



FEMALE TRADIE

"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it" Maya Angelou

Omesh Jethwani, Government Projects & Programs Manager interviewed Penny Petridis, a carpenter and metal fabricator on her career journey in the building and construction industry.

So how did you begin your career in the building & construction industry?

In 1992 I enrolled into my first trade - Metal Fabrication Engineering. In the first two years I held a position building structures of cars such

as hot rods and custom cars before moving on to more of the building side of things in the last two years of my apprenticeship.

I worked on many metal projects, including the restoration of The Tall Ship James Craig and the Cape Bowling Green Lighthouse that stand at the maritime museum after which I slowly started to dabble in the construction of buildings which was incredibly exciting.

However, I was involved in a car accident and broke my leg in several places which, caused me to have a break from the heavy trade work for some time.

It wasn't until 2009 – after a 10 year absence from tools - that my sister convinced me to do my trade in carpentry. She was completing her Diploma in Building and Construction at the time and was building her own home. Just the thought of being able to get back in the trade sector excited me.



It didn't take me long to enrol in TAFE and land a job working for a family business operated by Brian and Craig in building and maintenance. I spent a few years there doing various building works but wanted to concentrate more on the carpentry work which was the beginning of my first business venture – Deck'd Out

When and why did you decide to start up your business named Female Tradie?

In 2014 I wanted to expand from just building decks and move on to larger building projects. This is how Female Tradie came about. I knew there weren't many female tradies out there and just wanted to keep it simple for those looking to get any work done.

With the ongoing heated debates on gender equality and diversity, what are your personal views?

I believe there are always going to be those who oppose or don't understand other people's choices as we all grew up differently and hold different sets of values. At the end of the day, it is not something that I think about and therefore, it does not stop me chasing my dreams and goals.

Do you think there has been an improvement of women intake in the building & construction industry?

A very slight improvement. As I mentioned, I did have a 10-year break between trades and when I returned to the industry I was so shocked to see that there wasn't a big increase of women at all. I could understand if there weren't many in the metal and fabrication side of things because I must say that's a pretty tough trade. But carpentry?! Sheesh! I know women love woodwork!

How many carpenters do you know? I am pretty sure most of you would say none or - at the most - one. Even those in the industry - including many builders - are shocked to see me when I turn up on site.

What about plumbers? How many female plumbers do you know and electricians? Well I don't even know one. I am shocked and don't understand it and that is why my vision and inspiration is to do everything in my power to help change that.

A couple of months ago, you placed an advertisement on Gumtree for a female apprentice. Tell us more about it.

A couple of months ago, I placed an advertisement on Gumtree looking for apprentices. Unfortunately, my advertisement got removed and banned from the site under the Discrimination Act.

I responded to Gumtree advising them that Female Tradie is a registered business name and I was advertising for apprentices looking for work. I had my business logo on the image and they were not having a bar of it.

Recently you had a market stall at Sydney's Gay and Mardi Gras Fair Day - Tell us more about it?

Yes, after my little issue with Gumtree I needed to find another way to just reach out to women for many reasons. Firstly, yes my business is growing and I needed people to work with me so we could service all of our customers. However, I just wanted to put myself out there to use my experience and contacts to be a support for anyone interested in getting involved.

I have people stopping me in the street asking me for guidance of where they can get started in finding work in the industry or even asking me to teach them as they want to be able to fix up their own homes. I get smiles and waves from so many when they see me driving around in my van.

This is why I feel like I need to do something about this. This is too big for me to leave unnoticed. This is why I ran my stall at fair day, to be the support and create a network. It was a huge success and I am so excited and proud to be a part of what I feel will be a shift in women's' participation in the industry.

You have recently introduced the use of a power tools workshop for women. Tell us about your workshop.

There is a massive amount of interest in women wanting to get their hands on some tools. We have introduced our workshops, as there isn't much out there in regards to gaining skills.

To date, how many workshops have you delivered and how many women have completed the workshop program?

We are currently setting up the workshop and aim to have it running by April 2nd. We are based in Marrickville and will be holding woodworking classes on Saturdays and building and maintenance repair work on Tuesday nights. For more information log on to our website www.femaletradie.com.au

Is your workshop funded by the State or Commonwealth government?

No, unfortunately it is not. We applied for a grant last year but unfortunately, we were at the tail end of the funding and we just missed out.

To date have you received any sponsorship from building suppliers who share the same vision as you?

No at the moment we have not received any sponsorship, but we would be ever so grateful for any tools or materials that could help fund this project.

Lucky enough Harry from "My Real Estate Needs" has looked after us with our workshop to get us started which has been amazing but now we just need to fit it out.

Omesh Jethwani
Government Projects & Programs Manager