International Women's Day – Jane Ann Newson

In recognition of all the women celebrating International Women's Day, I would like to give a few words of inspiration.

When I first entered the Public Works industry in 1990 as a salesperson for Clemmer Industries, the biggest challenge I faced was being a woman in a male-dominated industry. Back in the day, many men could not even imagine a female showing up at their yard to take culvert and traffic sign orders.

A key factor in overcoming this hurdle, I believe, was to fit in. I made sure that I knew the products well and dressed appropriately to the environment. If I went to a yard, I wore jeans and work boots, and if I went to an office, I stepped it up a notch with casual pants and casual boots or shoes. Not to sound smug but any woman who walked into a yard in high heels, a short skirt, and/or a low-cut top was certainly looked at, but not usually taken seriously.

I did also get some sexist jabs and negative comments periodically from certain men who felt the need to compete with me. At first it stung a little, but I quickly realized that focusing on promoting myself, my product, and my company is the type of dialogue which people generally prefer.

All said, I would like to pay tribute to the so many men out there who gave me the chance to fit in and to respect my knowledge. I am also grateful to the many men who brushed off the unkind comments from salesmen who were indeed intimidated by my success as a woman. Not only were these comments damaging to the salesman's credibility, but my clients would actually come to my defence!

In 1995 I went into business for myself – Trillium Municipal Supply Inc. My first endeavor was the introduction of culvert relining to the drainage industry. Eventually Trillium moved into the snowplowing sector, ultimately being appointed national distributor of RoadWatch infrared road temperature sensors. I feel very blessed to be accepted as a colleague in such a vital facet of winter road safety.

What I most cherish during my time in this industry is the friendships and even family-like relationships I have made (99% with men!) over the past 35 years. For the most part they came to accept me as one of the boys, which I absolutely loved – it made work so much fun! Many of these wonderful men are no longer with us, and I still miss them dearly.

In closing, I must say that things have changed so much for the better over the years. Women have established themselves so well in every industry, and men have accepted us into what was once their domain - making the business world a happier place and working together towards a common goal.