Surviving & Thriving in a NONTRADITIONAL SKILLED TRADE

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Bureau of Career and Technical Education
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# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

What to Expect ......................................................................................................... 2
  Employer's demands
  Personal questions
  Feelings of isolation
  Sense of humor

Expecting Too Much, Too Soon ................................................................. 3
  Support from co-workers
  Support from family and friends
  Avoiding worries

Start Off on the Right Foot ........................................................................... 4
  Work attendance
  Work habits

Sexual Harassment .......................................................................................... 5

Arm Yourself Against Sexual Harassment ........................................ 6

Health & Safety Tips ......................................................................................... 7

What is an Apprenticeship .............................................................................. 7

Local Unions ..................................................................................................... 10

Non-Union Employment .............................................................................. 11

Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 12

Glossary ............................................................................................................. 13

Resources ............................................................................................................ 14
Welcome to the world of nontraditional work. The goal of this booklet is to provide those entering a nontraditional skilled trade or apprenticeship program with solid information on surviving and thriving in the nontraditional work force. The US Department of Labor defines Nontraditional Occupations as occupations for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of the individuals employed in each such occupation. Examples are males in nursing and childcare and females in technologies and plumbing.

Because we want to help you better understand the nontraditional world, we have tried to provide you with a ‘real life’ picture of a nontraditional workplace. It is our hope that the practical information provided will not only help you adjust and function once you have decided upon a nontraditional career; but also assist those of you who are still undecided on whether to follow a nontraditional path.

The information in this booklet is serious. We recognize, however, that for any new entrant into the nontraditional workforce, interpersonal skills are as important as the ability to do the work. Also, having a sense of humor is vital to maintaining your mental equilibrium in life. This is particularly true in nontraditional work. It is with this thought in mind that this booklet is written.

Our sincere appreciation is extended to the Tradeswomen of Purpose/Women in Nontraditional Work, Inc. (TOP/WIN) for their assistance in preparing this booklet.

“If you’re going to be able to look back on something and laugh about it, you might as well laugh about it now.”

Marie Osmond
Entertainer
WHAT TO EXPECT

As an entry-level, nontraditional worker or apprentice, there are several things you should be prepared for when beginning your career:

► You may get a lot of attention simply because you are in a nontraditional field. As a nontraditional worker, you will be representing your entire gender.

► You may be given repetitive and odd jobs, sometimes called “gofer work.”

► You will be asked why you chose your particular career. You need to be sincere about your reasons.

► You may be left out during breaks and lunch periods because you may be the only person of your gender. Try to learn a little about some of the topics the others discuss so you can participate in the conversation and establish relationships with your co-workers.

► You can count on being a victim of practical jokes. Be prepared to endure your fair share with as good a sense of humor as you can muster. Also, your co-workers will probably place bets on “how long you can last” in your new job.

“...I had a lot of tricks played on me when I was an apprentice. But there was one that made me feel stupid. I was working with a crew and we were building an overpass for the turnpike. Anyway, one afternoon I got feeling so tired and my tool belt felt like it weighed 100 pounds. It wasn’t ‘til I got back to my truck at the end of the day and took off my tool belt that I saw it was full of little rocks and pebbles. It seems that all day the guys were putting them in there, one at a time, behind my back.”

Linda Stover-El Carpenter/Apprentice

“When I reached journey level at my trade I would never put an apprentice through all the practical jokes played on me when I was an apprentice. But don’t you know, the first time an apprentice was assigned to me I sent her off to find a left-handed wrench.”

Cindy Kern Heavy Equipment Operator

► You will probably feel awkward for the first few months. Don’t count on a lot of support and encouragement from co-workers. Try to be patient and work to the very best of your ability. Congratulate yourself on small victories.

