

Women in the Building Industry

— A roundtable discussion, Ottawa, June 2026 —



Photo credit: Wayne Cuddington / All Things Home

From left to right: Linda Oliveri Blanchard, Kaylie Chamberlin, Tanya Buckley, Alyssa Stack, Rosaline Hill, Michelle Taggart, Caroline Castrucci, Carolyn Munro, Lianna Mackie

INTRODUCTION

This project was prompted by three recent events in Ottawa’s housing industry, which the founders of All Things Home have covered for more than 15 years. In short succession, three respected industry professionals — who are all women — were appointed to strong leadership positions.

They certainly aren’t the first, but having three such examples all at once, in an industry that has been traditionally a male-dominated one, was an intriguing development.

That got us wondering about the journey for and the evolution of women in building. So, at the beginning of June 2026, nine of those industry leaders gathered with us around a conference table to examine the challenges and opportunities facing women in the housing sector.

The following is an edited transcript of this insightful discussion. The hope is that it will offer inspiration, encouragement and guidance to others.

PARTICIPANTS



Tanya Buckley
Senior vice-president, [Urbandale Construction](#)

Tanya holds an executive MBA from the University of Ottawa. She serves as vice-chair of Algonquin College’s board of governors and vice-chair of the [Greater Ottawa Home Builders’ Association](#) (GOHBA).



Caroline Castrucci
CEO & co-owner, [Lauryzen Kitchens](#)

Caroline joined the family business unexpectedly, planning to be there temporarily before heading off to college. Forty+ years later, she has worked in nearly every aspect of the business and is a past president of GOHBA and the Canadian Kitchen Cabinet Association.



Kaylie Chamberlin
Owner, ARTium Design Build & Just Basements

Kaylie grew up in and around the trades, spending three decades surrounded by the HVAC industry before realizing her true passion was in renovations. She purchased ARTium & Just Basements in 2025.



Rosaline Hill
Principal architect & founder, RJH Architecture + Planning

Rosaline is a multi-award-winning architect and registered professional planner with over 25 years of experience in housing and urban design. She is a champion of smart urban infill and development and creating walkable communities.



Lianna Mackie
General manager, [Mackie Homes](#)

Lianna has family roots in the trades, but her early career was in event planning. Since joining the family business, she has grown her role at Mackie Homes as the company has grown, from just a few homes a year to a total of 500+ across Eastern Ontario.



Carolyn Munro
Founder, Carolyn Munro Design + Build

Carolyn's childhood dream was to become an architect. Instead, she graduated from Algonquin College's interior design and architectural technology programs. She worked in commercial and residential design before starting her own design-build business in 1986.



Linda Oliveri Blanchard
Senior regional manager – Eastern Ontario, Enercare Home Services

Linda was one of the first women to become a licensed gas fitter in Ontario, parlaying that into a rewarding career at Enercare. She volunteers on the boards of multiple associations and was a finalist in the *Ottawa Business Journal's* 40 under 40 awards.

**Alyssa Stack**

Senior vice-president & general manager, **Cardel Homes**

Alyssa has a background in psychology and behavioural sciences, which has influenced her leadership approach throughout her career. She champions innovation, operational excellence and customer satisfaction while helping shape the future of homebuilding.

**Michelle Taggart**

Co-president, **Tamarack Homes & Tartan Homes**

Michelle has a background in urban planning and led Tamarack's land development for several years before taking over as co-president in 2025. She is a past chair of GOHBA's builder developer council and is active in philanthropy and mentorship.

MODERATOR

**Anita Murray**

Co-founder and president, **All Things Home**

A career journalist with more than 25 years as an editor and writer at the Ottawa Citizen, Anita was Homes Editor for five years, reporting on the new and resale home markets, renovations, design, architecture, gardening and more. She has covered the Ottawa housing industry since 2011. In 2017, she co-founded All Things Home, a national award-winning website connecting Ottawa's housing industry with homebuyers, renters and homeowners.

Q: What does it mean to be a woman in this industry?

LIANNA: I'll start by saying it's everything. I've never felt more included. You walk into a room of amazing women like this and you feel that instant connection. Sometimes it's missing when you do feel like a minority, but look around you.

ANITA: Do you still feel a bit like a minority?

LIANNA: Less than I did before. It is changing.

CAROLINE: It was nice yesterday, I was at a large project in Kanata, and I probably saw five women on a commercial high-rise project, with boots on. They were schlepping stuff, painting and doing stuff and it was nice to see. And I don't remember the last time that I actually saw five women working in — residential, yes, when it's a single-family home — but not in a commercial high-rise.

TANYA: For me the word is hopeful. I think everyone here has seen change and some evolution in the industry, because we've been around it long enough, but I also think we see the potential. And where women have been in this industry for a long time, but at a, I'll call it a bit of a middle layer, and I think the hopeful piece is it's initiatives like this that make us realize that women are now in a leadership role. And I think we want to see more in the field, despite Caroline's comment. I think we all see a potential for more women in the field and more women in leadership, but hopeful for me is kind of what resonates.

CAROLYN: I've been in this since 1983 (starting) in commercial construction, and it was all men. I worked for an interior design firm, so I didn't do inspections, etc. And I wasn't treated very seriously. Mind you, I was very young. And they always tried to pull the wool over my eyes. I was always very polite when I caught them.

When it comes to the men's club in construction, there are equally as many men supportive of a woman's career as there are against it. I had nails behind my tires one time at a job site, but as a whole it was a balance of working with the right men who present you with opportunities. We're seeing more women in the business and I think it's great. One man I worked with years ago loved to hire women because he said, 'There's not many women in construction, but the women who do choose a career in construction, whether management or on site, do so because they like what they do. And because of that, they're reliable, they show up, they get the work done and I don't have to worry.' And this was back in the '80s.

TANYA: I think the middle layer that I'm describing is the typical sales, marketing, design, drafting tech started a little later, kind of thing. That's what I call middle layer. I just mean not typically in those management roles unless they've been with the company a long, long time or in family business. That's where you saw women through the industry, just not necessarily in the roles you see today.

MICHELLE: When I first started, I would often be the only woman at a table. And now it happens regularly where it's all women. And we have engineers, architects, designers all in leadership roles. You said hopeful, Tanya. My word would be strong. I love attending a meeting and there's a bunch of strong women around the table.

I have three daughters, so I bring them with me, oftentimes, if I have a speaking engagement or if there's an event or a ribbon cutting or something, and I want them to see me in this leadership role and to know that they can aspire to leadership roles. Same when I get the occasional talk at a school. Or I get lots of calls for colleagues who have daughters who are interested in the industry so I'll have a quick chat with them saying, 'We are strong and we can do it and there's absolutely no reason why we shouldn't be leading the conversations.'

TANYA: I think that's why I say hopeful because, for me, those are the examples that are now available to others, to the next generation, that we didn't have, I didn't have, coming up. There were no women who were mentoring or who were leading the charge. And I think that's why I feel so good about — you're right — strong women at every tier now who hopefully demonstrate that there is opportunity. It's a great industry to be in; it's career driven; there's so much breadth and depth to it. It's so nice to expose younger (women) to the industry.

ROSALINE: When you mentioned being the only woman at the table, this exact table right here [the roundtable was being held in the conference room of the offices of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association or GOHBA]. I would come into this room — I've been on the Urban Infill Council since it first started in GOHBA, since before it was at GOHBA — and it was all men, and me. And I found it intensely intimidating, this room and this table, when I first started. But they were all, all of them, very respectful and welcoming of me. And I consider myself very fortunate that way, to have had such consistently positive experiences here in this place. So, thanks to those guys.

