



NEWS & VIEWS

How I navigate a male-dominated working environment

by [Women's Agenda](#) | April 21, 2014

Allison Selman's a leading engineer in the oil and gas industry. She's also a mentor and trainer to junior engineers, lecturer, writer, presenter and editor of a publication dedicated to one of her out-of-work passions – rock climbing. Working in a male-dominated industry, she explains how she's learnt to, "Tread through challenging situations with humour". She's the latest of our 'real role models' to answer our Q&A about life and career.

What is your job now?

Brownfield & Integrity Team Leader for Atteris, a boutique pipeline engineering consulting company that provides services to the oil and gas industry.

Describe an average day for you.

I have rather hectic days that constantly vary. There is challenging technical project work that I undertake with the major oil and gas operators and projects in Australia (and internationally, when required), I have a business development responsibility that takes me out to meet with many of my clients, I also participate in industry research programs through the Energy Pipelines Cooperative Research Centre, assist the Australian Pipeline Industry Association with pro-bono work that will improve the Australian Pipeline Industry, support for the Women in Engineering (with the high school portfolio), mentoring and training junior engineers, presenting at technical conferences (domestic and international), publishing in technical journals and magazines, lecturing at universities, performing engineering work to resolve unknowns, and lots more.

How did you get there? (Did you wing it or plan it?)

Following my engineering studies at University of Western Australia, I started working in the mining field. However, I didn't particularly enjoy the work. I received an opportunity to move to the oil and gas industry, which I have not regretted. From then on, I observed the industry closely and semi-planned my career path. In terms of getting where I am – the keys to my success was always being open to new opportunities and challenges (never turning anything down when I was young, I wasn't picky about the work that was allocated to me), always taking on roles that were beyond my capability, ensuring my network was sufficiently strong so that I was aware of opportunities and making sure that I was always improving myself, staying up-to-date with my technical knowledge and working hard.

How do you manage the logistics of your career and your life outside of work?

I love life. I live it to the fullest. I love my work and I love my life outside of work. I am very active outdoors, which I spend mostly scuba diving, rock climbing, mountain biking and snowboarding. My passion for travel takes me all around the world to experience the wonders that life has to offer. Life is busy, but making sure that I make time for everything that is important to me, is key to happiness.

What is the easiest part of your working week? And the hardest?

The easiest part of my working week is working through the technical challenges (project work). I think the hardest part of the working week is being conscious that I am a role-model for others and making sure that I can influence others in a positive manner (and have confidence in myself, that I can contribute to the development of others).

How do you think your younger self would view your current career?

With pride. I think not many people have the luxury of achieving a trifecta in life – being happy in work, at home and with my own personal life. I have achieved much compared to my colleagues, I am doing work that I love, I have gained respect in the industry which I work and I look forward to the challenges that are yet to come.

If someone else out there wants to develop a career like yours what advice would you give them?

Be able to connect with people – engineering is a team sport; and success cannot be achieved when working alone. Be aware of your long-term goal, but be flexible enough to understand and accept deviations in your pathway – arrogance will get you nowhere, especially when there is a competitive market situation, as there currently is. Keep challenging yourself and your abilities to explore and achieve.

Have you got any anecdotes about your career or daily life you'd like to share?

If you choose to work in a male-dominated environment, do not constantly ask for concessions and understand that your own presence could be a challenge to those around you. Change comes through acceptance. Acceptance comes through gaining respect. Respect comes from being able to speak to each other as equals, no matter what level this be at. My career has taken me through some pretty challenging (now amusing) occasions of working on-site in locations that are not that female friendly. Tread through challenging situations with humour.

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