► When co-workers ask about your personal life, it is usually best to be honest. As perhaps the only representative of your gender on the job site, you may choose to be honest about your personal life while tempering your honesty with wisdom. Revise your Facebook or My Space page as necessary to reflect yourself in a professional way to potential employers or other co-workers.
While there are certain things you can count on in nontraditional work, like those outlined on page 2, there are also other things you should not expect:

- Constant praise and reinforcement from co-workers or supervisors. Develop an internal sense of self worth and self appreciation.
- Constant support or encouragement from other nontraditional workers.
- Constant support and encouragement from your family and friends.
- Total support of your partner and/or your children.

Support from a partner will come with time. Initially, they may feel insecure because you are bringing home a bigger paycheck. Stress to your partner that the extra money will benefit everyone, not just you.

Children have special needs and are affected in different ways. They may be teased at school, and because you may be more tired, your children will sense your tension.

To make the transition easier on everyone, including yourself, discuss worries with your family and friends before you begin your job. Seek out others in nontraditional jobs for support and advice. In addition, contact professional organizations, trade associations, etc. It usually helps to relieve stress if you can discuss your concerns with people who can relate to them.

While you might expect to get a lot of support from other nontraditional workers, this is not always the case. Sometimes, your peers feel resentful of new nontraditional workers. After all, they had to survive on their own and they will most likely expect you to do the same.
Your first contacts in your new job will follow you for a long time. Making the right impression in the beginning can eliminate a lot of problems later.

- Be reliable—go to work every day and always be early, never be late.
  - Lateness and absenteeism are reasons for termination.
  - Lateness causes resentment among co-workers.
  - Don’t use child care problems as an excuse. Always have a back-up.
  - Arriving early allows you to talk with co-workers. This time can pave the way to your acceptance as part of the team.
- Be eager to learn and work.
- Learn all you can from those who are willing to share their knowledge.
- Be aware of and interested in what is going on around you, even if you’re not directly involved with the project.
- Learn the fine art of keeping busy. Follow the example of your co-workers. Clean something, sort something, carry something.
- Work to establish and keep lines of communication open, even with those veterans who don’t want to take the time to explain a project.
- If you are interested in becoming a journeyworker and the area you are working in doesn’t have such a program, ask your apprenticeship coordinator to reassign you to one that does.
- Learn the language and “talk” of your trade, and use it to communicate effectively with co-workers.
- Dress appropriately. Follow your co-workers’ leads.
- If you are a union member, seek out your union steward and work to develop a good relationship.
- Be certain you establish boundaries related to fun early on. This will help to put people at ease and enable them to know when you are joking and when you are serious.
- A good sense of humor is essential—use it often!
- Always perform your work to the best of your ability. This will establish your reputation as a worker; not a slacker.

“As a first year apprentice, I worked on a road job. It was 35 miles long. One day, I moved from one end of the job all the way to the other. And you know what...my new crew knew all about me before I got there.”

Sue Love Carpenter/Apprentice
A staggering 70% of American women report having been a victim of harassment. So, it is not surprising that women in nontraditional careers experience an even higher incidence of harassment than their more traditionally employed counterparts.

In fact, 91 out of 100 women in nontraditional careers surveyed reported experiencing some form of harassment. (The other nine either worked for a female-owned company or were self-employed.)

**FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

- Only 5-15% of harassed women formally report problems of harassment to their employers or to agencies like the EEOC.
- Of all American women, 50-85 percent will experience some form of sexual harassment during their academic or working life.
- Women are nine times more likely than men to quit jobs because of sexual harassment, five times more likely to transfer, and three times more likely to lose jobs due to being labeled as a “troublemaker” for workplace harassment.
- One-half of working women say they’ve suffered unpleasant incidents at work due to sexual jokes and demeaning comments about women.

What exactly is sexual harassment? By law, sexual harassment in the workplace refers to any inappropriate or unwanted attention of a sexual nature. Therefore, any unwanted attention that affects a promotion, condition of employment, or your ability to perform your job is considered harassment. This includes any unwanted touching or sexually suggestive remarks, as well as the display of obscene materials.

Most agree that harassment—like rape—is not about sex, but about power—who has it and who doesn’t. The harasser exercises power by demeaning, degrading, and humiliating the victim.