And I think it is really important for us to be sharing our stories and inviting young women to see what we're doing. My daughters found my construction boots in the cupboard about six or seven years ago and my little girl said, 'Ew, whose are these? Are these yours?' And last year one of my daughters started in architecture at Toronto Metropolitan University and I bought her first pair of construction boots.



Q: How has this male-dominated industry changed or is changing and what effect is that change having on the industry?

LIANNA: I think you can look around this table, I think this is the change, truly. Men creating the opportunity for women, creating the seats at the table for women. I see some family businesses here also creating opportunities for the next generation. A lot of representation for our kids to see that it's a possibility, too.

ALYSSA: And I think we have to look at the idea that it's not only the strong women in the industry standing up and saying 'I can do this' and having the confidence and the initiative to do so, but there has to be the equal amount of men in the industry who are willing to help those women step up or step aside to make room for women — to understand that women are more than just the administrators, the supportive roles — that these women can play at the big table. They have great ideas, they have instincts, initiatives, and they have a way, I find sometimes, of dealing with some of the industry conflicts that perhaps men have had challenge navigating before. So, I think there's the opportunity for collaboration and more of the old boys' club are starting to see that opportunity; they're starting to see the benefits not only for the team but for themselves as well and that's what's given us that space to kind of step in there and rise up.

TANYA: I agree, I think it's the overall value to the business that that diversity brings. It's not about women being better than men, or men being better than women, it's that different perspective, and different way of working, too. I think we have a different approach to the way we work, the way we work with people.

I was reflecting on the question this morning, and I don't even know if it's this question, but the idea that I think we, in this industry, we can kind of empathize with our buyer in a way that men typically couldn't in the past. And maybe I'm wrong there, but I do think that we bring a different relationship to our buyers than men do. And it's not better or worse, it's that it's a different perspective. And it just kind of rounds out the value of that diversity, the value of the business. And, ultimately, I agree with Alyssa: It's the men who recognize that value, who make room for and opportunity for and recognize that, who are leading the charge for women in the industry.

ROSALINE: From a business perspective, in housing anyway — I know we're not all just doing housing — but in the housing niche, I think adding that diversity to our staffing and our senior staffing improves business understanding because we're better able to understand the diverse demographics we're serving. We don't default to traditional norms, we see the demographics that are being missed and we can finetune our business models to be more appropriate and more successful. So, a little bit of thinking outside the box that results from diversity that way.

MICHELLE: Back in the day, there was more of an old boys' club mentality in the industry and there would be fishing trips and there would be golf trips and sometimes decisions were being made, they would come back and decisions had been made. And I think having women at the table actually brings more, I don't want to say professionalism, but just that layer of transparency maybe, where the decisions are now being made at the table and they're being made in a bit more of a transparent way.

CAROLYN: I think over time, with being around in the '80s and seeing the evolution of women, in any business or occupation, more of us are getting into the workforce. And more of our mothers or other mentors within the family are encouraging us, 'why don't you try this career, try that career,' and I think it's grown and it's evolved in the last 40 years where you're now seen as a peer, not just a woman at the table, but you're a peer and you've got something to say

and women are being heard now. Before you were just there in the corner and 'we'll take your opinion, we'll consider your opinion' but now you're part of that opinion.

TANYA: I'd say it's being sought now, where it wasn't being sought before, more and more anyway.

ANITA: The diversity?

TANYA: Well, the diversity and the idea of 'let's bring women into the discussion, let's get their perspective,' as opposed to you're in the room and you participate, but you're not necessarily being drawn in.

KAYLIE: It actually feels like it hasn't been all that long that this has taken shape. I mean, I've been in the industry, initially in the mechanical side of things, now on the design-build side of things, and I can remember my very first position at a mechanical contracting company, one of the individuals on my team who was a man saying, 'Well, there's the group chat that you're in and then there's the group chat that's the guys,' and the guys are doing the golf and the old boys' club.



And that was not that many years ago, truly, so I feel like we've seen a huge evolution even in the last five years from where things started, and there's maybe still independent group chats that we don't know about and I suppose it's been years in the making, but it really feels like it's being accelerated now for women around this table. This didn't exist maybe even five or 10 years ago.

CAROLINE: But I think the whole family dynamic is changing, too, where before it was the husband who was working, the wife stayed at home with the kids. Now because both husband and wife are working, that whole family dynamic is changing because somebody has to go pick up the kids. So, maybe the husband doesn't have time to go on that fishing trip.

LIANNA: I think that's crucial; not only do you want to be seen as an equal at work, but at home as well. And, all too often, women are the default parent. We're the pickups, we are the lunches, etc. And by someone helping with that, it creates more time. I remember even at the GOHBA table, many moons ago, I wanted to be a part of the marketing committee and I couldn't make it to the 7 a.m. meetings because I had to be at home with the kids. And now I can. My kids are a little bit older; my husband's a lot more helpful.

CAROLINE: Talk about a family business, I work with my mom, I worked with my dad, I work with my brother, my husband, my nephews, and extended family. So, there is a huge family dynamic, and I had my sister-in-law as my client, so it was very interesting.

TANYA: It's interesting because you have the benefit of family understanding what the demands are on you and therefore possibly a little more empathetic.

CAROLINE: Women made sure they were more empathetic.

Q: Do you find that things are changing fast enough? What still needs to be done?

CAROLINE: Change could always go faster, but it has to be more organic and it has to develop. You can't just change for the sake of change; it has to be change for the good. And I think for it to be disseminated into all things, it has to go slowly. Maybe it could go a little faster, but you're not going to flip a switch and it's going to be changed overnight.

TANYA: I think a great example of change has been the HOWL initiative [Home Builders of Ottawa Women Leaders, which started in 2023]. This association recognized something that was there, but hadn't been highlighted and nurtured and it was that there is a strong presence of women in this industry and it should be recognized, nurtured, celebrated and that initiative has really brought us all out of the woodwork. You look around the room at any HOWL event, and it strikes you as to how much change has happened.

LIANNA: We're all in separate businesses and, in our separate businesses, we might be considered that minority, but you get us all in a room together and you feel so included, and you see a sea of women in this rewarding (business). It can be extremely rewarding, it can get extremely tough, but we're all in it together, and I think creating more opportunities, Anita, like you're doing today, is so necessary to continue that trajectory forward.

CAROLINE: When I started 42 years ago, there was myself and (designer) Linda Nolan as the only two women at the monthly (housing association) dinner meetings. That was it.

LIANNA: How many people were at that meeting, would you say?

CAROLINE: Two hundred. When I look at a home builders meeting now and I see, I'm going to say on average it's probably 50-50 now with women at a function depending on what it is. I think it's great that you went from two women to 50 per cent.

LIANNA: And I think it's incredible that you've seen that.

MICHELLE: I think the door's open to women and we just need to step up and step in and take on those leadership roles and just excel. We might have to work a bit harder to get to the very top positions, but they are open to us if we want them and so, really, I just want to encourage young women to go for it, because you can do it. It's like, show up, work hard, don't get caught up in the drama, just do good work.

TANYA: Focus, do a good job, work ethic, learn, listen.

MICHELLE: It's amazing how far that can take you, just those kinds of most basic things.

CAROLYN: I find through my career, working for people or with people, the people you associate with have a real impact to your career. Some can be very intimidating or some do not have strong business ethics and I've been fortunate. But I've also seen situations where I don't want to work with someone or I've fired some trades, fired some clients because they just don't fit into my moral compass.

