

WTC 'Creating Solutions for Women' with Liz Walsh

[00:00:00] **Christi Powell:** Hey, Angela, how are you doing this morning?

[00:00:11] **Angela Gardner:** I'm great. How are you? Christi?

[00:00:14] **Christi Powell:** I'm good. Welcome to Women Top Construction Podcast. Today, we've got a really exciting guest on before we introduce Liz with WBEC. She is the WBEC. President love her, love her organization. We as 84 lumber company have been a member of WBEC for over 11 years now.

And it's very important to 84 lumber. It's very important to 84 lumber and myself that we are, uh, helping women grow in every industry. Not just construction, not just industrial, not just in entrepreneurship. So we are super excited to talk to Liz today. She's going to tell us more. It's so important for us to be gathering together globally and looking at supporting each other in this challenge that we have in business and in all industries as women.

So welcome. Liz. Thank you so much for joining us today. today. You are a busy woman and I just can't thank you enough for being on with us.

[00:01:18] **Liz Walsh:** Girl, just to be here...

[00:01:22] **Christi Powell:** We have lots of questions for you, so we're going to try to keep it short and sweet, but it might be hard.

[00:01:27] **Angela Gardner:** I want to start off with the first question, but I want to start it off with a sentence from your bio because it really hit me and I loved it, especially the last word, Liz leads with empathy, kindness, and great sense of humor. Humor is so, so important these days. I mean, it makes life so much more enjoyable and you can see it in your, your face, like all of those things.

So I am so excited to get to know you. But so our first question is, tell us a short summary about you and your role at Women Business Enterprise Center. Sure.

[00:02:04] **Liz Walsh:** So this is just so exciting because anything Empowering and lifting up is just what we need today. And when you say, you know, humor, I think during the pandemic, we're still all recovering.

And I think I think it was Michelle Obama who said the country seemed to have a low level of depression and I feel that and I think now. More than ever in our history is the time that we should be lifting each other up. And especially we, as women, so we, Becky, we are a nonprofit organization. We actually belong to 2 national organization.

So, it gives us a really wide reach. 1 is the SBA. We are an approved women's business center. So that means that we can provide. Entrepreneurial training programs to folks, just kind of thinking, do I really want to start a business and be my own boss? Or do I just want a new job? So we help lead them through all of that.

And then we are also, of course, referenced by Christie already 1 of the, we bank partners. So, we bank is the national. 3rd party certification, women's business. Enterprise National Council, it's both a certification and an organization and it is verifying and validating that a company is at least 51 percent woman owned, but it's not just the ownership.

It's the control and it's the oversight. It's the management of it. So it's not just on paper. So how that occurs with there are. 14 organizations, we call ourselves regional partner organizations. So we're kind of the boots on the ground for the national certification. So my area covers the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the state of Delaware, and 8 counties in southern New Jersey.

But there are 14 of us, there are 13 others of me, just as passionate, just as wonderful, who cover all of the continental United States and our territories. Oh,

[00:04:11] **Christi Powell:** wow. So I've got a question for you on that string of all the accomplishments that we bank and what you're doing and what the SBA is doing right now for women in all positions.

What would you tell someone who was thinking of leaving the workplace and starting their own business? I noticed that you started a new program called Encorepreneur, and it's very cool, and it's just specifically for those women because we're seeing an influx of women who have left the workplace and want to start their own business, and they're very good at it.

So tell us a little bit more about that and how that's helping women transition.

[00:04:52] **Liz Walsh:** So one of the really great things about being a non profit in, you know, the economic development world is We can pivot pretty easily

and as we all know, we all had to, we, we've redefined the word pivot for sure. So, and it got overused, but it's still a valid word.

So, 1 of the things that you were kind of hearing it on the news that there were a lot of folks post coven who were not returning to their pre coven. Workplaces and careers, predominantly the healthcare industry and the educational industry. So we saw that and we wanted to kind of make sure that we were, it wasn't just in the news that.

So we did a quick environmental scan of the area that we. That we touch, and indeed, there are folks who have thought about being their own boss and starting a business. This gave an opportunity to do. So when they didn't return, so we call them encore, because they're kind of starting their 2nd act. So, um, they may be women of a certain age, and they are individuals who may have had a very storied and established career, but are now trying something else.

So, we're doing a lot with that population, the encore population. We're calling it on core. And we actually have, uh, just launched digital labs so that folks can talk again, going with that lifting up in the community that especially women desire. So we're starting it off in a digital level so that we can, you know, start to connect these folks and try out business ideas on each other in a safe environment.

