



Pre-Apprenticeship Hands-On Training

To adequately prepare women for careers in the construction industry, a key component of pre-apprenticeship training is to offer experience working in the field, on a crew, using the tools of the trade. The goal is that students gain enough experience in class to feel confident that they can integrate onto a commercial jobsite successfully. They are exposed to the rigors and challenges of a professional jobsite but in a safe, supportive environment with experienced tradeswomen as instructors and role models. Students graduate pre-apprenticeship field training with a clear understanding of industry expectations, the knowledge that they belong and the confidence necessary to succeed.

Key components of hands on field training:

- 1) **The Tools:** Wearing the tool belt, using power and hand tools, working on ladders and moving at an “industry pace” that demonstrates efficiency and purpose.
- 2) **Tradeswomen Role Models:** students benefit from being taught by experienced tradeswomen from the industry. It takes the surprise out of seeing women doing the work thereby ‘normalizing’ the Tradeswoman. It promotes the idea of tradeswomen as leads and supervisors. One needs to “see it to be it”. Additionally, it fosters support, empowerment, and mentorship among women.
- 3) **Independence:** Female students benefit tremendously from being given challenging tasks with little direction/instruction. The industry demands self-direction, confident decision-making and independence. Class teaches them to trust their ability to ‘figure it out’, and fosters a growth-mindset. Because our culture doesn’t generally foster leadership and independence in girls and women, it’s important to cultivate this attribute in class so that students can become comfortable taking charge of their task.
- 4) **Learn to Learn:** the focus of hands on training isn’t necessarily to teach building concepts as much as to teach the student that they can learn anything. Women often struggle with needing to be proficient to feel confident. If they practice learning new things each week, it reduces anxiety around not being fully skilled. They become comfortable in a learning position. This serves them well in apprenticeship.
- 5) **Construction Culture:** the culture is brash, direct, loud, fast and with little positive feedback. Students practice what it’s like to be spoken to very directly and firmly, and become comfortable working without the affirmations that they are often accustomed to. There is a very strong emphasis on timeliness.
- 6) **Culture of Safety:** practice working in PPE, navigating hazards, succinct and assertive communication, safety meetings, material handling, trip hazards, jobsite etiquette, physical fitness/stretch and flex.
- 7) **Accepting Feedback** with grace and as a way to learn: Instructors provide an evaluation of their students each week. This allows the student to hear directly from the industry how they might improve. This is an opportunity to teach the importance of perseverance, not personalizing feedback, accountability and incorporating feedback as a way to grow.