Especially just being a woman, they want to intimidate you to see where your breaking point is. I remember one guy trying to do that, I asked him, 'Are you OK?' Because he was turning really red. And everybody laughed around him, because they realized, 'Well, I guess she's not going to break.' Having said that, it's working around the people who will also support you, whether they are male or female, that will make your career or project your career further.

TANYA: Picking up on what else could change, I think it's time to take a leadership role. I think we've worked really hard to get here and I wish I had someone like the people in this room to work with and learn from. I was fortunate to have men recognize my potential and give me opportunity and teach me. But, in hindsight, I wish I had had a woman as an example or coach or mentor. And I think that's where we can maybe step up a little more, and it's not just lead by example, but actually seek out, nurture young women in this industry who want to build a career in this industry, regardless of what that career is.

ALYSSA: I think we have to remember as well that although the leadership opportunities are now open to us and in mentoring younger women coming in, there still is a lot of work to do for those younger women coming on to construction sites. So, to normalize having a woman at that level in the trades, in the field. And as women leaders, not only can we help and mentor those young women, we can also mentor our men on our teams in the field, for example, 'Hey, those calendars [on the job site that objectify women] are not appropriate.'

It's those little things that people don't think about that can still have an impact. And it's the silly little things — you might have the nicest guy who is very respectful doing these small things that then makes a younger woman feel a little uncomfortable. So, that's where I see our role is also in mentoring the men we work with to help show them that there's meaning in those tiny little gestures.

MICHELLE: The calendar is a really good example, actually, because we all know the calendars. It would take you or me or one of us to say, 'Guys, it's got to come down. We want to draw more women into this industry.'

ROSALINE: I think this goes to a bigger topic. It's not just about us following in the footsteps of the men who came before us and repeating what they have done. Instead, it's us envisioning a different way, a new way of doing things that is better because it is more inclusive or more thoughtful.

And my standard of better also includes work-life balance. Many women, not just in our industry but in all sorts of industries, assume that if they want to succeed, they have to sacrifice their work-life balance or time with their kids, and I think it's important for us to prove them wrong. One of the reasons I started my business is I was unable to go back to my previous work because I was the sole breadwinner and caregiver in my household and I was worried I couldn't find the balance that I needed in a workplace established by men. So, I just carved out my own little life on my own and built my business that way. And those examples, I think, are really important for people to know what the options are for themselves.

TANYA: It speaks to what the definition of success is. Because there's a male lens on that, and there's a traditional lens on that. But to your point, we can redefine that; it's not a given. We can shape what we want success to look like, not just for ourselves, but for our company and our staff. And the value of that is everything from attracting talent to retaining talent to productivity. I think it's very tangible. It's not just that you get to go home at 4:30; it's so much more than that.

LIANNA: But allowing the flexibility for the mothers on your team to be able to be successful at work but also take those appointments. We have a lot of women on our staff who their husbands work in the trades and they have to go to these appointments. And we say, 'Well, take your appointment.' What women can get done in six hours... just get the work done.

ROSALINE: And not to disparage men, that they are dismissive of that or anything, but having a mix of people on your team, and people who really profoundly understand how challenging that is, I think is what can make it possible to shape a workplace that really works with people and appreciates people and makes the greatest opportunity for them to share their greatest value.



TANYA: I think it's shifting, too, when you look at, just demographically, another generation that is taking paternity leave. And men who are staying home, whether it's for two weeks, five weeks, three months, who are learning the intrinsic challenge of raising a family, caregiving, balancing work-life. And sometimes it's children, other times it's aging parents. I'm going through that now and it's another level of challenge that is, frankly, a life milestone. And when you look at your career, you go through all kinds of life milestones — early career, young family, raising families, aging parents — all kinds of variations.

ALYSSA: I think the men who are doing that are doing it better than the women do, because what I'm seeing is women are still apologizing for having to take time off. I have a woman on my team who's sick. She's very sick and she's apologizing that she can't come to the office and she is going to get her work done at home instead of actually resting and getting better. Where when I look at men taking time off, they don't apologize.

TANYA: Where do you think that's rooted though? Is that a social norm? Is that in our DNA? Is it the way we were raised?

ROSALINE: Sometimes though, it's a genuine concern. My office is relatively small; there's only 10 of us. And it realistically will be a challenge when I lose people on maternity leave. So, we are going to have to be really careful and strategic in how we manage that. So, I don't want to underestimate how difficult that can be. I can see why people might feel apologetic in settings where they know the impact. But we've just got to make it work.

ALYSSA: I think that's our job as the leaders and the managers. It shouldn't be on our employees to apologize for getting sick. If you're sick, take the time. That's our job, that's why we're here, to make sure we have those backup plans and to make sure that we have something in place that can accommodate for sure.

Q: Have there been instances where you have felt excluded from or only tangential to key decisions because you're a woman? Looking back, how could you have handled the situation differently?

LINDA: I've been doing this for 25 years and I remember in the beginning I was also very young in a room full of men as the one token female. I had almost a fear of speaking up because I didn't want to be seen as a nuisance or an emotional female or whatever. Stigma was around women in the industry back then. And honestly, I regret not speaking up. And I think I'm getting better at that now and demanding the respect I deserve after doing this for so long. I feel like I've earned it.

But, absolutely, there have been so many instances where it's the golf trips, the fishing trips, contracts are signed on the spot where (I was thinking), 'Wait a minute, hold on, I didn't even get a chance to put in a bid' — I'm speaking as a trade supplier. So, it's very much been the old boys' club.

CAROLINE: My personal favourite is when they look at you, and you give your answer, and then they look for the guys.

TANYA: My biggest thing that I held onto was 'what answer do they want to hear?' And I so wish I hadn't thought that way. I wish I had spent the time to think about 'what do I think?' And have the courage and the confidence to voice it. And it's taken years to get there. And what's interesting to me is once you get there, you realize you have your own thoughts and you have your voice and they're valid.

I think there was this self-imposed misnomer of just wanting to have the right answers and wanting to be heard, and the only way to be heard was to state what I thought they wanted to hear.

CAROLYN: I remember on a project I was building in the Thousand Islands and I wanted to hire local trades. So, I interviewed the trades to see whether I wanted to work with them and asked, 'Do you have an issue working with a woman in charge?' They would pause and sometimes they were fine. One guy actually turned me down. So, I figured, 'OK, well that saved me a breath.' But even for clients, I interview them as well to see whether I want to work with them because some aren't comfortable with a woman making the decisions.

So, I always interview them and I quiz them on stuff, especially if it's a new sub-trade. I'll ask them questions about something technical, just to see what their answers are.

ALYSSA: I think there is still a double standard that if you're sitting around a table or having a conversation on site talking about something technical, something to do with the construction component, it's automatically assumed that the men at the table have the relevant experience. It's not assumed the women do.

So even if you're sitting there with men who have never put steel toes on in their life, it's going to be assumed that they're speaking from experience. Or when you're looking at a woman in our industry, the thought is, 'Oh, you came up through sales, design, office admin. You probably don't have that same on-site experience.'

I found as a woman starting in my young to mid-20s on the construction site, you have to work so much harder to show that you know what you're talking about. You have to show up on site. You have to put the time in just to get people to accept that your opinion is valid, that you do know what you're talking about.

LIANNA: It's almost like you're in a business interview every time.

CAROLINE: I don't want to buy new construction boots because mine are very used. They're well lived in and I don't want new ones because then (the impression is) I've never been to a job site before.