[00:06:43] **Christi Powell:** Within the residential building and construction industry, ECI software solutions offers an integrated suite. cloud based management solutions specifically tailored to their specific markets with the goal of supporting small and medium sized companies to improve profitability, reduce construction costs, shorten schedules, and increase sales.

Thank you, ECI, for doing all that you do.

One of the things I love about WeBank is that, um, and WBECs. East in particular, because you are unique. Not every one of the RPOs has a business center for women. So what I love about it is that when you see a need, you create a solution and that's near and dear to my heart. There's so many needs out there and the fact that you are always thinking of how do we be better?

How do we serve our women better? How do we make our economy better? How do we bring women and men together to work together? All of it is a solution for some big needs. Some small, some big, but I love what you're doing. Thank you so much for

[00:07:58] **Liz Walsh:** all of that. Yeah, thank you. And 1 thing that we did was we looked at all of our course offerings and opportunities and we looked at the life cycle of a woman owned business and we segmented it into startup.

Stretch succeed and sunset you think of sunset. We're not necessarily thinking of succession planning and turning the business over, but we, as women sunset when we go out on maternity leave that we've had that in place for, I guess, about 4 years now. And it's really helpful and no 1 is only in 1 stage.

So you can kind of, you know, it's, it's like a train station, uh, get off at this station, take that class, then take go a little bit further, take the next class. But that kind of looking at the full life cycle of a woman owned business has really been helpful in, you know, kind of directing where we put our resources and our educational opportunities.

[00:08:58] **Christi Powell:** And hey, listeners, if you are considering getting into business, if you're already into business, you don't have to be a member of WeBank to learn more. If you go to WBEC East, you can take a lot of courses that you can pay for. Some of them are paid, some of them are unpaid. You have a lot of free resources out there.

Please go there and get some real help and support from people who've been doing it for a long time. I love that. She's talking about phases of, of, of an industry and a woman owned business. And, and Angela can relate to this. She literally ran her, ran her dad's business for three businesses for several years.

And it's not easy, it is not an easy task, is it, Angela?

[00:09:42] **Angela Gardner:** No, nope, and now we're running a podcast.

[00:09:45] **Liz Walsh:** We're doing it again! Yay,

[00:09:48] **Angela Gardner:** yes! Well, I

[00:09:49] **Christi Powell:** mean, so yes, we are loving it. We are

[00:09:51] **Liz Walsh:** loving it. You're pivoting and you're responding to a need. Exactly. More people are listening to the podcasts online now, and Yeah. So you're responding to the need of, of the current society.

[00:10:03] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah. So what you're doing Liz really is dear and dear to my heart because I mean, when you're a woman leader and, and

oftentimes we're thrown into that and you got to figure it out. And for me, it was telling me I couldn't do something or telling me that that doesn't exist. I'm going to figure out a way to make that not happen.

Yes, but I think what y'all are doing is absolutely wonderful. And I'm going to pivot a little bit because I bet you can share a little bit. This probably is something that y'all figured out and what y'all do. And of course, Christine, our big of this is what role does mentorship or sponsorship, you know, cause sponsorships a little bit more hands on, like actually lifting them up, talking about someone behind closed doors.

Or applying them for an award that they don't know about. Things like that. How does that and networking play into the support of the growth and success of the women owned businesses at your organization? Like how do you facilitate those conversations and make that happen?

[00:11:09] **Liz Walsh:** So we do it pretty organically.

Okay, we don't have a formalized mentorship program. We have a group of experienced certified women business owners with 30 of them who we call on voice and they serve as our ambassadors because I can talk to someone who's starting their business or saying, well, how do I get a contract? And what? What?

What's good on a capability statement? I'm looking at it from a perspective of reading and a research perspective, like, as if I'm a college kid. We want people in in that world in the real life that are doing it. Yes. Okay. We really try to I'm not an expert. I mean, I guess I kind of own my own business because I was single parent my whole life.

So I did everything, but, um, you know, to get to get real peer to peer. Networking is incredibly important and our envoy serve as kind of, um, informal mentors. So, if we know we have somebody who just joined us, who's from the science industry, we'll connect them with 1 of the boys with a science background because there's also.

So many industries, and so many particular challenges that each industry woman faces that way, but, you know, you can't do it alone and we need to recognize that. So I'm so glad Christie that you said that I mentioned our, our approved territory. But, you know, we've had people participate from Puerto Rico way outside of the Philadelphia region.

