

# Scott Witt Podcast - 'Tenacity'

[00:00:00] **Christi Powell:** Hey listeners, this is Christi Powell with Women Talk Construction. I'm here with Angela and we've got Scott Witt on from Superior Construction.

[00:00:20] We're excited about him being with us. Today and he's gonna talk to us a little bit about heavy civil and what they're doing and how he's promoting women and actually advocating for them. He's got a couple of girls himself. I've heard he's an awesome ally to women in the business. I've also heard that he is guiding the creation of the superior women in construction, and you're one of the most vehement supporters.

[00:00:44] That's what the ladies are saying about you. Scott, what do you have to say about that? Oh

[00:00:48] **Scott Witt:** man. I'm flattered to be honest with you. Yeah, yeah. I hope I live up to some of that.

[00:00:53] **Christi Powell:** Well, now you have to, you don't have a choice, right? It's out on the air. That's right. So tell us a little bit about yourself, what you're doing, what, uh, superior's about, and, um, I know you're the cfo, but tell us just a little bit about your role there and your background.

[00:01:08] **Scott Witt:** Yeah, so I'm the Chief financial officer. I think, you know, Obviously I'm supposed to be a good steward of the corporate assets, which to me is the brand and its people. Um, and then it's, it's really my responsibility to set a clear vision and direction for the company. So that's really kind of how I see, see my role.

[00:01:29] Uh, the company itself, uh, we're in our 85th year. Uh, we are a heavy civil contractor. Operating in the Midwest. Um, and the southeast, our two biggest, our biggest state by far is, is Florida. And then Indiana comes in second and then the rest of the states up there kinda sprinkle in the difference. Nice. Hmm.

[00:01:50] **Angela Gardner:** Well, based on those great comments for the women, you know, what are some of the unique and perspectives that the women bring that you feel women bring to the construction industry at your company? Um, what are those talents that they leverage at Superior? Uh,

[00:02:05] **Scott Witt:** in general I think women are tougher than men, and I think women have a, I like in general.

[00:02:11] Yeah, yeah. You know, that I think women have a, a little bit of a chip

on their shoulder. They feel like they have to work harder to just get to a level playing field. So I, I think that's really what they, they bring a bit more, uh, tenacity in a lot of cases, in my opinion. And, uh, I have a strong mom and a strong sister and a strong wife, you know, and my first bosses outta college were women.

[00:02:36] So I've just kind of been in and around that my whole life and really noticed it. Um, my entire career, you know, the, the, the professional women I've been around just seemed to try harder and do more, uh, in most cases. Yeah. Thank

[00:02:51] **Christi Powell:** you for that. Yeah, that, sure. It's good to hear from a male perspective what their, what they think our assets are on the job site.

[00:02:59] Yeah. Yes, I agree. Yeah. So what kind of training and support do you provide for your women that want to grow or want to, um, move up to, uh, a, a higher role within the company? Are, is there something that you do and. And if you do something, are you having a hard time finding a way to measure that? Because we have heard that a little bit.

[00:03:18] **Scott Witt:** Yeah. So finding a measure for return on talent is really hard, right? It is. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Then trying to isolate it down to specific, you know, so that, that's tough. I think a lot of companies face that as far as what we're doing to help develop the leadership and the talent of women in particular, that's what the Superior Women in Construction Group is all about.

[00:03:41] We're at the front end of that, and it really is. You know, we're asking them, what do you guys need to further your career? What do you think you guys need as a group of professional women in this industry? What can we as a company do for you? And let's work together to find the answer. So we're kind of at the.

[00:04:00] You know, at the tip of the iceberg, trying to figure out what, what we need to do. And then hopefully a year from now, if you ask me that question, we'll have some ideas in place or something actually in place that we can talk about. Well,

[00:04:11] **Christi Powell:** I think that's probably the most impactful thing that you can do is ask your people what they need, right?

[00:04:16] And that for all the listeners out there that are trying to figure out how to build your own workforce program or trying to get more diverse people in, um, that's as simple as it gets, is you ask your people what they need and try to figure it out. That's awesome. Very honorable.

[00:04:33] **Scott Witt:** Yeah. I had a, I mean, it was a little bit of an epiphany for

me, so I, I actually retired. From another construction company in 2017 and came here and I started here in 2021. I. And the first meeting I had was at one of our job sites, and I think I had a meeting, an introduction meeting with like 20 people and 25% of the room was women.