TANYA: The idea that you have to kind of prove yourself first holds true no matter what stream you've come through. And that's the piece that is changing.

CAROLINE: I hold men to the same standard. They have to prove to me that they know what they're talking about. There are a lot of people who have a lot of hot air and they don't really know what they're talking about, but they can talk a good game. Bullshit baffles brains every day.

MICHELLE: I remember many years sitting around — and it takes a long time to learn land development — and sitting around the table and having ideas, but thinking, 'I don't know if that's a dumb idea so I'm not going to say it.' I have one example that's engraved in my mind, we were looking at this plan and it had a lot of contours to it and there was this way that we were planning on servicing it and I'm looking at it and I'm thinking, 'What if you just put the pipe around this way? Wouldn't that be more efficient? I don't know, should I say it?' Eventually I did say, 'What if we do this' and I kind of pointed with my finger and everyone paused and they were like, 'Yeah, that's what we should do.'

It gave me that boost of confidence in the early days to realize you have to trust yourself, and even if you are wrong, that is OK, too, but you have to trust your instincts. And how many times have you held back only for someone else to say it?

TANYA: Who's been in the room where you've said something, not two minutes later somebody else runs with it and you're thinking, 'How did that get missed?' And then what do you look like saying, 'That was my idea.'

CAROLYN: Early on, an older lady (at the company I was working at) said to me, 'You've got to say it in a way that's their idea, because otherwise they won't listen to what you say.' And I said, 'No, I'm not doing that.' And she said, 'Well, you're not going to be heard.' I used to fight that; you've got to say those things, and this is why I'm saying this. And then sometimes they agreed and sometimes they didn't. But your voice has to be heard.



TANYA: It really takes a couple of those experiences where you go, 'OK, I'm just going to start speaking up.' So, it's those experiences, you hold back, somebody else says it, and you think, 'D'oh, I thought that, OK, valid.' And then you throw them out there, and they're valid. It's there. It takes time.

CAROLINE: Even if the idea is not the one they go with, but it contributes to the conversation and it then gives everybody an opportunity to look at how to parse a little bit from this idea and a little from that idea and come together. And I think we can contribute something and even if it doesn't work, it brought the conversation to the table.

TANYA: I think that speaks to the collaborative nature that women bring. I think it's typical of us to be much more collaborative than direct. I think we want to be heard, but we also want to hear the different perspectives and the different voices around the table, and best idea wins, not whose idea wins.

ANITA: With some of that lack of confidence, I wonder how much of it is from being a woman in a male-dominated field and how much is just from being a young person in a field. I come from an industry where it didn't really matter whether you were a man or a woman, but I have felt a lot of those kind of things, too, not speaking up in a meeting because I didn't think my views had any validity. But over time as you gain experience it becomes easier.

MICHELLE: Maybe it's just a little more intimidating when you're young and female and in a room full of men; it just adds that extra layer. But I agree, no matter what, if you don't really know what you're talking about, then it's hard to speak up. It takes time to gain experience and confidence.

TANYA: You can't expect to be where we are — not career-wise, just confidence-wise — in your 20s, when you're building your career and you're trying to gain experience and you are trying to earn credibility and respect. I think that's a natural phase of any career. But I think you said it really well, Michelle. Add that to a male-dominated industry and it's just a little more challenging.

ROSALINE: I think there are some gender assumptions though that compound it, so the construction site assumptions that we don't know how things are built or can't even walk safely across the construction site. That would be a common assumption about women that's quite out of left field.

But there's also boardroom assumptions. So, I regularly have to demonstrate that I can understand a business model, that I can understand a business pro forma, that I know how my clients are going to be getting their financing and the conditions that they will face when they need to reach their financing. And that's not something that people would assume about me. Whereas if I was a man, they would be more likely to assume that I had that skill set. And so, in instances like that we just have to calmly keep proving ourselves in spite of the assumptions.

ALYSSA: In my case, I had to get pissed off. I had a vice-president who would continually take my ideas to the big table and take the credit for them. And then on the occasions that I was at that table, he would set me up for his ideas that were poor ideas. It had to happen a few times before I finally felt enough is enough and I'm willing to, not necessarily step on toes, but to make sure that upper management knew what was going on and that I do have my own ideas. There are some examples of poor leadership out there, that we've all been through, that I think shapes the way we're going to be as leaders more than anything; especially in my case because I want to be the leader for my team that I never had. As far as women in the industry, it goes into just industry standard, because I think there have been some very poor women role models historically where you either had to be a bitch to get by or you were always stepped on.

The women around this table have shown that that's not the case. You can be a competent, intelligent, fair person and get far in this industry, and I think a lot further than going the opposite way of just being that nasty person who doesn't take shit from anyone.

LIANNA: Why do women have to be seen as the B word? Why can't we just be direct and knowledgeable about our subject matter as opposed to being seen as a bitch? That's where I hope we're getting towards, where we can stand our ground and be direct and factual and that's OK.

ROSALINE: I've had to work a lot on my body language to make sure that I don't get myself into situations where I'm misinterpreted that way. So, in a tense moment in a boardroom, I now can calmly lean back in my chair. To be able to have that kind of self-control and to calm situations, use your body language so that people can appreciate your value instead of feeding into their misconceptions with some of the natural body language and the voice tone that we have grown up misusing. It's something we have to learn and definitely have to help each other to learn.

LINDA: The fact that you have to train yourself to not do something that could be perceived as evil, bitchy, whatever the words are, whereas a man in the same role wouldn't have to train their body on how to be perceived. And that's where we're trying to get to, where you could just say what you have to say — professionally, politely, directly — and get the same reaction that your male counterpart would get.

MICHELLE: I feel like now I'm training the men in almost the reverse way: Don't point at someone when you're in a meeting, and if you feel annoyed, let's keep it calm. In many ways that self-training that we had to do is good self-training that we should all be doing.

That level of professionalism transparency that I nodded to earlier is something I think we as women can bring to a business that has not been necessarily from a perspective of empathy, emotion, regulated. Things were just done the way they were done for a long time and we can bring a more intentional approach to professionalism and a closer eye on it, making sure that our employees feel safe, that they feel heard, in a way that in the past they might have been brushed off if they were having a hard time.

TANYA: To Alyssa's point, we've learned a lot of that by being exposed to what not to do. You talk about having to get peeved. My experience was being held back, and I think I still to this day hold resentment toward that because I think, 'Shit, where would I be?' I'm quite proud and I think have made great headway in my career. But I think I didn't fight enough for the value I thought I brought, because I thought I would be perceived as complaining and bitchy and annoying. And God forbid you did, and you were annoying. Then what? What do you do with that? So, I think for me that was one visceral experience, being held back, in my case by my father in family business, despite having been given all kinds of opportunity, I don't deny that. But being given just the opportunities they see for you and not beyond that.

ROSALINE: I encounter that with clients now. Because I'm a residential architect, people assume that I must do additions and custom homes. I work exclusively for developers. People

don't assume that a woman architect works exclusively for a developer. And I do have clients who will tell me still, 'Well, we give our big jobs to other architects.'

Q: Do you find there are still instances where you are made to feel uncomfortable because you are a woman? How do you deal with that?

