BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PLANNING

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As time goes on, more women are starting careers in industries that are traditionally male dominated. The organisational, personal, and social barriers that used to prevent women from moving into male dominated industries such as planning, engineering, construction, and other trades are starting to break down, but there is a long way to go before we can claim to have reached true equality in these career paths.

Statistics and Causes.

Over time, it has become clear that women are entering planning professions, but retention rates are poor.

'The number of women in high-level positions in the planning industry is not changing, with the national average of female directors in planning consultancies remaining at 19%, and only 5% of planning silks are female too.'

In terms of professional advancement, women are much more likely to report barriers than their male counterparts. Issues such as a lack of role models, a lack of family-friendly workplace policies and even their gender have been reported as barriers to success.

Studies have shown that approximately 43% of women quit their jobs when they have children, compared

with just 28% of men stating that they have had to reduce their working hours to balance work with their family's needs. In many industries, it is common that it is a lack of flexibility in the workplace that leads to the design for a woman to leave work after starting a family.

Many employers do not offer flexible working policies, and in many industries, part time hours are a barrier to success. For a lot of women, it is simply not possible to forward their careers and balance their work-family life, and this leads to a lack of diversity in leadership roles.

Breaking Barriers.

Back in 2019, the north west branch of Women In Planning Celebrated International Women's Day with an event entitled "Gender Balance – Deeds Not Words". One of the speakers at this event was Lisa Tye, who spoke about the success that she has found with her job share partner Kathryn Jump in an industry where part-time and flexible working practices are perceived as a barrier to success.

'Lisa and Kathryn were together appointed as the National Head of the Planning Team, and between them are responsible for a team of twenty lawyers and a budget of £3million.'

Lisa and Kathryn are smashing through barriers and proving that flexible working practices work in every level of a company.

Training.

Another way to combat inequality in traditionally male-dominated industries is through management training, with a focus on promoting a culture where flexibility is both acceptable and encouraged. Encouraging flexibility throughout all levels of a planning consultancy will create a more productive, understanding culture, that will be just as valuable to men as it is to women.

Coronavirus.

In terms of equality in the workplace, it is possible that COVID-19 may have a positive impact. Businesses have needed to make some major changes to enable their staff to carry on working during the pandemic, and the most common solutions have been remote and flexible working.

For many employees, the sudden shift to remote working has enabled them to better balance time between their families and their careers, and in doing so, has shifted perspectives on success. From the perspective of employers, remote working leads to fewer sick days, greater productivity, and happier staff.

The pandemic has proven that these models do work for employers and employees, and so looking into the future, these working models may become the norm.

Going Forwards.

Diversity and gender equality in professional circles is everyone's responsibility.

'People of all genders need to work together to ensure that everyone's voices are heard, and that gender stereotypes and organisational barriers do not stop individuals from reaching their fullest potential.'

To move forwards into a more equal future, meaningful discussions are needed on how to recruit and retain more women in leadership positions within the planning profession.

Bringing attention to the successes of female-lead companies such as Women In Planning can only help break down barriers, and London First's Empowering Women in Planning Webinar presents offers some tangible takeaways that can help promote equality in planning too.