[00:05:01] They were field engineers, project managers, civil engineers. And at that moment I go, oh my God, I'm so ashamed. My old company had zero. If you walked into the same room at, at my other company, they had zero. And I'm like, man, You know, we're onto something here, there, you know, something's going on that I'm, I'm missing out on.

[00:05:23] And that, that, that's kind of where it started for me anyway, recognizing, you know, the construction industry needs to do more to support, uh, the role of women in the workforce, especially in today's labor market.

[AD]

[00:05:40] **Christi Powell:** GroundBreak Carolinas is focused on connecting the design, construction, economic development, and commercial real estate communities in the Carolinas. Their wide range of exclusive content and thought leadership is intended to help design and construction related businesses be successful. Ground Break is the only platform that reaches Key A E C, decision makers and influencers in our two state region. Visit [ground break carolinas.com](http://groundbreakcarolinas.com) and be sure to sign up for our free biweekly newsletter.

[00:06:15] **Christi Powell:** So you were proud of that, but you really hadn't thought about it, is what it sounds like.

[00:06:18] **Scott Witt:** Oh, no. I mean, you know, it, it's funny, it led to conversations. Mm-hmm. The, the Superior Women's Group was born out of a series of conversations, so, I have, my youngest daughter at the time was, you know, 17 or 18 maybe.

[00:06:34] And you know, we just started talking at the dinner table one night and my, you know, she was 18 at the time, but she's like, oh yeah, dad, they're, you know, women in the workforce have a hard time advancing. Mm. I'm like, how do you, like, you're not, you know, you're barely in college. What do you see? How do you even know that?

[00:06:50] She's just like, that's just the way it is, dad. I'm like, that's society. And then my oldest daughter is, you know, almost 30. And she's been in the professional workforce and she's experienced the darkest, deepest, most toxic male run stuff you can encounter in the professional workplace. So I could kind of see her point of view of why she, you know, feels like there's a need for, for guidance.

[00:07:15] Mm-hmm. I was really surprised to hear my younger daughter say the

same thing. And then just seeing these young women in these roles, Working right there and having the respect of the men. Just, it really, it lit a, a fire in me to, to, while I'm here. I want to try and do something for this. Nice. For the professional women.

[00:07:34] Right.

[00:07:35] **Christi Powell:** Nice. Well, I have to admit, I was boots on the ground before I took this role for 84, um, with the women business enterprise. I never sold to a female ever. Yeah. I'm a female. Yeah. I never sold to a female. Like, yeah, why? Right? Yeah, it, it's something you just don't think about. And then when I took this role on and I saw how much they needed our help, it was really cool to be able to step up and help.

[00:07:58] **Scott Witt:** Yeah. It's a shame, you know, it's kind of sad to hear that It really is.

[00:08:03] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah. Well, and just like your daughter, I mean, I've been in the professional realm and I understand, I mean, it happens everywhere, like board rooms everywhere. Mm-hmm. Um, and it's not just for women, it's for minorities. And the only thing is, you know, just we wanna be respected.

[00:08:17] And I think it's awesome what y'all are doing. You're looking at the bigger picture too. You're looking at. And, and you mentioned for us before you got on, the reason why you went there was you wanted to see young people succeed. Well, it sounded like in any business. Mm-hmm. But especially this one. Um, you wanted to see the young leadership drive this company through for many more decades and generations. I think that's awesome because that's what we need. Um, the younger generation needs y'all around to guide them. Yes. And in construction especially, I know this. That, you know, family businesses, it, it's hard to to get through each generation because there sometimes isn't that next leader or that guidance.

[00:09:03] So tell us a little bit about that, how that happened too, because a lot of our listeners are dealing with the same thing of transitioning through succession planning.

[00:09:13] **Scott Witt:** Yeah, so our company's dealing with a couple of dynamics. So it's a fourth generation. The gentleman that you know is the majority shareholder now, His dad passed away, uh, around 10 years ago when he was 24 years old.

[00:09:28] Oh, wow. And so for all intents and purposes, up until just recently, we were still operating under the shadow of the prior generation. Right. So Nick is really just coming in into his own and creating his culture mm-hmm. If you'll or his, his, his fingerprint on the company. Um, and then the other thing is, As we

went through a period, you know, last six or eight years, the company has expanded into new markets.