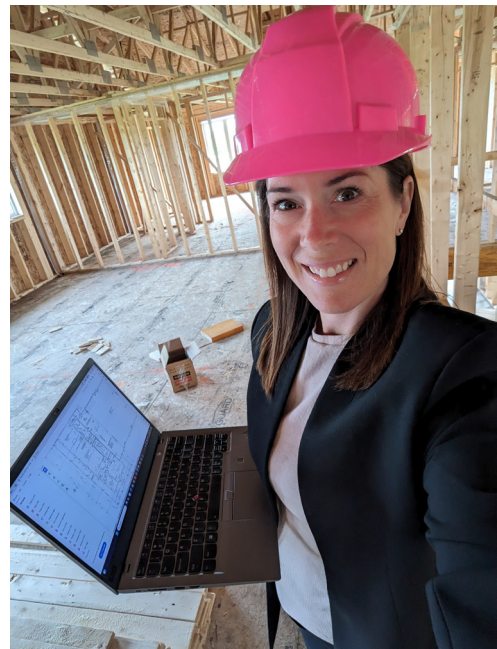
LIANNA: Just a polite reminder. I mean, you're on the job site and the thinking is you're a realtor, you are a salesperson — the assumptions. And the minute you walk in the room, there are natural assumptions. But it's just a polite reminder, but sometimes — and we've talked about it too — sometimes is it worth it? Do we correct every single time?

[A few answer No]

TANYA: I like not correcting it. It's like, 'Noted; that's your issue, not mine. I'm just going to come and do what I do and you'll either shift or you won't but you're not going to affect me that way.' I think at this point in our career (we're) way past that now.

ALYSSA: I think we've got armour on now. After 25-plus years in the industry, it's very hard to upset or offend us. We've seen it all, we've heard it all. We can deal with it. But exactly what Tanya was saying, it is those mental notes, that you're like, 'OK, that's the type of trade partner you are, that's the type of site super you are, building inspector, whatever.' So, those mental notes and then as the women do rise up through, they're the decision makers on who we then work with. And that factors in.

TANYA: I love going to job sites, wearing the hard hat and the boots, and walking in and they have no idea who you are. They're trying to figure it out, right? And I love it. I have no need to tell you who I am or what I do, because we're no better, we're just playing a different role. But you always clock it, the people on the site who are taking note.



ALYSSA: They want to know if they're in trouble. 'What should I be doing? What am I getting in trouble for?'

CAROLYN: I think that comes with experience and age, you just don't care anymore. It's their issue, but it's also being the person in the room where you've got to lead by example, but you make a note and consider that next time when we're having that contract conversation.

TANYA: The best way to diffuse it is to get past it, don't give it any credence.

MICHELLE: I have a little trick I use. I'll say, 'It's 2026, we don't talk like that anymore.'

CAROLYN: But it is nice if we can mentor more young people. I've mentored quite a few students in my business and it's how you approach things and just teach them about attitude, a bit of self-confidence. And the guy who's 20 and you're 20: you're both green. He doesn't know any more than you know; you're better to work together as a team than have that tension of male and female. But we need to mentor more women coming up the line.

KAYLIE: You used the word confidence, and I think confidence is a big part of it. So, a lot of the comments have been more internal site, land developers, builders. I work direct with consumers, so I'm going into people's homes, and I'm chatting with them about projects. And it's always interesting to hear the feedback from homeowners. Someone touched on body language. If I show up at someone's home, they're immediately — not all homeowners, of course, not to paint everyone with the same brush — but a lot of male homeowners are, 'You're going to sell me a renovation project? What do you know about construction?' You get this body language read from them.

But equally, the confidence piece comes into it where they've had five quotes through the door, I'm the last one and they're doing business with me because I was more thorough, more professional, more empathetic. I read into all of the things that likely the people who had been through the home before me had not.

TANYA: It was transactional, and yours was much more consultative and much more empathetic probably.

KAYLIE: For sure. And so doing this enough gives you that confidence to say, 'I'm going to show up at this home and I'm going to crush it here today. I know that this is going to be a win for me because if I'm following three to four men who were in there before me who probably weren't as thorough in their process or as professional, I stand out in that pack.'

TANYA: You know what's interesting about that? It's almost to the point — and I smile because I wonder — do we now have an advantage that we didn't have before?

KAYLIE: I genuinely believe we do, and I'm feeling it in real time right now.

TANYA: Which I think is a nice tipping point to be at and to be witness to and to be part of.

LINDA: Anyone who sells homes, they'll always tell you that truly, at the end of the day, the final decision maker is the woman of the house.

TANYA: Which is why I say I think we're more empathetic to our buyers.

LINDA: We know what they're looking for when it comes to storage, kitchen, just living in the home.

TANYA: How you live.

ALYSSA: Exactly. I think women understand the value of the client experience more than just the numbers, the timing. So, I think that's the one advantage that we can bring to our teams.

LINDA: And if you look at how home designs have changed, it used to be a boxed-in living room, a boxed-in dining room, and then as the way people live changes and all of a sudden now we're opening up walls and having more practical living. This is, again, typically things that women would notice. I think it would have stayed pretty stagnant if you just left status quo of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it,' but bringing in women into the industry really has helped highlight the practicality of a home and how people live in it. So, I think having women in leadership is a huge advantage, especially for people looking to sell.



TANYA: I think that tipping point, too, for me is when you reach back, you're in this room, it's all men, just you, you stood out. And now you're in the room, there's a few of you, and you're standing out for different reasons. That's that tipping point to me that really feels good — you're welcomed, your opinion is sought. You know you bring value, most of the people in the room know you bring value. They don't all; we're not there yet.

But I think for my part anyway, not that I disregard those, but I don't let that affect me the way I did in the past. I'm not trying to prove myself to them anymore. I've proven myself to myself; take it or leave it and if you don't want it, then I'll bring my value elsewhere, that's OK. That's what I mean by tipping point, I think part of it is the confidence but part of it is the shift that's happening, too. And that you know there are more than just a few of us in the room now. Even if we're not physically in the room, we're out there.

MICHELLE: I like that the reason why you stand out now is different from the reason why you stood out before. That's a good one.

ROSALINE: I used to laugh that, well, at least no one's going to forget me because I really did stick out so much.

TANYA: And the other thing, too, is I was seeing a life coach at one point and she said, 'Tanya, to what degree do you put your confidence on, like a sweater in the morning?' And boy, that hit me. That whole fake it till you make it thing? I was doing that. And I was doing that partly because I'm gaining experience and I'm trying to earn my way. And you don't know what you don't know, all that kind of thing, but now it's not a sweater in the morning, it's just innate now, because you're not trying — again it's that proving yourself to others, as opposed to being

honest to self, and knowing that you don't know it all, knowing that you don't have the best ideas, but you have some. I think that's about our own personal growth, not just career growth, and I think that's what women do for women, not just in this industry but in life, is they — don't quote that one because it's a bit cliché — but they lift each other up. It's good to celebrate that.

LIANNA: That's how it's done. And I really even see or hear the conversations that men are having about women in our industry. There's a deep-rooted respect for what — I can't speak for myself — but for the women at this table who have been here for 20-plus years. Kudos to you guys because you're making a lot of room for the younger generation and even when you're not at the table you still are. Your opinion matters.

TANYA: And the relationships that are built are really strong relationships, they're not — I have this perception of men building relationships in their careers or in their industry that is, I'm back to that transactional piece. It's got a layer to it and I'm sure they play golf and I am sure they're buddy-buddy, but I know that I can pick up the phone and call you, hands down. And you get to be emotional.

Q: How would you say your leadership style has evolved as you have navigated this male-dominated industry?

