

NAWIC Annual Conference 2023, Portland, Oregon. August 9-12, 2023

Report by: Amy Pacheco

The Annual Conference in Portland was an informative and inspirational event where NAWIC Leaders and Members gathered to celebrate Women in Construction and learn from each other in meaningful ways. There were many accomplished speakers who provided valuable insight into what it takes to succeed as a woman in the construction field. This was my first NAWIC Conference of any sort, and I really enjoyed the experience. I would highly recommend any new member to consider attending a regional or national event in the future. We had 14 members attend this event.

On Wednesday 8/9, I attended a special session for Chapter Treasurers since I am preparing to assume this role in the upcoming year. This was perhaps one of my favorite sessions of the week, as it was intimate and specific to what I should know as Chapter Treasurer. I really valued the input from these experienced women. I learned the general outline of what is expected in the position, and many nuances involved in managing the Chapter finances. There was a heavy emphasis on compliance with National standards and our Chapter bylaws, and I came to understand my role in making sure our Chapter follows the rules. It was encouraging to know that in addition to the mentorship I receive in my own Chapter, NAWIC National and other Chapters are willing to be a resource. I really got the sense that NAWIC has a good structure to follow, from National down to local Chapters, the resources are there, and the common threads are evident. I took this very seriously and will apply what I learned in my new role as Treasurer.

Wednesday evening was the reception party at Deschutes Brewery. I had the opportunity to sit and talk with a few of the local Oregon NAWIC members. The next morning, Thursday 8/10, was the opening Keynote event with Dr. Rhianna Rogers. She delivered a very informative speech on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and encouraged us each to consider how it might impact our companies and communities. She recounted her experience helping an under-developed community in Latin America save their land from exploitation. The main point of her story was that communication is necessary to reach the best results for both sides. We need to have the courage to speak up and stand our ground, and the other party will have to bend so that everyone gets a fair result. This will not happen if we do not speak up and take action in our own communities and places of work.

I attended a session on Effective Coaching with M.J. Clark. She provided a very useful strategy for coaching employees. She started with the psychology of how people (employees) process information through their own personal beliefs, and consequently their emotions drive their behavior. Knowing this, leaders can effectively change employee behavior through proper communication. This basically sums up Emotional Intelligence. Understanding where people are coming can help us phrase our feedback in a useful way that is not triggering. The end result is better teamwork and positive change for employees who need improvement in their roles. We participated in a group activity where I personally received some good advice and feedback from my group.

I attended a session called The Value of Personal Brand with Dr. Kellie McElhaney. This was motivational from a personal standpoint. Basically, we are all responsible for our own personal brand – ME.com. We all need to be the head marketer for *ourselves*. She presented an interesting Ven diagram showing “How you see yourself”, “How others see you”, and both intersecting in the middle as “Your personal brand”. She led a fun interaction where we re-phrased some of the limiting beliefs we have about ourselves. For

example, if you have been told you are “too emotional”, you can rephrase that to “Empathy is my superpower”. She recommended that we all work on our “Brand Star” which is just a five-point depiction of what our brand attributes are. We then went into analyzing how our identity is shaped by these attributes, and whether we wanted to modify anything for a better outcome. I found this session to be very informative with some new concepts I had never seen before.

That evening we attended a regional gathering at Skanska. They prepared a lovely rooftop cocktail hour with appetizers and drinks. I met some of the NAWIC sisters from other Chapters in the PNW region. Our Chapter went out for a nice dinner afterward, which was a really fun time of bonding.

On Friday I attended a session by Pat Williams, a founding member of Kick Ass Careers (with Jamie McMillan). She shared her inspirational story of growing up in foster care to eventually earning her college degree and joining the trades. She also has a background in social work. She had a very powerful message about advocating for yourself as well as your sisters in the trades.

The final session I attended was Friday afternoon. Shannon Vogel presented a very informative topic on Social Media. As an Accounting professional, I rarely deal with social media but I was curious how this tool can possibly help my company. She went into great detail about the pros, cons, and targets of each of the major social media sites. I was surprised to learn some of the facts about posting, such as it’s best to post on Facebook between 1-4pm on Wednesday – Saturday. I would have never known! She shared a plethora of other tips that I made sure to keep.

Overall I am happy with my decision to attend the Annual Conference. I met many great women who relate to what we do in the construction industry. The speakers were all very professional and delivered useful information that I will add to my knowledge going forward.

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