[00:09:55] Our revenues have, I mean, we've been growing, you know, 20, 30, 40%. A year. So Nice. We're we brought in five to 800 brand new people into a company that's 85 years old. Wow. And so, you know, I mean, think about that. You doubled the size of your mm-hmm. Your employee base. So how are you going to have a continuity and culture and beliefs and all of that?

[00:10:19] And then on top of that, you, you've got brand new people coming into the company. Who are younger and inexperienced and, you know, don't have the depth of knowledge, you know, for, for the hands on day to day of. Doing some stuff, so, right. Um, and, and I see that, you know,

[00:10:37] **Christi Powell:** it's cool that you're there for them.

[00:10:39] **Scott Witt:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So I see it as like, at the end of my career, it's my responsibility to help bridge that gap. At least here. As long as you can. Right. As long as I can. That's right. Yeah.

[00:10:50] **Christi Powell:** Thank goodness there's a lot of you out there. Exactly. Trying to make it better. Yes. Thank goodness for that. So one of the things that we talked about earlier was some kind of changes that you've seen, like just talking about the Florida do t wanting to, to be the leader in, um, you know, just doing things more innovatively, right?

[00:11:11] Yeah. If that's even a word. Um, plan for the future, right? Yeah, yeah, that's right. Tell us a little bit more about that. I think our listeners, some of our listeners would really like. To hear that information.

[00:11:21] **Scott Witt:** Yeah, so I, what I was talking about earlier is I do, I sense a mind shift in the project owners in our industry and we deal primarily with, with state dots.

[00:11:32] So areas like Florida that have, uh, a positive migration and have had a positive migration for a long, long time are really taking a, a bigger picture view of the projects they have to manage and build and construct and, and develop and timelines. So in Florida, You know, there's a lot of visibility of what the plan is and where the plans are and where the money is, um, and where the money's coming from.

[00:11:57] And I, I see other states that are, that are growing, like South Carolina I think is going through kind of not quite where Florida is now, but where Florida was several years ago. You know, so South Carolina's in that boat where they're having to really take a look and say, oh man, we got all these people moving to our state.

[00:12:15] And we need to improve the infrastructure and they're, they're just taking a bigger picture view of things. Yeah. Does that answer your question?

[00:12:22] **Christi Powell:** I feel like it does. Mm-hmm. Yeah, it does. Definitely. It's good to hear that. It's good to hear that we're doing some things that are innovating for a heavy civil, um, you know, the roads are necessary.

[00:12:33] And it'd be nice that transportation, right. If they're ready, get the product. Yes. Yeah. And we do have a lot of growth in the southeast too.

[00:12:41] **Angela Gardner:** Yes. Yeah. And y'all are looking to, to be more in the state of South Carolina right? To kind of,

[00:12:47] **Scott Witt:** yeah. We, we've been in South Carolina for five years, kind of Okay. In the, in the Charleston area.

[00:12:53] Uh, we do have a couple of nice projects there, but we're looking to build our brand and our credibility. In the state as South Carolina starts to implement some road programs that they, they have on the horizon. Ok. Well

[00:13:06] **Angela Gardner:** that's great to know. That's awesome.

[00:13:07] **Christi Powell:** Yes. I love the story about your girls and, and the fact that you were asking questions so that you could make, uh, a difference for the women in your industry.

[00:13:17] How do you think that the, what do you think the future looks like for that? And what, what part do you plan on playing in making that a better situation for women who want to be in heavy civil?

[00:13:28] **Scott Witt:** Well, my commitment statement is whatever it takes today. So that's what I'm gonna do. Like it,

[00:13:36] **Christi Powell:** Like it!

[00:13:36] **Scott Witt:** So some of the changes I've seen, so one of the epiphanies I had here at Superior, I was in a meeting. With Nick, the boss, and I think we were talking to our bonding people, our surety brokers and our bonding company. And um, he mentioned that people always ask him all the time, well, your son's three years old, when do you think he'll start taking over the company?

[00:14:00] And Nick says, I have two daughters. Why wouldn't one of them take over the company? Nice. Why does it have to be my son? So I think the futures bright for women who have the skill and the will to succeed. Um, I think the, the

dynamic, the culture, whatever you want to call it, it's there. We just gotta find ways to connect better.

[00:14:21] And bridge the gap and break the ceilings that exist.