LINDA: It's matured, I'd say. Getting over the initial fear of being a nuisance or speaking up too much and, again, learning to demand the respect that you've earned. I'm a trade supplier, I am not a builder like the majority of this room, but I always used to say I go to visit builders like yourselves and it was me and there were two other guys who did the same job as me for other companies and they were men. And I'd walk into a room and just to be perceived at the same level as them, I had to earn my way up and I had fight for it.

Meanwhile, at the same time, I'm a gas fitter and they're not; I'm actually qualified and they are not. But I had to earn it, because of the assumptions. I think it's matured in the sense that, OK, we've gone through this, we've paved the way, it's time to actually now just get to work and do the right thing, speak up and take care of yourself and take care of your clients.

ALYSSA: I think my leadership has matured over the last couple of years and even significantly in the last year, I would say, with one realization: not everybody has to like me.

And I think as women a lot of times we think that we have to be the boss, but we have to be a team player, we have to make everybody happy, and it's like when you get to that level of, 'No, I have to make the business run because that's my job. I have to do it in a fair and objective way, but not everyone's going to like what I decide to do.' So, I think when you get to the level of deciding that I don't have to be your best friend; we don't have to go out afterwards. And that brings more challenges when you have those personal relationships. I think that changes your leadership style, and I think it makes you better, it makes you sharper, it makes you realize where the priorities lie, which in the end helps your entire team.

TANYA: I would wholeheartedly agree with that. I have an additional layer that's presented itself over the last four or five years, and that's the desire to be a leader who helps others grow, succeed, develop. My win is not only in running the business and the business being successful, it's in my team and my people becoming better at what they do, enjoying what they do, contributing, just growing your team. At this point in my career, that's what I take great pride in from a leadership standpoint. But it has to go hand-in-hand with running the business; one can't come at the expense of the other.

CAROLINE: That was a very hard lesson to learn was that you're not everybody's best friend. And you learn that the first time you go to fire somebody. I cried more than they did. I was bawling. I'll never forget the guy; it was just terrible. But after that, the next one, it was so much easier. But you had to make that first one and you had to learn that, not that you can't be their friend, but there's business and then there's the distinction.

MICHELLE: As I stepped into a leadership position, I was having the thought of what's my personal brand? What's my company brand? What's my family brand? And how am I showing up in all those places in a way that feels authentic to me? I wanted to be really intentional about it. And so, one example would be I will come here and I will talk about women in leadership because that's me. But if somebody asked me to walk in a fashion show or something, I'm probably going to say no because it's not core to those three things. It's my family, both my nuclear family and the larger family, the business, and as an individual.

LIANNA: Staying true to that and not letting someone sway you because there's a lot of wants and people who want this from you, and your phone is ringing all the time, there are so many email requests, but staying true to yourself and saying no, it's a fine art.

Q: Rosaline spoke to this a bit already, but how do you achieve work-life balance? Is that a challenge?

MICHELLE: My most valuable asset is my time. And so now that I'm in a leadership position, there's a couple of things. One is that I am very thoughtful about what I do with my time, what I say yes to, what I say no to, and also I outsource what I can. We do grocery delivery in my family; my husband is an equal partner, so he does a lot of stuff at home; we have a house cleaner. I treasure my time and I want to be there for my family, so if I'm going to do that, I can't say yes to everything that comes up.

So, I have to be really intentional. I have three questions I ask myself: is it good for my family; is it good for my emotional, physical health; is it good for my business? And I use those lenses to frame how I decide what I'm going to do with my time, what I say yes to, what I invest my time and energy into. It needs to be at least good for one of those three things.

TANYA: What I find, too, with the notion of time is, when you say yes, show up and be very present. I don't care if that's a meeting, if that is an initiative: put the phone away during a

meeting. Spend the half hour, try not to be in two and three places at the same time. I think that that dilutes the value of the time.

ANITA: I noticed your phone is there, Tanya, but it's turned over.

TANYA: My phone will always be turned down, and it's respect for the party, but it's also respect for time; I value this time. And the other thing, if we book half an hour, I'm going to give you a half hour. Don't ask for an hour. Don't take an hour. So, that's about showing up, being present, and then moving on to the next thing, because we have competing priorities constantly.

CAROLINE: But it's also that you have to stop feeling guilty saying no, and then having to explain why you can't. And that's been a really hard lesson.

KAYLIE: Back to work-life balance, technology is very influential in how we're managing our work-life balance right now, too. I like the idea of coming up with these questions: is this good for me, my family, my business, because home time should be family time, whether that's a single person, a couple, a family, etc. It's so easy to have our devices and bringing our work into our home in the evenings or weekends and that applies for male or female, but I think that we have this sort of obligation or feeling that we can't disconnect from it. So, it's becoming even more challenging to strike a balance between the two, I find.



ALYSSA: I think when we get to a certain level as well, there's still an expectation that we're taking our laptops home every night, and we're going to go through emails and we'll be working outside of our extended hours that most of us already work. And I think we have to get to a point where we realize multi-tasking is not a good thing, it's a bad thing. Growing up, that's the first thing you want to put in your resumé, 'Hey, I can multi-task, look at how many things I can do at once.' As we get older and we actually start asking ourselves the important questions, we realize you need to focus, be present and allot your time in an intentional way so that you're not wasting it on items, agendas that are going to get you nowhere. You're not benefiting.

TANYA: And for everything you say yes to you're saying no to something else, and that's another cliché, but it's true. What are your guiding principles to say yes, because you can easily say yes to so many things and once you start saying yes, you get asked more.

ROSALINE: I started my business because my personal life was too complicated to go back to a conventional office. And I made very specific choices about how I was going to balance my personal life and my business. I worked 35 to 40 hours a week when my kids were little and

started my business that way. And my competitors were working 60 to 70 hours a week. My competitors were men. And my success matched theirs.

And then I chose to partner up in business with a man who also is the caregiver in his family and we shared the same kinds of ideas about how to balance things. And I don't think there's enough stories like that that are well known. I'm sure it's more than just me out there who's done something kind of out of the ordinary that way but I think it is really important for women to know stories like that and to know that they don't just have to choose between nine to five and bring your phone home and answer emails, that you can carve out other options for yourself in the workplace.

LIANNA: That's true. I have had heavy guilt coming into summer when my kids are off school and I am less seen at the office. But I'm still just as present, I'm just elsewhere. COVID helped that along so that we can work a little more remotely, but I do have that same amount of guilt for not being seen physically there because I'm also caregiving at home. But I've stopped feeling a little bit of guilt with that too because, you know what, I'm where I want to be and where I need to be, and I can do it.

ROSALINE: But instead of guilt, you're setting a really important example for people in your office.

TANYA: It's interesting, Lianna, because I'm now at a point where I design work to not only suit me but to be most productive and more satisfying. I love getting up at 5 a.m.; it's a quiet household, I get to take a moment for myself, plan my day in my mind, then I'll dive in, then I will come back out. And I've managed to let the people around me know that this is how I work. Sure, any time between 3 to 4:30 p.m. I may disappear. And I've stopped explaining that I'm putting in my time, by the way, just starting at 5 a.m. I don't owe them an explanation anymore; it's just this is the way I work. I will be available to you anytime you need to reach me, that's key for me about managing time is being available to the people who need you. And then from there it's designing it to suit our productivity levels.

ROSALINE: There are very different self-care things now that I manage more people and have a different kind of job, more pressure in my job. And you just have to be really matter of fact about how you take care of yourself, make choices to take care of yourself.

Q: What is one piece of advice you wish you had heard early on in your career?

LINDA: Do not rely on your youth or your appearance because those will fade. The only thing that will remain and continue to grow is your intellect, your knowledge. Those are the things to focus on. And honestly, not playing into that whole 'girl trade' role; just don't rely on that, rely on your brains.

