

From New Graduate to Board Secretary, WTS-LA Enriches the Life of Lucy Terrell-Lewis



Lucy Terrell-Lewis (WTS-LA Board member), Photos © John Livzey, 2015

Lucy Terrell-Lewis' path from college graduate to WTS-LA Board member personifies the mentoring and networking opportunities the chapter offers its members—even before they become members.

“When I graduated [from Carnegie Mellon University in 2008], I had a job offer accepted with a company in Bakersfield that had lured me away from civil engineering altogether,” recalled Terrell-Lewis. Initially, she put off the start date to stay on the East Coast to participate in her sister’s wedding and travel Europe. “Come August, my partner moved to Los Angeles for school, and I realized that giving up civil engineering would be too much of a sacrifice, so I was looking for a job from the East Coast,” she said.

Looking for Job without Support

“So I started looking for a job in Los Angeles without knowing anyone, not even knowing which firms were out here,” she said. She heard a reply from one firm, which lifted her spirits, but cold calls bore little fruit, perhaps because she was job hunting on the cusp of the 2008 recession and was not living in the same time zone.

“So I scheduled a telephone conversation with Cindy Sugimoto of Lea+Elliott [who became chapter President in 2009],” Terrell-Lewis explained. “I was an entry-level person, but she explained to me what WTS was and warmly invited me to attend a WTS-LA event. She assured me that she would introduce me around to people. She explained to a young graduate how important networking was, and she helped me realize that meeting colleagues was much more important than cold calls or sending out my résumé.”

Flying to First WTS Luncheon

“So, I flew out to attend the very next WTS luncheon,” said Terrell-Lewis. “People were very warm and friendly. In general, I had been



feeling that many doors were closed to me. So having people welcome me and be eager to speak with me and look at my résumé filled me with hope.”

Then she was on her way, as one interview led to four. Her WTS-LA networking would benefit her two more times.

Impetus for PE Certificate

“Years later, Cindy introduced me to someone who needed to study for her seismic exam,” Terrell-Lewis said, explaining how she found her study partner, Kim Schulz. “That became the impetus for my studying for the seismic exam and eventually becoming a PE. I needed that momentum.”

Then there was the second job via her WTS-LA membership.

“I participated in the mentor program twice,” she said. “The first time Andy Sokol was my mentor. The second time Cindy was my mentor. When I was ready to look for a job with a rail focus, I was able to reach out to Andy, and his firm hired me. I now work for him.”

Reaching Her Dream Come True

Now the California resident carries an STV, Inc. business card stating that she is a “rail engineer,” a dream come true for someone who loved riding subway trains on the East Coast. She has been designing rail projects for five years. Her current work includes the Airport Metro Connector and the Sonoma-Marín Rail Area Rail Transit (SMART) project in Santa Rosa.

“A lot of small details have been fascinating,” she said, looking at her work. “Yeah, I think it fits me very well. From when I started riding the rail as a child, I came to see rail as part of the fabric of a city. Doing this work well and properly is something that I take pride in.”

Her association with WTS-LA continues as she serves as Board Secretary.

No Price Tag on Staying Connected

“I feel that you can’t put a price on being connected to people who also want to be connected to you; although it doesn’t necessarily pay you back in ways that you expect, it will pay you back in ways that you cannot anticipate,” Terrell-Lewis said.

“Even today I was explaining this to the intern we have now [at STV],” she explained. “I was encouraging her to get involved in WTS and set her priorities so that forming and sustaining relationships with people there is a top priority.”



Lucy Terrell-Lewis (WTS-LA Board member), Photo © John Livzey, 2015

Inviting WTS-LA Events

“The atmosphere of the WTS luncheons is different from other organizations that have luncheons,” she explained. “When I first attended those events, I didn’t have anything to compare it to. Now, compared with other professional organization events, the WTS events are so inviting. I’ve sold raffle tickets for the annual dinner; I’ve been one of the table speakers for Career Day—and they all have been fun.”

“I have appreciated that WTS has welcomed a great variety of women; I still think there is a misconception in our industry that you have to be a certain kind of woman to succeed,” Terrell-Lewis said.

“Both in the membership and the leaders that WTS puts forward as speakers, there is a celebration of the many different ways one can be a success in this industry,” she said. “Seeing leaders being proud and confident in who they are—whether or not it meets a societal expectation of who will succeed in this industry—I find very encouraging.”