

Getting women into the infrastructure support services: let's break down the barriers



8 March celebrates International Women's Day - an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in promoting women in our industry. Amanda Fisher, MD for our Facilities Management, Defence and Justice business shares her journey to the top and what needs to be done to attract more women into the industry.



Today marks International Women's Day. It's a great opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in terms of promoting women in infrastructure support services and changing the perception of our industry.

Is there more that could be done to get even more women into our industry? Yes, certainly. But my story is hopefully a positive example of how women can not only enter this sector and do well but also - if they have the desire and commitment - progress to senior positions.

The Army taught me to be self-aware and how to get things done

After graduating from university, where I studied hotel and catering management, I joined the army. I completed my officer training at Sandhurst and then served seven years as an Army Officer in the Catering Corps.

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My first appointment was leading junior soldiers - 60 young men. In managing them, I learned that communication is key to being an effective leader: keeping it straightforward, using language they understand and being decisive. There's a tendency to overcomplicate things the more experienced you become. But direction comes from clarity. To understand where you are heading.

The Army provided me with leadership skills, self-awareness and the ability to get things done. I've carried the 'serve to lead' principle with me for the whole of my working life.

I left the army to take up a role as Operations Director in the healthcare and facilities management business, going on to take up senior management roles at several high profile companies. I was excited and proud to join Amey last year, becoming Managing Director for the Facilities Management, Defence and Justice business.

Gender has never been an issue for me

The truth is that I have never focused on gender. In the Army Catering Corps, I was one of four women out of 180 Officers. But I never let this become any sort of issue. I focused on outcomes. It was about delivery. So what if you are a man or a woman?

The same is true now. We need to promote the infrastructure services industry to women in order to attract a more diverse workforce. But, for me, it is about capability, commitment and understanding the business and its needs. Not gender.

We have a great history at Amey of providing stellar facilities management, defence support and justice services. Our ability to respond to the needs of clients and end users will determine the future shape and direction of the industry and I'm proud to be part of that.

I work hard to get the right people around me and creating the right team ethos, because running any business is a collective effort.

Times have changed - but more still to be done

I am pleased to say times have changed and, while there is a long way to go, we are attracting more women into the industry. This drives the right organisational behaviours around flexibility to the benefit of all, not just women.

I am really proud that I am one of two female MDs at the executive level of Amey and I am passionate about making sure we continue to promote women at all levels of the organisation, working as one team.

Advice to women starting their careers

What advice would I give to young women starting their career? Be the best at what you do and measure your success against your own goals and values rather than seeking the approval of others.

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Be proactive in seeking credit for your performance, don't wait to be recognised - women can be particularly reticent about this.

Be clear on where you want to be in five years' time but also be flexible. This will help you to recognise opportunities when they arise and take them. When opportunities come your way, be decisive rather than expecting them to be given to you.

You don't have to emulate men in the workplace - be individual. Play to your strengths - acknowledge what is unique about you - you don't have to conform.

Believe in yourself: that leads to confidence. Don't let the under-representation of women deter you from taking a place at the table.

The same advice applies to men

To be honest, this advice can be equally relevant to men as women. We all have a part to play in our organisation, whatever your gender.

But I want to leverage my current position as an MD to help develop and encourage women within our business at all levels, hopefully inspiring women to join and stay in the industry – so they can play a major role in changing the culture for all.

Amanda Fisher

Managing Director – Facilities Management, Defence and Justice