



Jackie MacCarthy, Conifex Power - What Does Gender Equality Mean to Me?

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Jackie moved to Mackenzie, BC in 1974 when her father accepted a position in the local sawmill. Armed with an Office Administration Diploma from the College of New Caledonia (CNC), she joined Finlay Forest Industries in 1988, for a two-week work practicum that soon evolved into a data entry clerk position. She was one of the first employees to have access to computers, including the main frame named Mikey. She remembers doing backup by inserting a good old floppy disk and then storing it in the vault.

“Looking back, I feel taking Office Administration was the “thing to do”. I’m not sure there were many other options for women in a small town or if there were, I just wasn’t open to it,” Jackie explained. She added, “I had never dreamt of becoming an engineer or welder or mechanic or production supervisor and maybe it’s because it just wasn’t staring me in the face. My dad worked in the mill and my mom was an office administrator- that’s what I knew.”



When the newsprint mill started up, a role opened up for a dedicated accounts payable and payroll employee. Jackie took the opportunity to go back to CNC and take part-time accounting courses to further her education. She moved up to become the Assistant newsprint accounting position where she stayed through a variety of owners until the closure of Abitibi Bowater in 2008, although she stayed on as an employee during shutdown to pay salary continuance, help with disposing of assets in the newsprint mill, site security and any other odd jobs required.

When Conifex acquired the site, in 2010, Jackie became Purchaser at the Site II sawmill and stayed there until October 2013 when the old Newsprint site, now in the process of being transformed into an innovative biomass plant called her back. Initially providing project cost accounting support to the capital project, Jackie transitioned to the Office Administrator once the facility went operational in 2015. She now plays a key role on the team including management of materials and services purchasing and receiving, shutdown planning and execution and assisting with hourly payroll.

Jackie, who is married and has two grown sons whom both still live and work in Mackenzie reflected on her journey. “Here I am, 31 years later still working at the same site, which has transformed from producing and selling pulp to producing and selling newsprint to now using residuals from the sawmill to produce and sell green power – what an amazing industry to work in.”

She shared her views on the evolution of diversity, “I have seen many, many changes while working here, not just with different company names or products, but with genders and their roles. When I first started in 1988 there were very few females that worked on the manufacturing side - it was much more common for women to work in office administration. Through the years I have seen a positive shift with women entering the work force in many different roles. At the power plant we have a diverse workforce, with women power engineers, environmental engineers, maintenance planners, and casual clean up.” She summarized her thoughts on the future and challenged Conifex to keep all doors open, “I see women working as superintendents at the mill and charge hands running production lines - it’s fantastic. And why shouldn’t they be? They are people doing jobs that should never have gender stereotypes tied to them. Hopefully one day soon Conifex will have female plant managers - if a woman chooses to do that job.”

Doug Rooke, Vice-President Capital and Power, had this to say, “Jackie has been an integral part of our power plant team since Conifex was formed, contributing broad knowledge of our business processes, systems and people. She is a pleasure to work with and consistently brings a positive attitude to any new challenges we face”

Doug also shared his views on gender equality. “It is my belief is that resilient organizations are created by teams formed of individuals with a wide array of backgrounds, each with differing perspectives, that work together to understand each other's respective viewpoints to tackle complex problems in today's business world. By harnessing workplace diversity, improving effectiveness of workplace communication through awareness and acceptance, organizations can avoid potential pitfalls and capture new opportunities not otherwise possible.”