[00:14:24] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. Yeah. Totally, totally love that. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much for that. Are there any challenges that you're, you're facing today for supplies and materials as you're out, uh, performing on your jobs?

[00:14:42] **Scott Witt:** Yeah. Every day. Every day. Every day. Yeah. Uh, I, I would

[00:14:45] **Christi Powell:** say anything in particular, Um, that you just struggle with constantly?

[00:14:49] **Scott Witt:** Well, I think originally it was just figuring out when you could get stuff. Mm-hmm. But I think now we're to a point, okay, we know the lead times and we can plan better Yeah. Around that.

[00:15:00] And I think the price escalations are starting to stabilize. Mm-hmm. So, a year ago, if you had asked me that questions, I would've said MSE walls. Concrete steel. Um, but today at least we know the lead times and, and we can work around it. Yeah. Um, yeah, my, uh, my former employer, uh, dealt with a lot of mechanical equipment.

[00:15:23] Mm. And there that was rough. The Yeah. There, you know, even buying a high-end refrigerator these days mm-hmm. I think has a six month to one year Yeah. Time. So it's still out there. I just think companies now it's stabilized enough where you can at least plan, yeah. Around what's going on. It's not so much of an unknown anymore.

[00:15:42] **Christi Powell:** That was great information. Thank you for sharing that.

[AD]

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[00:16:12] **Christi Powell:** So one of the things that we focus on is giving back to the community, I'm sure by the core values that I can see behind you. Yeah. Um, those listeners may not see it, but we can see their core values behind Scott. Obviously you're creating an environment, um, where people wanna come to work. So tell us how are you giving back, uh, to the community?

[00:16:34] **Scott Witt:** Well, one of our core values is commitment. And, uh, when we say commitment, we mean. If, if we plant roots in a community, we're not there just to do a big major highway project and then move on, we're there to plant roots and establish ourselves and become good corporate citizens. Nice. Whatever that, whatever that might mean for that particular area.

[00:16:57] So, I mean, specifically today we have a group of our young women actually are at a, uh, American Heart Association event. Uh, encouraging Cal. Yeah. Yeah. Callie Millers our HR manager. She's, um, She's on the board for the Heart Walk this year and some other initiatives that the Heart Association has. We're very big on, um, Christmas times, getting kids, uh, toys.

[00:17:20] Yeah. Uh, toys for Tots, filling Santa bags or whatever. I mean, honestly, every month we do something different. Nice. Uh, we just did a, a walk for a, a mental health awareness here in Jacksonville. Um, yay. Yay. Yeah. Yeah. So, so we, we leave it to our division leaders. To do whatever they need to do in their community to make an impact.

[00:17:44] Nice. And we encourage them. Yeah. That's great. So we do our budgets. Alright. Uh, each division manager has a budget, has a plan, and they go attack it. Yeah. And then, you know, it's as simple as, you know, the local zoo here needed. Something built. Yeah. And so we like, oh, we could probably take care of that for you.

[00:18:02] But, you know, we're always looking for opportunities to, to represent or, or give back to our communities.

[00:18:08] **Christi Powell:** I, I knew that I could tell that by looking at your core values, that it was very important. Mm-hmm. And I don't know if you've noticed it or not, but some of the emerging leaders, that's very, very important to them.

[00:18:18] It, it is just as important to them for, to be involved in the community for their company as being able to spend more time at home. Uh, th this is what we're hearing. Yeah. Have you noticed that?

[00:18:29] **Scott Witt:** I have. And I can tell you like, you know, I'm at the, again, I'm at the end of my career, but it, it's kind of cool.

[00:18:35] People know me here in the community and if somebody needs something, they at least know they can call me and talk about it. And I may not be able to help, but I probably know somebody that does. So as you progress through your career, I think that kind of, that part of your ego develops a little bit. But I do, this generation is a lot more the younger generation today.

[00:18:56] I think is a lot more about, uh, giving back to the community. Mm-hmm.



[00:19:01] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah. That's refreshing. Yeah.

[00:19:03] **Scott Witt:** Yeah. I see it. See it a lot.

[00:19:04] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. That's awesome. I was taught just keep your my head down and work hard. Right? Yeah. Nobody, that's right. Nobody, nobody told us anything else. So just keep your head down and work hard.

[00:19:19] So, Scott, talk to us a little bit about, um, the importance of vulnerability and authenticity.