While the harassment is generally carried out by an individual, your employer is held responsible if the harassment is allowed to continue once it has been reported. If the harasser is a supervisor, the company has a legal responsibility to take corrective action and is liable, regardless of whether the harassment was reported to the employer.
ARM YOURSELF AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Be assertive and tell the harasser to stop the behavior that is annoying you. Be specific.

- Don’t be afraid to speak out about sexual harassment incidents. Sexual harassment must be dealt with and eliminated without delay.

- Witty comebacks and quick-responses can be used effectively to quiet a harasser. If you’re the kind of person who can come up with a snappy retort, don’t hesitate to use that ability. However, in some cases, this may just “add fuel to the fire.”

- If you are a member of a union, discuss the situation with your union steward or the steward’s supervisor if necessary.

- Send a letter, via certified mail, to the harasser voicing your objectives and demand that the behavior stop. Keep a copy of your letter in case you need to pursue more formal avenues later.

- Keep a journal documenting instances of harassment. Be sure to include dates, times, who was present, and be as specific as possible. This journal may be admissible evidence in court.

- Bring the harassment to the attention of your supervisor and file a formal complaint. If your supervisor is the harasser, go to the next level to register the complaint. Use your journal as documentation and when possible, have a co-worker accompany you as a witness.

- Remember, you have the right to work in a harassment-free environment.

- Follow your employer’s formal grievance procedures.

- Document your knowledge of any past sexual harassment allegations involving your harasser by recording names, dates, and alleged allegations.

- File a complaint with the State Human Relations Commission or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (Addresses are provided at the end of this booklet.)

- Seek support from friends in nontraditional careers.
HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

▶ Begin an exercise and conditioning program before you begin your new career so you will be fit and ready for any challenge.

▶ Continue with your conditioning program throughout your career.

▶ Eat healthy foods.

▶ Never do more physical work than is comfortable. Learning to pace yourself is important.

▶ Never wear jewelry of any kind to the workplace. It can easily become caught in equipment and machinery and cause injury.

▶ Be aware of unsafe working conditions and report them to your supervisor.

▶ Be aware of the tendency to overextend or take risks to prove yourself.

“Never eat more than you can lift.”
Miss Piggy

“I don’t care what the boss says, ain’t no reason for you to be taking that bulldozer down into that ravine. That’s no-man’s land down there, and if there ain’t no man that would go down there, ain’t no reason a woman should.”
Willie (The Hawk) Hawkins Laborer

WHAT IS AN APPRENTICESHIP

Apprenticeships are not new. They date back over 4,000 years when a young person would go to live and work with a master of a craft.

Today’s apprenticeship programs provide on-the-job training and classroom instruction in a skilled craft or trade. They allow individuals to learn on the job while pursuing journeyworker status.

Apprenticeship programs are sponsored jointly by a union and employers, or by employers alone. They normally last from two to five years, and the apprentice is interviewed and tested on basic reasoning, spatial, mathematical, and relevant career skills throughout the apprenticeship program.
Starting pay for apprentices ranges from 40 to 60 percent of the pay for a journeyworker. Apprentices usually receive pay increases every six months.

To be eligible for an apprenticeship, several requirements must be met:

- Apprentice should be 18 years old.
- Apprentice should have a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED).
- Apprentice should be in good physical condition.
- Knowledge of advanced math may be required (i.e. algebra, trigonometry).
- Drug testing may be required.

In addition to on-the-job training, apprentices will normally be required to take additional classroom training. This training is usually held after normal working hours—either in the evening or on weekends—depending on the specific apprenticeship. As a result, individuals considering apprenticeship programs must realize they will be making a significant commitment of time and effort. Apprentices are expected to attend all classes and exhibit good work performance. A sure-fire way of being dismissed from an apprenticeship program is to have poor classroom performance, or miss class altogether.