CAROLINE: I don't think it could be better said.

KAYLIE: Who can follow that?

MICHELLE: I would say trust yourself. Listen to your own inner voice. Also, it was said earlier but I'd say it again: showing up on time, being prepared, looking for those leadership opportunities, looking for opportunities to say to your boss, 'I got this' and then you take care of it and when you give it back to your boss it's done and it's done well. If you're aspiring to leadership, those basic — it's that discipline. Keep on doing that day after day and the opportunities will come.

CAROLINE: But going back to appearance, dress appropriately, don't dress like you're going clubbing. You're on the job site or you're meeting a client: dress appropriately. That's what I would tell any young woman coming in. And dress for the job that you want.

TANYA: Mine would be to — today, so back then it wasn't an option — find a woman who you can turn to, who will coach you, be a sounding board, help nurture your confidences, someone you can confide in, in terms of what you're experiencing. The one is the confidence piece for sure, trust yourself and develop your own voice. The other part of doing that is to find a woman and it can be a personal friend, ideally in a career setting, but I wish I had had that. I had male role models, but they were male role models. That would be a game-changer for women today.

CAROLYN: You need that someone to tell you it's OK.

TANYA: I don't think I could ever use my male mentors as sounding boards. It was more like, 'What do you need from me? What do you think I need to do?' I was taking instruction; I was absorbing knowledge. Don't get me wrong, there was value there. Just it was limited.

CAROLYN: When I was starting, there were really no women in the field, but I was fortunate to have a few men who would say, 'Have you thought of that, or have you done that?' One said to me, 'This is a stepping stone to your career, how can I help you?' That was the best. And I would say that to anybody coming through my door, or somebody who's young. I'm not going to be the end-all, you're not going to end your career with me; but to look at it that way, as a stepping stone to where you want to go.

I think even guys, as well as women, we all need that mentor in a career. It's hard when you're young. I came off a dairy farm into construction, then into an office with the formal suits, and then back into construction, which I always liked. But it was hard. There weren't many women. And I think, for us, it's nice, too, if we can pay it forward.

ALYSSA: My advice to anyone, women and men in any industry, is to know your value, know your worth, and don't be so eager to compromise just to fit in, but to be able to have that confidence to speak your mind. Take the chance.

Q: What is the one thing you wish every woman in this industry understood that they have within themselves; what power they already possess?

ALYSSA: The ability to say no.

LIANNA: I like Alyssa's answer. Because saying no — they know in a room full of key players, whether it be men, whether be women, if you are young in your career. We want them to be like, 'Yes, yes, I'll do this, I'll do this.' But by saying yes to all of that, you actually need to find where to say no and it's strategic. So that's a very powerful one.

TANYA: I love the power of saying no, but I think we all could relate to the fact that we felt that we didn't know if we had a voice. Is it our voice? Is it somebody else's voice?

For me that's the redefining mentorship — I don't even like the word mentorship anymore — It's really just find someone who's your cheerleader.

ROSALINE: My answer would be just that young women know that they have the ability to succeed, because I wasted an enormous amount of energy in self-talk, 'You can do this. Your competitors are doing this, they're not as worried about this as you are, you're going to be fine, you can succeed.' And what a waste of time and energy. So, if we could save other people all of that, that would be worth it.

LIANNA: Do you think women need to go through a little bit of that though? I would love to teach my daughter to save her time and energy going through that, but it just feels like a rite of passage.

ROSALINE: To some degree any human being has to do that, but I overdid it.

Q: What role do women play in shaping the future of the housing industry?

CAROLINE: A big one.

ANITA: In what way?

ROSALINE: Our industry is so stalled, so gummed up. We're following these rules that are just a tangled mess. And it's nobody's fault in particular. It's so slowly these problems have compounded and we find ourselves in an untenable situation. And we're going to need some out-of-the-box thinking and some different approaches to problem solving. And so, we now have different minds at the table and different ways of thinking at the table than were at the table when many of those problems compounded themselves. I think it's a huge advantage.

TANYA: That's brilliant, as far as I'm concerned. It's true; that's calling it like it is. I always liken our industry to turning the *Titanic*. And you can see the iceberg. You know what's coming,

you're not sure if you're going to be able to do anything about it. The outside-the-box thinking is — it's just so slow to move.

ANITA: Mind you, COVID showed us how the industry can pivot really quickly when it has to. So, it is capable of doing it, just not most of the time.

TANYA: So, there's no excuse. I don't know if it's waiting for itself. What's it waiting for?

ROSALINE: It's waiting for us to step up.

Q: Aside from what you've already said, what advice would you give to others, male or female, who aspire to a leadership role in business?

MICHELLE: Continuing to show up and do your thing, work hard, stay out of the drama. Also, as you rise, especially as a woman, people are going to criticize you, as they would maybe anybody. So, it's just to have that inner knowing of your worth and the value that you bring to the table and just not getting caught up in that stuff and just staying focused on doing an excellent job. And bringing what you can to the table to try to make your company better, your industry better. And doing that again and again and making a habit of showing up in that way, I think, then you look back and it speaks for itself.

CAROLINE: Keep learning. There's always new stuff coming. Just because you've graduated from school and you're on to your career, you have to keep learning, there's always something new coming.

TANYA: Mine too is ask stupid questions.

CAROLINE: The only stupid question is the one you don't ask.

TANYA: That's actually where I'm going with it. It's OK. It makes it permissible to ask questions.

LIANNA: And especially in a leadership role, asking those questions in front of your team; you're setting an example.

ALYSSA: And it's OK to be wrong in front of your team. I think it's better that they see you be wrong and they can see how you handle that to teach them that it's safe and it's OK.

ROSALINE: And that you rely on them, because individually we can't get it all right. That's why we have our team. So, to have that kind of presence of mind, it makes a big difference.

TANYA: That's the value in the collaborative approach frankly.

Q: What strategies helped you build credibility and influence early in your career? What did you do to basically gain that respect?

TANYA: What Michelle said.

LINDA: We keep going back to Michelle.
[They all laugh]

ALYSSA: Showing up, be prepared —

TANYA: Work ethic.

MICHELLE: You have to be prepared, and we've all done it, or I don't know, I certainly have many times, where you show up, you have to make a presentation, you're not prepared, and it's obvious.



TANYA: You still have to be good at flying by the seat of your pants though.

MICHELLE: Well, once you get to a certain level and you know your stuff really well, you can do a little more winging, but I like to, if I ever have to make a presentation, at least read through the slides once. You need to be prepared. You need to, as a woman especially, I think you need to know your stuff.

ALYSSA: You also need to be prepared based on your audience. That same presentation, you could give in five different ways, depending on who it is that's receiving that information. So, I think it's not only the topic, but who's going to be in the room, what are they going to be looking for, and how do I hit on those points to show that you are prepared, you're intelligent, you're competent in your role.

ROSALINE: I think you also have to look for opportunities and be open to opportunities, so doing a job that just needs doing. It might not be exactly what you want to do, but it may be a great opportunity. Stepping into those moments of opportunity and having your eyes open for them I think is really valuable. But also distinguishing between the opportunities that you want to step into and those that are leading you down a path you don't really want to go on. Combining those two skill sets is really good for expanding your experience and growing your abilities and showing people what you're capable of and also not ending up in a job you hate.

