

West Virginia Women Work Come to Virginia

Several months ago, I got an email from my navigator, Ron Leonard as an introduction to Janis Gunel. Ron is always thinking very progressively about matching up people who can help people. In this case, Janis, a sub-grantee for the Chicago Women in Trades - Equity Partners Project, was offering the services of her organization to Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in Virginia in the building trades, or in the advanced manufacturing arena. Janis offered an opportunity to provide technical assistance to these two sectors in Virginia. A co-facilitator, Nontraditional Employment for Women, NEW” came all the way in from New York to also present.

Their workshop focused on making opportunities for women to be recruited and retained in the construction and manufacturing sectors more visible, readily achievable and more navigable. Why even do this? As the economy continues to grow, there are some reported shortages of skilled workers in the trades. West Virginia Women Work is working to build the skill sets of women and help employers make good hires for a successful employment situation.

Janis and her organization West Virginia Women Work (WVWW) have made it their mission to help employers see ways to shift their recruiting focus in order to take advantage of a whole demographic of potentially valuable employees. Boosting that recruitment and retention edged naturally leads to an edge in bidding on jobs, landing contracts and expanding that bottom line.

We did a dry-run of the concept with just one Sponsor in Virginia, the IBEW JATC in Ashland, Virginia. Gary Duff from IBEW was kind enough to work through the surveys and the initial process so that WVWW could provide a group presentation. Almost a dozen representatives of building trade apprenticeship and advanced manufacturing programs attended the afternoon workshop that we held in our Manassas Regional office. We reached back out for feedback and here are a few of the participant’s comments:

The content was very thorough. The two nonprofits that were in attendance, explained what they did, how they did it, and how they could lend their expertise to those that attended yesterday. They explained the content in easy to understand terminology and made sure everyone was on the same page. Questions were encouraged, so anything that was unclear someone asked a question to clarify. I liked that they asked a lot of questions to the group about personal/company experiences. It made the situations relatable. The content itself was very informative. The handouts that were provided will be helpful in the near future, combined with the notes and contacts I left with.

The style and delivery of the content was what made the seminar. The presenters were personable, enthusiastic, and very intelligent. It is easy to read information from a pamphlet, but the hard part is to engage the crowd. A “tough crowd” is a very real thing, and if you aren’t engaged the information can go in one ear and out the other. Sometimes longer seminars, such as this one, could potentially grow dull. But I was engaged the entire time. I was excited when I left because I felt like I learned a lot and was motivated to take what I learned back to our company and apprenticeship program.

Eye opener! Great resources. Great discussions. It was good to have women’s perspective on how to educate me (a man) on how to reach out to women with an interest and is capable of succeeding in my industry and more so on how to inform them that they can be successful in my industry.