To find out about apprenticeship programs in your area, you can:

- Contact the U.S. Department of Labor for a listing of local Apprenticeship and Training Offices. (Address is provided at the end of this booklet)
- Contact the Pennsylvania Department of Labor, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training Offices for specific information on apprenticeship programs available and help in pursuing these programs. (Address is provided at the end of this booklet)
Look in your local yellow pages under Labor Unions for a listing of union locals in your area. Contact the union local and ask for information on apprenticeship programs in your chosen career field.

Once you’ve found an apprenticeship program in which you’re interested, you should ask for an application to apply for the apprenticeship program and schedule an interview. Once you get an interview, remember:

- Dress appropriately for the interview.

- Find out about the organization sponsoring the apprenticeship ahead of time. Type the name of the organization into your internet browser for more information. Check the organization’s website for information prior to your interview. Call and request copies of their brochures or the annual report if these documents are not available online.

- Anticipate questions you might be asked and be prepared with well thought out and appropriate responses.

- Be prepared to answer questions about “why you want to work in a field dominated by men.” Emphasize your interest and skills in the career you’re pursuing.
The simplest definition of a union is an association of people in similar employment formed to safeguard wages and safe working conditions in the hopes of providing stability to the worker. One of the benefits of a union is a structured and organized grievance process.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE UNION**

- Conduct collective bargaining.
- Organize non-union members.
- Enforce the contract.
- Manage money.
- Assist with education and training programs.
- Initiate strikes when necessary.

**TIPS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR UNION**

- Know the full name and local number of your union.
- Read and become familiar with your union’s by-laws and collective bargaining agreement.
- Read, learn, and be able to use Robert’s Rules of Order during union meetings. (This book is available online and in bookstores.)
- Attend union meetings. By attending union meetings, you will get to know union members and will be identified as a team player. If you don’t feel comfortable going alone, attend the meetings with co-workers.
- Participate during meetings and get involved in the union.
- Keep on top of current events and legislation that is applicable to your career.
- Get to know people in the union and establish relationships with individuals who hold power within the informal structure of the union.
- If you are making a complaint to a union official, take a witness if it makes you feel more comfortable.

“Nothing can be more absurd than the practice which prevails in our country of men and women not following the same pursuits with all the strengths and with one mind, for thus the state, instead of being whole, is reduced to half.”

Plato

“Going to my first union meeting was absolute agony; I was one of only three women out of about three hundred men. The looks I used to get! Now, going to meetings is no big deal. I know a lot of the guys; we sit together and have a good time. But it was tough in the beginning, real tough. I had to take the ‘mind over matter’ approach. If you don’t mind, then it doesn’t matter.”

Sue Aaron
Aircraft Technician
While most skilled trades are currently unionized, trade jobs can be found in non-union businesses. Here are some key things to keep in mind when considering employment in a non-union environment.

- Apprenticeship Programs are very similar in union and non-union environments. The main difference is that in a non-union environment, the apprenticeship is solely employer-sponsored.

- Employers are investing training money in each apprentice and hold expectations for apprentice loyalty and dedication to the goals and mission of the company.

- One of the differences between a union and a non-union environment is how grievances/employee concerns are handled. In a non-union environment, you need to:
  
  - Know the name of your supervisor and the personnel manager.
  
  - Find out the procedure for sharing ideas, concerns, and recommendations. Do you go to the supervisor? Is there an employee suggestion program? etc.
  
  - Keep your eyes and ears open and learn who the “movers and shakers” of the organization are. Who are the people who get things done; have the power to change things? It may often be individuals other than those identified by management.
  
  - If your company has employee teams that meet to consider ideas and make recommendations to management, become involved.
After reading this booklet, you should have a better understanding of what lies ahead as you enter into the skilled trades workforce. Or, if you are still considering nontraditional work, perhaps the information provided will help you reach your decision.

As we stated in the beginning, our intention was never to paint a positive picture, but rather, to point out the challenges you may encounter. This was done not to discourage you, but to be certain you fully understand this nontraditional path. There are more women than ever entering the field of nontraditional work. In order to survive, you must have a positive frame of mind, a strong determination, and belief in pursuing your career goals.

