

Daniel Robbins: Here we are again for another episode of Above It All, a podcast dedicated to the roofing industry by Johns Manville. Today we are blessed to have Shelby Dewhurst. We have a really special topic and that is Women In The Engineering Field. And Shelby, please enlighten us a little bit more on the culture around this but, so far from my understanding, it seems that there were always, it was a kind of male-dominated field and more than ever there's all these fun ways and recognitions that are happening to get women more involved with being a louder voice in the industry. What are your thoughts?

Shelby Dewhurst: Absolutely. So, I joined JM and I was one of the only women on our team, and as I've grown in my position and taken on more responsibility, I travel to various industry things and there's always a push to get more women involved in what is previously really looked at as a male-dominated field. Not just being an engineer, but an engineer in roofing systems where we're talking about, there's a lot of "good old boys club" around roofing. But I go to things like ASTM and Asphalt Institute, AI, and get to meet some fabulous women who've been in their engineering fields and technical resources and they're really all about helping promote women and becoming a tribe within roofing, even though we're talking, sometimes it's with our competitors, but we can talk about how we can lift each other up and support each other without sharing company secrets or anything. But what resources are out there for networking for women? There's things like the National Women in Roofing, which gets together and has good conversations. Even on the JM side outside of roofing itself, we have our women inclusive network kind of figuring out, how do we get women mentors and women in other positions to really help young women in their fields, help people who have been in their careers a while who may want to make a move.

Daniel Robbins: Totally. So, it sounds like there's this thing at play too where just women in the workforce and women rising in career growth and and income opportunities and I think this is kind of a part of that culture too, is what it sounds like a little bit.

Shelby Dewhurst: Yeah, definitely. I look at some of the people I look at as women mentors and they may not be part of roofing or engineers but we have some really strong women at JM that everyone supports each other. We all bounce the ideas off of each other and to make us more well-rounded.

Daniel Robbins: You went to engineering school?

Shelby Dewhurst: I did.

Daniel Robbins: So tell me, what was that like? Was it a mixed batch of males and females, or did you feel like there was a lot of men becoming engineers?

Shelby Dewhurst: So, I went to Colorado School of Mines, which one of the jokes going in as a female is, "The odds are good, but the goods are odd." In referring to relationships, because it was about a 75% male school with 25% females. So, there's good laughs about that. I graduated with my degree in chemical and biochemical engineering, which as a field at Mines still had maybe a little bit more men, maybe a 60/40 split, not quite the 75/25. To me, I really enjoyed my time at school, had a great time with all my peers and always felt very included, and the divide between male and female wasn't always prevalent until you went to maybe some larger events and you looked around and you're like, oh, there's only three women here. Or we'd have special ceremonies in school, so when I graduated there was something for just the women that were graduating called The Rose Ceremony and we were able to do that in one of our smaller conference room type places, rather than needing a large space 'cause there weren't as many women graduating.

Daniel Robbins: That's very cool. So, it sounds like you were seeing the disparity through college, right? Male dominated industry and now every great roofing company has a great engineering team and you're on it. And so what has that journey been like? How, I guess are you... Do you find yourself similar? There's always kind of just more men in the engineering field? And then what is it to be a woman in that space?

Shelby Dewhurst: So, I joined our engineering team a couple of years ago. I actually started as a Product Development Technician, joined the team pretty fresh, and have held various engineering roles within our product development team for cover boards, polyiso adhesives, accessories, and now in the bituminous role. And if you actually count the number of men versus women, there are more men. But I think we have some really strong women on our team. Our director Zeb, is someone I definitely look up to and she is great at asking questions, which makes me a better engineer. We have other women on our team and being part of this team, I don't always look at gender. We all have ideas, we're all creative, we're innovating and sometimes we're fighting fires 'cause we are the plants' team that helps respond to things.

Daniel Robbins: No, that sounds fair. So, talking about a little bit about the product development side of stuff. Is everyone split over different projects? Did you all get to share in different... Do you get to put your hands on different aspects of all the products that

get developed?

Shelby Dewhurst: So, we're split usually by product line. So, I primarily work on our asphalt roofing products, but that doesn't mean I haven't been part of single ply products or projects or adhesive projects. Sometimes we like to pull each other in when we need a little bit more expertise or we need someone to think off the wall, because we've been in various roles. So, even though sometimes it can feel a little towards... We're all marching towards our own end goals on our team, we do have each other to bounce ideas off and help create really well-rounded test plans to make sure we're thinking about everything, 'cause we want our products to work for our operations team, and we also want them to work for our customers. And sometimes we have to find that balance of something that's really easy to produce, is not what our customers want to see. And sometimes what our customers want to see is really hard in production. So, finding that balance, that way we can create the product offering that is best for the customers.

Daniel Robbins: I've never really thought about it like that before. You guys are playing with these balances of checks and balances in a way. And I just thought it was potentially like a free-for-all who can come up with the best product. But there's always this, I guess from a JM side, there's this deep consideration of the customer.

