

A Man in a Woman's Transportation World

COMMENTARY



Photo © John Livzey, 2016

It is often said that it is a man's world. Nowhere is that truer than in transportation. But it doesn't have to be that way. And there are many people fighting to change the status quo. I became one of them when I joined the Los Angeles area chapter of WTS, a non-profit organization dedicated to "the advancement of women in transportation." While I'm not, per se, a gender crusader—though I do believe in equality—let me explain why I became an active WTS-LA member and how it has helped *my* career.

I was hungry. Working my way through USC's urban planning and architecture program, I saw an email from the Career Services Center about a "sponsored corporate transportation luncheon." My first thought was, "Free lunch? No ramen noodles for me today! Sign me up!" I went for lunch and came out with a career. Now as a transportation planner at Caltrans, I have continued to make strides in the transportation sector while emphasizing WTS-LA's mission by chairing the chapter's annual Transportation Résumé Book for college students.

WTS-LA opened a door of opportunities in transportation, professional development, and personal development. But I must admit, as a man it felt odd to join an organization dedicated to helping women. Of course, I want to help women, but what could WTS-LA do for my career? It turns out, quite a lot.

First and foremost, WTS—formerly the Women's Transportation Seminar—exists to level the playing field for women in transportation. That's why it was created. And it is needed for that purpose. But WTS-LA provides a multitude of ancillary benefits, benefits women and men can't get from any other transportation organization. The networking is unparalleled. The programs bring national transportation leaders to your table. And WTS-LA provides the best professional development anyone can find. Gender notwithstanding, WTS-LA provides extraordinary benefits for anyone in transportation. But why else should men join?

Ten enterprising women created WTS in 1977 because they wanted a seat at the transportation table. Today, WTS International is stronger than ever with more than 5,000 members in the US and overseas. Dynamism, innovation, growth, and advancement are part of the organization's DNA. It expands, improves, and connects transportation professionals. And both women and men benefit from its inherent ethos toward improvement and equality. Anyone can join. Anyone can volunteer. Everyone can benefit.

It is a man's world. But transportation knows no gender. Through WTS, women around the country have banded together and succeeded to the highest levels of the profession. They have proved they are more

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than qualified for any transportation job. And they have done it with the help, support, and understanding of men. I am not only proud to be a part of that, I am grateful that I can advance my career while helping to level a playing field that should never have been uneven in the first place.

By Todd Nguyen