While more women are entering nontraditional fields, you will still be a minority. This in itself brings challenges not faced in more traditional work. However, you will also experience rewards and opportunities that may not be available to other individuals who choose a more traditional road. You will become an example for other women and your courage will pave the way for women who choose nontraditional careers in the future.

“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Unknown
Apprenticeship – a contracted amount of time when a person is learning a trade or occupation, often as a member of a labor union.

Collective bargaining – a team of union members meet and discuss terms of work with the employer. The two groups meet, discuss and revise plans until an agreement that meets everyone’s goals is reached.

Grievance complaint – a formal, written complaint to management outlining how you believe your work rights have been violated.

Harassment – any physical or verbal abuse of a person because of her/his race, religion, age, gender, disability, or other legally protected status.

Job/Union steward – a person who manages a union environment and handles the concerns of union members.

Journeyworker – a person who has completed an apprenticeship, needs less supervision than an apprentice, and makes more money than an apprentice.

Nontraditional work – any occupation where 75% or more of the workers are of one sex.

Non-union – a business that operates without an organized union.

Sexual harassment – inappropriate or unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal comments or conduct of a sexual nature.

Union – an association of individuals in similar employment formed to safeguard wages and safe working conditions in hopes of providing stability to the worker.
The EEOC is the federal organization to contact concerning sexual harassment. We suggest contacting this organization only after talking with your supervisor and union steward. Be very persistent within your company to stop the harassment before going to this federal organization. When you contact this office, they can send you information on sexual harassment and the federal guidelines concerning definitions of harassment. You also call the EEOC when you wish to file a sexual harassment complaint.
131 M Street, NE
Fourth Floor, Room 4NWOZF
Washington, DC 20507
(202) 663-4900
TTY: (202) 663-4494
1-800-669-4000 for complaints
EEOC Field Offices: http://archive.eeoc.gov/offices.htm/

National Labor Relations Board  www.nlrb.gov
The NLRB deals with employees’ rights to take action as a union, in a group, to negotiate changes and improvements in working conditions. If you are having difficulties with your union, contact the NLRB and they can advise you about the proper action.
1099 14th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20570
1-866-667-6572
TTY: (866) 315-6572

Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board
www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_labor_relations_board/10485
The PLRB deals with union employees’ rights to take action to negotiate changes and improvement in working conditions. They are an impartial government body that helps to settle disputes between employers and union employees.
651 Boas Street, Room 418
Harrisburg, PA 17121
(717) 787-1091
Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission      www.phrc.state.pa.us
This state government agency handles discrimination complaints related
to race, disability, gender, etc. for any individual employed in the
Commonwealth. The PHRC handles discrimination complaints from both
union and non-union employees.

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Philadelphia Regional Office
110 North 8th Street
Suite 501
Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 560-2496
TTY: (215) 560-3599

Pittsburgh Regional Office
301 Fifth Avenue
Suite 390, Platt Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(412) 565-5395
TTY: (412) 565-5711

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training      www.doleta.gov/OA/
This nationally-based government agency can provide individuals with
lists of offices within their state and region to contact for information on
Apprenticeship Programs. The U.S. Department of Labor is a resource
agency and all specific information comes from the state level.

US DOL/ETA/OA
Suite 820-East
170 S. Independence Mall, West
Philadelphia, PA 19106-3315
(215) 861-4830
Fax (215) 861-4833

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry
Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training     www.dli.state.pa.us
This state government agency can provide you with specific information
about apprenticeship programs available in your field of interest and
location.

PA Department of Labor and Industry
651 Boas Street
Harrisburg, PA 17121
(717) 787-5279
Pennsylvania Commission for Women

The commission works to ensure that Pennsylvania women have equal opportunities and treatment in all aspects of life. Contact the Commission for resource materials, assistance with women’s issues, and referrals to the proper agencies for addressing specific concerns.

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(888) 615-7477
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(717) 772-4177
JOBS I WILL CONSIDER
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CONTACTS THAT I WILL MAKE
Company _____________________________________________________________
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