilege

"Hey, White Guys..."

Many Types of Privilege

*What Does Privilege Look
Like?*

*How Do We Check Our
Privilege?*

White Male Privilege

Privilege: Refers to the social, economic and political advantages or rights held by people from dominant groups on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc. For example, men often experience privilege that people of other genders do not have.



A key aspect of privilege is that, due to its unearned nature, those who have privilege often do not realize they have it. In other words, they don't see the access and opportunity being a member of a dominant group affords them.

There are many types of privilege

**Class
Privilege**

**Race
Privilege**

**Educational
Privilege**

**Gender
Privilege**

**Gender
Identity
Privilege**

**Age
Privilege**

**Body Size
Privilege**

**Able-Bodied
Privilege**

**Life on the
Outside
Privilege**

**“Passing”
Privilege**

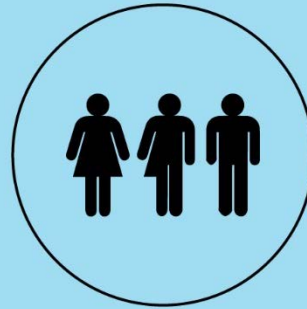
**Religious
Privilege**

**Sexuality
Privilege**

What does privilege look like?



If you can expect time off from work to celebrate your religious holidays, **you have Christian privilege.**



If you can use public bathrooms without stares, fear or anxiety, **you have cisgender privilege.**



If you cannot be legally fired from work because of your perceived sexuality, **you have heterosexual privilege.**



If you're confident that the police exist to protect you, **you have white male privilege.**

If you don't have to think about it, **it's a privilege.**

Becoming aware of privilege should not be viewed as a burden or source of guilt, but rather, **an opportunity** to learn and be responsible so that we may work toward **a more just and inclusive world.**

How do we check our privilege?

"Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral. "
— Paulo Freire

1. Acknowledge that the privilege exists
2. Move away from immobilizing guilt
3. Understand that your privilege will not go away until the root systems that give you privilege are abolished
4. Be an ally to communities you are not a part of
5. Recognize how and why your privilege can destruct community empowerment
6. Use your privilege to benefit groups you are not a part of
7. Educate others with your privilege to check themselves, and
8. Call people out and embrace being called out about privilege.

Being an Ally

What is an Ally?

5 Tips for Being an Ally

*Tips on Naming,
Intervening, and
Addressing Systemic
Power*

What is an Ally?

An ally is typically a member of advantaged social groups who uses social power to take a stand against social injustice directed at targeted groups (Whites who speak out against racism, men who are anti-sexist). An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression.

An ALLY
is not an noun.
It isn't an identity, a label, or something to claim.
Being an ally is taking action,
making a stand
doing something to make a difference
by standing up
against oppression and marginalization.
You are an ally
when someone else recognizes you as an ally

Characteristics of an Ally

- Feels good about own social group membership, is comfortable and proud of own identity
- Takes responsibility for learning about own and targeted group heritage, culture and experience, and how oppression works in everyday life
- Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of targeted group members
- Acknowledges unearned privileges received as a result of advantaged status and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that targeted group members also enjoy
- Recognizes that unlearning oppressive beliefs and actions is a life-long process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity
- Is willing to take risks, try new behaviors, act in spite of own fear and resistance from other advantaged group members
- Takes care of self to avoid burn-out
- Acts against social injustice because it is in their own self-interest to do so (as well as in the interest of targeted group members)
- Is willing to make mistakes, learn from them and try again
- Is willing to be confronted about own behavior and attitudes and consider change
- Is committed to taking action against social injustice in own sphere of influence
- Understands own growth and response patterns and when they are on a learning edge
- Understands the connections among all forms of social injustice
- Believes they can make a difference by acting and speaking out against social injustice
- Knows how to cultivate support from other allies

Tips on Naming, Intervening, and Addressing Systemic Power

Name it when it's happening.

"I'm noticing..."

"that I haven't heard from many folks of color recently."

"that there's a lot of interrupting happening, and that it's happening along gender lines. I want us all to work to become more aware of that and change that."

What you just said can be hurtful.

Refrain from saying things that people hear as name calling.

Rather than what you just said is "racist." You can say: "What you just said is hurtful to people." Or ask questions.

Ask questions to support self inquiry.

What makes you say that?

Where did you hear that?

What do you mean by that?

Can you tell me more about that?

Tips on Naming, Intervening, and Addressing Systemic Power

Support the leadership of those targeted.

Allow people to respond on their own behalf. Either way make sure it's covered.

Synthesize. "What I heard from this person is this...."

Create space for those who we are not hearing from.

"I'm going to take a moment to see if anyone who hasn't spoken in a while has something to say."

"We've been hearing from a lot of men. Let's take a moment to see if any of the women, genderqueer, trans folks in the room have something to say."

Additional Resources

*Sample Harassment
Policy*

We Want Your Feedback!

Gender Neutral Signs

Sources for PPE

Harassment Policy

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees from harassment in the workplace. However, while the law applies only to companies with 15 or more employees, small businesses should be proactive in preventing sexual harassment not only to avoid costly lawsuits but also to make employees feel safe.

Each state has different requirements for what employers need to include in their harassment policy.

Vermont

State requirements:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/21/005/00495h>

Sample policy:

http://labor.vermont.gov/sites/labor/files/doc_library/Sexual%20Harassment%20Model%20Policy.pdf

Gender Neutral Signs



Sources for ordering gender neutral signs:

<http://www.smartsign.com>

<http://www.mysafetysign.com>

Sources for Personal Protective Equipment Sized for Women



Sources for ordering women's PPE:

Center for Construction Research and Training
<https://www.cpwr.com/research/research-practice-library/r2p-and-p2r-work/reaching-vulnerable-workers/construction-ppe-for-the-female-workforce>

We Want Your Feedback!

This toolkit was developed by Kate Stephenson and Mel Baiser of HELM Construction Solutions with help and feedback from many of our colleagues in the building trades and social justice movements.

We recognize this is just a first step towards raising awareness of these issues in our industry and our workplaces, but we felt the need to start somewhere.

If you have feedback on the Toolkit, ideas to share, or suggestions for additions, please email kate@buildhelm.com.

We look forward to developing this Toolkit as a living document. Please share it widely!

If you found this Toolkit useful in your work, please consider making a donation to support the time and effort it took to put this together. Send checks to: HELM, 61 Prospect ST, Montpelier, VT 05602.

About Us



www.buildhelm.com

HELM Construction Solutions works with owners, designers and builders to create high performance and sustainable buildings and businesses. HELM provides a range of innovative services to help your business and your projects run smoothly and efficiently. We are committed to high performance and sustainable building practices that are not only right for the environment, but result in more durable buildings, better indoor air quality, comfort and a significant reduction in the operating costs of your home or business. HELM is a collaborative team with over thirty years of combined construction, management, leadership and education expertise.

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