[00:19:25] **Scott Witt:** Yes, I, I think it's critical. You can't be part of a team if you don't know each other and really getting to know each other is telling your story. You know, everybody, everybody has really good things that happened to 'em.

[00:19:38] Everybody had challenges they had to overcome, and I have found, Getting to know the team members better and listening to their story and hearing the pains they've overcome mm-hmm. And hearing the successes they've had, this really makes you more effective, um, and more productive as a team. So, um, to me it's, you know, if you're an emerging manager, I would encourage you to sit down with your team and just go through the, the exercise or process of, of having everybody tell their story and get to know each other better and put it out there.

[00:20:11] Don't hold anything back.

[00:20:13] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah, I like that. That's not, that doesn't happen much in our industry, but I, I think it's starting to, right. Yeah.

[00:20:19] **Scott Witt:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah. We, uh, you hot? Yeah. My direct reports and I just went through a, it's been almost a year long exercise of developing, um, this is a trademark thing. You can Google it, but it's called a uap, so we went through the Oh, yeah, yeah, I've heard of that.

[00:20:36] The UAP exercise. And the Umap people told me, you're the leader. You have to be vulnerable. You have to put it all out there. And, um, you know, there's some stuff in my life I never talked about IT com. I'm a man. I compartmentalize everything. So I just, I like, all right, this is the most painful thing that happened in my life.

[00:20:56] And I told 10 or 20 people, you know, kind of strangers, really. I just put it all out there, told my story, and their jaws dropped, you know? Mm-hmm. Then it was their turn. So then the

[00:21:08] **Christi Powell:** barriers come

[00:21:09] **Scott Witt:** down. Then it, then it came down and some people are more reserved and didn't quite go there. But then there were, I mean, we had people.

[00:21:16] You know, breakdown, crying, you know, big, strong burley men tell their story. I'm like, oh my God. So it does make a difference and it, it helps, it helped us connect better. Mm-hmm. And I think it's, it's helping us, uh, work towards our vision a lot more than we would have if we wouldn't have done it. Nice.

[00:21:34] **Christi Powell:** Mm.

[00:21:34] I love that, that yeah, definitely wanna talk about that in the future. Thanks Scott for sharing that. Authentic thank you. And vulnerability that was important to our industry. For sure. And what you all are doing is, um, definitely on the innovative side. Of trying to make our industry better, and we appreciate you for that.

[00:21:52] Yes, we do. I'm looking

[00:21:52] **Scott Witt:** for ideas too, because we don't have all the answers that women need. I'd love to love to hear some feedback and ideas on what women really need to succeed. You heard

[00:22:01] **Christi Powell:** that audience we've been asking you. We're asking again. Scott wants to know what you need. Yeah. All right. Please post it on Breaking Barriers.

[00:22:08] swarm.com. We wanna hear what you need.

[00:22:18] Well, we appreciate you being on today, Scott. Please let our listeners know how they can get ahold of you and, um, if you've got any job openings or you know, any projects that you're working on in different areas, please feel sh free to share it with our audience. Yeah, I'm sure they would love to get

[00:22:33] **Scott Witt:** ahold of you.

[00:22:33] Yeah, well, I'm Scott Wit the CFO of Superior Construction. Best means to contact me is uh, my email address, s witt superior construction.com. Uh, we are always looking for talented people, so just go to our websites, peer construction.com, and we have a list of open positions. And the most exciting job for me, I think we're working on now, is the repair of the Anibel Island Causeway.

[00:23:00] Nice. That was wiped. Yeah. Wiped out by Hurricane Ian. So we. We got that up and running in seven days after the hurricane for emergency access.

Wow. And then we're working on the permanent repairs now.

[00:23:11] **Christi Powell:** So you all know exactly what you're doing?

[00:23:14] **Scott Witt:** Yes. I would say we're pretty good at it. Yeah. Yes. Yeah, we're pretty good.

[00:23:17] That's what we do. Yeah. Awesome.

[00:23:20] **Christi Powell:** Well, thank you so much for being on and sharing your wisdom today. It's been so helpful for our audience. I'm

[00:23:25] **Scott Witt:** sure. Okay. Very good. Well, I appreciate y'all having me.

[00:23:33] **Christi Powell:** Well, that's all for this episode. Thank you so much for listening to the Women Talk Construction podcast with your host, Kristy Powell and Angela Gardner. See you next time.