Shelby Dewhurst: Yeah, that's correct. And we want to come up with cool new innovative things, but we also want to make sure we're running as safe as possible, making what our customers want to see. And using the best materials, that is part of our group that we do a lot, is we do a lot of raw material evaluations, especially in a post-COVID world where maybe there were some supply chain issues and things got shifted. So, we have to evaluate all these raw materials. So, even though some of the more innovative things can be super fun to work on, sometimes we have to reign ourselves in to really focus on what makes us better as a JM whole.

Daniel Robbins: So, basically working on the JM engineering team has been like a, it's like a dream engineering experience, so to speak. It sounds like that if you were an engineer you'd probably want to at least try JM out for a little bit.

Shelby Dewhurst: Absolutely. And something I've always said I love about being on our product development team is, there's a fair amount of engineering that's computer work and report writing, analysis, but we also get to do a lot of hands-on stuff. So, if you're ever tired of working on the computer, there's something in the lab that can be tested. There's something that can be built in some of our bigger building areas and testing. So, there's a really great balance between the different ways of thinking, 'cause some days you just need to dig into data and that can be a really fulfilling day. And then there's some days where you just want to roll up your sleeves and maybe go work on testing some adhesives and pouring them out. Like I said, I'm our asphalt engineer and part of my job is formulating and doing lab blends. And I've always described it as the balance of creativity and science, because there is a little bit of art to creating a really good asphalt batch, with the ingredients or raw materials we put in to get the properties we want out. So, when days I want to let my creativity flow, I can spend some time in the lab testing materials and seeing what kind of polymers and what changes we can make to make better products.

Daniel Robbins: That's very cool. So, I want to touch on one more thing. So we're talking about corporate life, we're talking about career development, and what it means to be... You're kind of shedding light onto what your experience has been as an engineer, as a woman in the field of engineering. It's not too different, but it's interesting to talk about how you do see that disparity in males versus females. But then now you have a baby. And so, throwing that into the mix, it's like, you're a mother and you're a woman in the engineering field. And so, what is that balance been like with the work-life situation too? Just for everyone who's listening, because I think that's another thing that being a woman comes with in this so to speak. Because there's a lot on you now. So what are your thoughts on all that?

Shelby Dewhurst: It's definitely something I've thought about a lot. Like we were talking about before we started recording, I just had a baby 12 weeks ago. And it's been nice getting back to work, but there's also that piece of me that wants to be home with my baby, the future is moving. So, finding that space to make sure people still respect me as an engineer, but also as a mom. It's definitely, again, like finding that balance, and I'm figuring it out. I'm super new at it, and I definitely want to be a mom with a career and I want to move forward with my career and it is finding where to say yes and where to say no so, that way we still move forward because some of that old way of thinking is that you can't have it both ways and I think people, and across all industries and a lot of women engineers are showing that you can have it both ways. You can still have a fulfilling career and be a mom.

Daniel Robbins: That's powerful. That's very empowering. You're empowering me, I'm not even a woman. What's going on right now?

Shelby Dewhurst: Okay. I'm like, yeah. I also give credit to some social media for helping me feel empowered by it. 'Cause social media can bring people down, but it can also show other people succeeding and for me it makes me want to do more. 'cause I'm like, "Oh yeah, I see that person having a successful career as a civil engineer and she has two kids." I'm like, "I can do this." I also give a lot of credit to JM too. I think I work for a great company, and even though there are definite things that could be better, everyone is very helpful to me as a new mom and I think that's great. People have been supportive, I love sharing pictures. My manager and my director, I feel the support from them, which makes me... It made coming back significantly easier. I was coming back to a job that I enjoyed doing, which made me want to have a career even though my baby is the best thing ever.

Daniel Robbins: Well, I think that's says a lot, I think this company does. I think, from what I've seen, Johns Manville does a really good job of people who want to become parents. Like allowing them just to kind of have that, figure out that balance in a really healthy way. Since some... I think it's always tough finding the balance, but here I've noticed the culture is very warming to that. So, it's nice you got to experience that too.

Shelby Dewhurst: Yeah. And like I mentioned, I'm part of our women inclusive network, which is one of our DNI councils. And I think it's really cool that we've established that, because on that council we're talking about things where sometimes they're the tough conversations of, where can JM be better when it comes to making the working parents... Actually that's a different DNI council. But we collaborate with them a lot, but what benefits could be better? What's gonna draw young people to our industry and to JM and keep them here. So, I feel great support from my team, but then I also feel support from JM because we are looking at where we can get better as a company. Because yeah, maybe some of our policies are a little outdated, but we have voices on them to project them into the future. And people are talking about them. The women inclusive network, we got asked to sit in on a benefits review last year to say, "Hey, these are some of the benefits that we're proposing." And we got to give our feedback to say, hey, yes, that would make life as a working parent helpful. Or yes, that does make us feel like we're being heard and seen. And that's something I think, those DNI councils are doing really well, so that way everyone can feel it.

Daniel Robbins: Oh, that's amazing. Well, we're out of time, but thanks so much for shedding light into your world as a woman in engineering, as a mother in engineering, and someone who's on the council really trying to be a part of, I guess, lobbying too for parents.

Shelby Dewhurst: Thank you for the time and the opportunity to get to talk to everyone. Like I said, I love what I do. It makes coming to work pretty easy. So, thank you for recognizing that too.

Daniel Robbins: Alright, we'll catch you guys later. Stay safe out there. Bye.