CAROLINE: Expanding on that is being able to see work and then do the work as opposed to waiting for someone to tell you to do something. Being proactive and actually like, 'Oh hey, I see that needs to be done let me do that' shows initiative and I think that's what some of the young kids need today to have is that initiative to go and do something as opposed to always waiting for someone to spoon feed them.

TANYA: To build off of being prepared is being intentional. There's being prepared; if you're giving a presentation, certainly, that makes sense. Don't wing that. But I can think of countless meetings I go into, and I have nothing in front of me, but I have a very clear idea on why I'm there, what I want to get out of it, managing the outcome, because I'm being intentional. And I think that's key to getting the best out of the time, getting the best out of people. Also listening for cues. You've got to be able to shift as the conversation shifts. And all that happens in our head but it's based on experience. I think it's a skill that's important; being intentional is important as well as being prepared.

Q: Do you have any mentors, men or women, or both?

CAROLYN: I've had many, for different reasons. Some mentors are great for this and some mentors are great at that, so it's nice to have several mentors. But I've had them through the years. I wouldn't say they were intentionally mentors; I just listened to what they had to say.

LIANNA: Mine is actually my business partner, who's also my husband. He just naturally became my mentor because, like one of you said, when you step aside — and it takes a lot of confidence to step aside when you actually know the answer — but letting somebody have the opportunity to also share their answer, it gave me a runway I didn't even know I had.

MICHELLE: When I was coming up through the ranks, all my mentors were men. It was my dad first, for sure, and his attitude was always, 'Whatever the problem is, we got it.' He was always very calm, and so I soaked that up. And then I had, between my cousin and my uncle and my former boss were all men, and I soaked up a lot from them. But now I find the mentors that I'm seeking out are women and they're often peers. And we just have peer groups almost like this where I can bring issues and ask, because women leaders will approach things a little differently from men leaders and can sometimes understand a bit better.

TANYA: Mine parallels Michelle's almost to a T. I don't think I knew it until you just said it: I soaked up as much as I could from my father, then I shifted to another mentor in my career, and I think I had this perception that a mentor had to be all things. And I think I realized that they don't have to be all things and you don't sort of throw out the baby with bath water. You can take as much or as little as you want from that individual who you want to learn from, who's willing to impart.

LIANNA: I had a mentor to start, but the mentorship is growing, at this table, within HOWL, there's so many well-respected women, I'm just in awe.

TANYA: Mine petered, and I didn't know it, and I didn't know enough to look elsewhere. And so, you realize mentorship is a living thing, and that's a bit of an aha moment, just around the table, it can evolve and you can be looking for different things. Now it is definitely peers and mostly women.

KAYLIE: It'll be interesting 20 years from now to ask this same question. I've heard two or three of you mention that your dad was your first mentor. My dad was as well, he still is; I'm kind of at the end of my runway with all of the good mentorship I can take from him and ready to seek out professional mentorship from a female in this industry. But as women at this table, we are now going to be the mentors for daughters, nieces, etc., so 20 years from now it'd be nice to ask the question and have all the women at the table say, 'Oh my mom was my mentor paving the way for me in the construction industry.' Because I don't think anybody's first answer was their mother and maybe that's an assumption, but a lot of fathers got us to where we are here and I hope that 20 years from now it'll be mothers or aunts or friends.

LINDA: This is a tough one. When I went to trade school, the day I walked in, the receptionist sitting at the desk there, who was a man by the way, looked up and said, 'I think you're in the wrong place.' Unfortunately, there was no mentor, neither male nor female.

The receptionist, once he realized I was actually there for the gas fitters course, got all excited, got up, grabbed my arm — back then apparently that wasn't a big deal — dragged me into the classroom, made people in the first row move and plopped me down right in the front seat. And the professor looked down at me and said, 'Great, it's going to be one of those years.'

There were no women I knew of in the industry back then. So I didn't actually have any mentors. Now I have you guys, and it's very different. Caroline, I look at you, definitely. One of the only female presidents we've ever had of the home builders' association. This is my mentorship now, and I never had that before.

TANYA: And you succeeded in spite of it, or despite it.

LINDA: Well, it was the fear of failure. Imagine I'm in this college for all sorts of welders, tool and die, gas fitters, auto mechanics, plumbers. It's a tradesperson college in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and I'm the first woman to physically walk in the doors, never mind take a course, and it was this intense fear of failure. Not only did I finish, but I finished at the top of the class, because of that fear. I didn't want to be the trailblazer woman that walks in and then fails.

ANITA: What drew you to that course in the first place?

LINDA: I was going to school in the GTA at York University, the French campus, which was right next to Enbridge Gas. Enbridge used to have retail stores where they sold barbecues and appliances and fireplaces. And it was just literally a part-time job while I was going to university and I thought to myself, 'Gee, this would be really neat; I could be a gas fitter.' I don't know why I thought that. So, once I finished university, I went back to college to get my gas fitter's licence and here I am.

LIANNA: Have you ever gone back to your trade school? Have they ever invited you back?

LINDA: Probably three or four years after I graduated with my two licences, I did hear they had, I think, three women attend the school. I was like, 'Yes! Three!'

ANITA: Linda, did you have trouble finding a job at first?

LINDA: No, it just kind of worked out. I went to school to be a French teacher. That's why I was going to university. The reason I even leaned into this job in the first place was because it was a part-time job at this big letter E place. I lived in a high-rise condo. I didn't even know what Enbridge Gas was. We didn't have a gas bill in a high-rise.

Once I finished trade school, I stayed within the company. I did move around quite a bit into different roles, which was a good thing because I learned a little bit about everything. I learned about logistics and parts and I learned service and about billing and infrastructure.

TANYA: Did you go out in the field and actually do gas fitting?

LINDA: For a very short period of time, yes.

TANYA: Because, if I understood it, you leveraged that within Enbridge to move around and grow within different roles.

LINDA: That's right. I did some HVAC design as well. It really does come back to, again, I'm speaking as a trade supplier here, but going in to see people and just knowing that I have that knowledge that it's assumed my male competitors have, but they don't. And it's really come in handy for me in tailoring my services for my partners.

Years ago there was this new plumbing product that came out — now it's the norm and it's used everywhere — but it was a new technology at the time, drain water heat recovery. I decided to hold a training session for a bunch of the builders and get them to see this product, see how to install it so they understand for their trades what they've got to do.

All these different builders and their plumbers are coming in (to the model we were using for the training) and — I look back now and maybe I set myself up for this, but I always show up with cookies and coffee — we're meeting in the kitchen of the model home as people are coming in, I'm like, 'There's a tray of cookies and coffee.' And then finally I look up and say, 'OK, I think everyone's here, we're going to go downstairs now.'

People kind of look at me, we walked down into the basement, go into the mechanical room, and I'm like, 'OK guys, we're going to install a drain water heat pump recovery pipe together' and they all look at me and I've got these big burly plumbers looking down at me like, 'You're going to teach me how to install?' It's just that automatic assumption, 'You were the coffee lady. I thought you were the assistant.'

It was terrifying. I was probably about 25 or 26 at the time, so I'd been in the industry already since I was 22, but still just that fear. And I still remember that to this day. It was the first time it was blatantly in my face where they were telling me, 'You can't teach me.'

It's gotten better over time. So, the question you had about is it changing quickly enough? Back then I would have said absolutely not, but I'd say just even in the last 10 years the pace is really starting to pick up. You go out on sites, you see women site supers, foremen, trades and even on this side as a trade supplier, we're actually respected enough to be given a chance to place a bid on a project whereas before it was the old boys club. Could it still improve? Absolutely, but it's definitely at a much quicker pace now, which is great.

