

Learning by Leading: The Meet of the Matter



Monika Bowden (Psomas client services project manager), Photos © John Livzey, 2017

Psomas client services project manager Monika Bowden sees her time as WTS-LA president as both instructional and transformative.

“The most important professional lesson I learned was about *volunteer management*. I didn’t even know there was such a thing before I was president! But in working as president I learned that we were all at the table because we wanted to make a difference, that no one person’s contribution should be valued less than another person’s efforts. But WTS ‘gives’ women the opportunity to sit at that table; it gives women a platform or venue to raise their hands and help find solutions for Los Angeles’s most complex infrastructure problems. It also provides space to mentor and develop up-and-coming talent. As a professional, that is invaluable. On a more personal level, I learned that if I put my mind to something, I can achieve it. I was only 30 when I became president and I was fairly new to the industry. But I soon learned that none of that mattered. I had a job to do and a chapter to represent and I wanted to be successful.”



She was. And she continues to be so today for Psomas. Having joined the firm in 2015, Bowden has been handling projects, business development, and marketing for more than 20 years, almost exclusively for transportation and public works projects in southern California. Bowden believes her span as WTS-LA president set the stage for her ascent.

“WTS gave me the self-confidence to approach my position with a sense of pride and determination both on the job and in the industry. The first meeting I ever hosted for WTS-LA is a perfect example. We were honoring LA City Councilman Hal Bernson and as soon as I got to the reception it hit me: *I had never spoken in public before*. And I was terrified. How would I do a better job or even half-as-good a job as my predecessor Rose Casey? But at that moment I said to myself, ‘Monika, it’s time to ‘lean in;’ it’s time to put on your big-girl pants and get the job done.’ From that moment, I never looked back. Ironically, I now spend a majority of my time doing presentation training and coaching individuals on how to speak in public and sell their value proposition to clients.”

Bowden built on her initial experience introducing Councilman Bernson. For her, access and experience with dignitaries made a pivotal difference in her career.

“There were a lot of great events during my presidency, including hosting the top decision makers from not only the regional, but the state and federal levels as well. But the programs themselves were just icing on the cake, really. Overall, the unprecedented access WTS provides its members through the programs is second to none, and that was what made the difference. That was the highlight of my time as president and to this day I am friends with many of the people I met during my presidency.”

“For example, during my tenure the chapter hosted former US Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta! This was an amazing opportunity and it still makes me smile to this day. I also relished the challenge of always being the first local organization to host top decision makers in the region, including honoring then-Caltrans director Will Kempton. WTS-LA members got to meet him on the first day he was employed with Caltrans! That was a real feather in the cap for the LA chapter and a fantastic experience. Where else can you get that kind of access to those kinds of leaders?”