



“Women of 130”

The grassroots/DIY approach to mentorship, community and retention in the trades

How we got started:

Up until five years ago, women in L.U. 130 represented less than 1% of our membership. Some of us sisters kept in loose contact with each other, mostly through volunteering at Chicago Women in Trades. Many did not complete the program, were unemployed or underemployed, or had generally difficult experiences getting their education. After a change in leadership in our local and our apprenticeship program, we had a drastic change in opportunity. The application process became legitimately open and fair, resulting in the top candidates getting spots in the program, regardless of gender or race. The last five years have increased our numbers by 300%! A few of us Journeywomen decided we would not let these sisters fall through the cracks, wash out or quit if we could help it. We wanted our long awaited sisters to thrive. It started with just three of us Journeywomen sitting down together and coming up with a rough plan of what we could do for them.

Our Mission:

Build, sustain and maintain a safe community of apprentices and Journeywomen. Provide solidarity, support, compassion and mentorship by sisters, for sisters. Encourage and groom apprentices for leadership. Give every sister multiple contacts to reach out to for technical questions, social guidance and support. To teach by example many different ways and perspectives to reach success.

Our Methods:

- Maintain a private Facebook group to check in, post union events, post pictures of piping victories or failures, ask questions, share opportunities and maintain community.
- Monthly meet-ups. Usually before the union meetings. Hands on project that addresses questions that have come up. We all then go to the union meeting together, encouraging participation and visibility.
- Individual calls monthly to each apprentice (sometimes more if there's a situation going on). Three basic questions: How's work? How's school? Is everything cool with your car and you home situation?
- Volunteer together (every other month average). Either for Chicago Women in Trades or the union.
- Tutoring whenever sisters ask. We put together a study group or tutor session whenever asked.

Looking forward and challenges:

We actively encourage our apprentice members to lead. This has been most successful. We try to not be dominated by a single “leader”. In addition, not everyone is enthusiastic about participation. Some sisters choose to keep to themselves and generally struggle. Some Journeywomen are thrilled to help and finally have a community. 90% of our new apprentices from the shift in the last five years are very active. Almost all are working and thriving. We maintain a “policy” of keeping the door open, meaning: we keep inviting every sister whether she shows up or not. We remind our apprentices regularly that we often rise and fall together. This shared mentality helps with difficult personalities: keep it civil and friendly, no drama! This is bigger than us as individuals. We try to keep showing by example instead of lecturing a misguided sister.



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