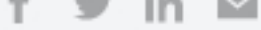


Two Female Bricklayers Build Solid Careers

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For both of them, it started with a flier.

Jacqueline Townsend was in an unemployment office in the fall of 2004 after she had lost a job as a telemarketer. She saw a Chicago Women in Trades flier announcing an orientation session, and although she had never imagined working in a trade, she had nothing to lose.

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It turned out that the event announced on the flier had taken place two days before, but when she called about it, she was invited to attend another information session. After that, Townsend completed the 12-week Technical Opportunities Program and applied for a bricklayer's apprenticeship program. She didn't get in the first time, but she wasn't giving up.

Six months later, she was accepted as a pre-apprentice. Then she was an apprentice for three-years, making 50% of a journeyman's pay. Now, as a masonry instructor at Paul Simon Job Corps in Chicago, she earns \$45.38 an hour, and her total benefits package is \$77.30 an hour.

"I never thought that I would make the money that I make at all. I never did." Instead of living from paycheck to paycheck, she owns a home, cars, takes vacations, and can even help her family out.

Most of her career has been with Iwanski Masonry in Chicago, where she had a positive relationship with the owner.

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"In the field, I did have situations where I dealt with racism, I dealt with sexism, I dealt with homophobia, all of the above. I had a situation where I was sexually harassed by my foreman, and it got dealt with very quickly. When the issue came up with the foreman at the time, I happened to have a good relationship with the owner of the company, so I spoke up," she says. "He spoke with the foreman and I got a verbal apology in front of everyone, so everyone knew what he said, and what he did, and, a week later, he was fired from the company."

Townsend says that working in masonry has a lot of benefits besides the pay. "It gave me some sense of pride about myself and what I do. I can drive past buildings that I've worked on and a specific area where I made my mark on the building. It's something that will be here when I'm gone. Just to be able to do the work and work with my male counterparts, it made me feel really, really good about myself."

She's grateful to the men who were sometimes hard on her when they worked side by side. She recalls asking one guy, " 'Why are you such a jerk?' He finally said, it's because I know you can do it."

She wants to pass that sense of accomplishment on to others by training them. She first taught safety, and now she teaches bricklaying full time. She enjoys seeing others succeed when they build something. And just her being there, as the trainer, encourages women, she says. "Women still get a small piece of the pie. and we have to prove ourselves every single day, over and over again, that we have the right to do the work that we do. It's challenging not just physically, but emotionally, to always feel like you've got to work harder just to show that you do belong on the job next to them."

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Liliane Calderone also learned about Chicago Women in Trades' Technical Opportunities Program from a flier. She went with a friend to pass out fliers for the WIC program, but instead she passed out the Technical Opportunities Program fliers. As a result, she went to the orientation.

"I thought it was great," she says. "I've always been really good with working with my hands and tools and things like that, but I never considered the opportunity to actually work with my hands as a career. It opened a big door for me, and it changed my mind on a lot of things."

Like Townsend, Calderone fell in love with bricklaying, traveling through the stages of pre-apprentice, apprentice, and journeyman. A few months ago, she was promoted to foreman at J. & E. Duff Masonry Contractors. Her employer is always looking to hire more women, she says. While men on the job might give her a hard time, it is usually "I'm just joking" kind of humor, she says. She has never taken action and gone to her employer about it. She tends to shrug it off.

"You're seeing a lot of progress even if it's baby steps. Keep marching forward, that's all."

She is proud of the buildings that she has helped create. In particular, she is proud of her contribution to Chicago's Elmhurst Hospital, a two-year project with a lot of brickwork.

She is excited about her new position as a forewoman. "I think it's a great opportunity, and I've been wanting this opportunity, so I finally got it, and I hope to do well."

As an extension of her work, Calderone sits on the executive council for the International Union of Bricklayers. "That was a whole new world coming from out in the field," she says. She is pleased that three women were appointed to the executive council in 2015. "You're seeing a lot of progress even if it's baby steps. Keep marching forward, that's all."

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