

Tools for Success - Chapter 1: Nice Work if You Can Get It

Getting Hired in the Trades

The construction industry is unique in many ways, including the transitory nature of the workforce. Weather, seasonal challenges, and the completion of a project all impact the industry's workers. Both men and women working in the trades look for work much more often than other kinds of workers because we are laid off when a job finishes or the season changes. Working regularly is critical though, because we have to support our families and because we need to work a certain number of hours to progress through our apprenticeship programs. Tradeswomen, unfortunately, look for work more often than tradesmen, for this reason: we are very likely to encounter discrimination in hiring and in layoffs. We need to work to remedy this discrimination through advocacy and having a good understanding at how the industry works.

Unless you're a member of union that handles all the job referrals for its members, or at least its apprentices, you're going to have to find most of your work on your own. Here are some suggestions for doing it well.

Prepare a Resume

Though you won't always need one, resumes are increasingly important for the trades as they are for most other occupations. Resumes should include:

- 1) Your trade and union local #
- 2) A summary of your relevant qualifications, be realistic and include only those skills in which you have some work experience and/or training.
- 3) A list of past jobs beginning with the most recent jobs, and going back to include all related work. For each job list the name, address and phone number of someone who can give you a reference. If you are a new tradeswoman, you should include some or all of your unrelated employment experience and emphasize transferrable skills.
- 4) A list of relevant training and education, including certifications.
- 5) A list of achievements, volunteer work and hobbies - this can include groups you have worked with (church, school, community, etc.) and any other activities that show your energy level, commitment and experience.
- 6) Three personal references, with mail and email addresses, phone numbers and relationship (former supervisor, instructor etc.)

Find Out Where the Jobs Are

- 1) Look for jobs on city, state or federal projects. The contractors on these projects should be looking for women to meet affirmative action goals. Typical government projects are

construction and renovation of roads, bridges, schools, government office buildings, hospitals, libraries and other public facilities.

- 2) Contact your local tradeswomen's support organization and other nonprofit organizations that connect workers to construction employment. A list of tradeswomen's organization can be found at: <http://chicagowomenintrades2.org/resources-3/tradeswomens-organizations/>
- 3) Call your apprentice coordinator or union business agent for job leads. Check in regularly - at least every two weeks.
- 4) Call contractors directly (if permissible by your union hall and/or apprenticeship program). Ask to speak with the person in charge of equal Employment Opportunity and send your resume to this person.
- 5) Keep informed about new job sites by traveling around you area. Read newspapers and construction publications; contractors in Chicago, for example, publish a weekly newsletter called the dodge report which lists all new construction in the area. Search on line, many state and city agencies, such as the Public Buildings commission, identify ongoing or upcoming projects.
- 6) Develop a network of people who can help you find jobs. Call co-workers, former supervisors and form employers frequently.
- 7) Attend union meetings and volunteer for union events and activities.
- 8) Attend company-sponsored meetings, events and picnics. Get to know the people who can help you find work.

Try these suggestions as you apply for jobs:

Traditionally, looking for work in the construction industry has been centered around visiting construction sites, though more and more the process is shifting to on-line and other applications processes. If you do go on site, here are some tips to keep in mind.

- 1) Some women have had success going with another woman to apply for jobs.
 - If parking is hard to find, one of you can drive around the block while the other makes inquires.
 - If you're both hired you can support each other on the site.
- 2) Arrive early 45 minutes before the start of the workday, dressed for work, with your tools, lunch, PPE (hardhat, safety vest, safety glasses and gloves).
- 3) Tell the foreman, steward or contractor:
 - what kind of work you want, and
 - your qualifications and experience
- 4) Many tradeswomen recommend taking copies of all required documentation, including:
 - Resume
 - Union card and identification
 - Any certifications you have earned

5) If you're not hired

- Focus on making as strong a positive impression as possible.
- Ask to fill out an application for future work. If they are not taking applications or keeping other written records, leave you resume (ask them to stamp the date on it first).
- In your notebook, record the name of the company, the name of the person you talked to and what was said, the location of the site and the date.

6) Even if you're not hired right away, be persistent!

- ask about work at other sites
- ask when they will be hiring
- go back again and follow up on any timelines they give you

7) If you think you are experiencing discrimination, see Chapter "When Push Comes to Shove"

Ideas from Experienced Tradeswomen

"I have never ever been hired from filling out an application online. It does help to have a resume to provide to a foreman/Superintendent/owner as I find them on site. My process goes typically like this: we generally know when layoff is approaching. We start calling fellow/sister bricklayers and see where the work is. As work get slow or I get laid off I send out a mass text to any and all connections that would lead to work or work leads. I call my business agents and union representatives as well as friendly BAs and reps from another local). Then I go to job sites and follow up on leads. I will stop by multiple jobsites, and intentionally hit as many jobs run by the same masonry contractor. My intention being that they talk about me and to spark interest in inquiring about who I am and my work rep. This technique is typically the most successful for me, above handing out resumes." Vanessa Casillas, Bricklayer

"Go to union meetings. Volunteer at Union events. Write thank you notes to everyone you work with and everyone you talk to." Anne Kahle, Pipefitter

"I know that it's a part of construction culture that many people won't ever know about unless you spell it out for them. Being this aggressive doesn't happen in white collar careers and even some trades. It's also important for apprentices to understand there will be rejection and it will happen several times before you get hired. It can be really hard to take blow after blow and still show up smiling and giving your best impression of yourself. It takes a lot of emotional strength to want to head out to random jobsites knowing you will be rejected. And still do it day after day until you find a job. No one talks about that part of it." Vanessa Casillas, Bricklayer