It's a global community and your, your mentor, your colleague, your bestie in your industry might be 10 states away, but they're still facing the same challenge. When people start when they are newly certified, the envoy send personalized postcards that say, greetings from from East, but they put their information on it.

My my cell phone number my emails out there in the world. But they do it, they do about 20, we get about 20 to 30 new newly certified women owned businesses each month. And each month an envoy takes charge of reaching out and saying, Hey, I'll be your friend. Yeah. We did investigate a formalized mentoring program and we find that just, you know, kind of grassroots and organic.

Has been much, much better. Yes. I

[00:13:43] **Christi Powell:** 100 percent agree with that formalized makes people just from what we've heard from the younger generation, it makes them feel like it's too structured and it's uncomfortable and it's almost intimidating. Intimidating, right?

[00:13:56] **Liz Walsh:** Yes. And one more commitment that we have to Yeah.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. . Oh, I have to talk to my mentee. Exactly. . Yeah. So, so we do, we're we're really trying to establish girlfriends. .

[00:14:06] **Christi Powell:** Absolutely. . Just, we want all the girls in one room. Yeah. That's what I do. I'm, that's, My heart, I want all the girls in one room. I don't care what I do for a living. Or if you don't do anything for a living, if you just stay home and watch those kids, that's the hardest job ever.

Yeah. So, so obviously you are an expert at collaborating with other organizations. Tell our audience, maybe we've got some listeners that are in organizations that are, that are literally protecting their resources and not sharing what they're doing, how is that possibly hindering them? From being able to make greater impact.

[00:14:46] **Liz Walsh:** So, there's more than enough to go around. There is. You know, some, sometimes as nonprofits, we're competing for the same dollars. What, what our approach is to go into it as a partnership so that there can be an equal distribution and our organization certainly will take a back seat. If someone does something better, we don't want to reinvent the wheel.

Our website, we really used it as a, as kind of a library. Some places you have to pay to get. You know, that you have a conference coming up, we'll take anybody's anything that will help the constituents in the communities that we serve. We want to get out there on. We do it through social. We do it through our website.

We have an opportunities page. We have posted guidelines, you know, obviously, nothing that that would be against our values. But, you know, I would like to not exist. I would like to supply our diversity and. Thank you. Women in business to be so normalized that I'm out of business. So I think that some other nonprofits have that same feeling when they're dealing with.

Homelessness or, um, you know, poverty, which are, you know, the, um, uh, food injustice. Those are really important issues that we would like to see be out of existence as well. Yeah, economic development. It should just be so much part of the norm differentiation between the minority and the women owned as opposed to just the run of the mill.

Owners of businesses, so, so I would say that the more we share, the better we're going to be, the better we're going to be and the greater our reaches, you know, it's and there are, there are a lot of free resources out there. Sometimes people get intimidated by utilizing the SBA, the small business administration, but they have great resources.

They do. Even if you're not in my area, we have a physical location that you can come to as a woman's business center, but everyone has in their area, small business development centers score chapters. There are so many free resources and they're all listed on our resources page site that you can avail yourself up.

So, but yeah, I think collaboration to the depths of my soul. I don't understand why we don't. Collaborate. Um, you know, it, it just, it makes sense. It's, it's what makes sense.

[00:17:20] **Christi Powell:** 84 Lumber Company is the nation's largest privately held supplier of building materials, manufactured components, and industry leading services for single and multifamily residences and commercial buildings. The company operates 310 facilities, which include stores, component manufacturing plants, custom door shops, and engineered wood product centers in Thurston.

One of my favorite sayings is, is if we were all pushing that boulder up the mountain, it would get up there a whole lot faster and we'd be, we'd be on the

downhill side, which would be, we wouldn't have to be talking about supplier diversity. We wouldn't even have to have this conversation. Right. But because we're in silos, we're all trying to push the same boulder up the mountain, but just a few people at a time.

And you are a leader in collaboration. I feel like Liz, not only you and your leadership, but your team is a leader in collaboration and the way they just wrap their arms around you. And no matter what you're doing or what you need,

[00:18:40] **Liz Walsh:** they're there. Well, you know what, if I have a thought I'm being paid either by a grant.

Or by a woman business owner who believes in us. So I feel like that thought belongs to the world. So we do, uh, you know, our, our subsidy, I, I'm, I work for you. I, you know, kind of working for the world. So yeah, it's not

[00:19:02] **Christi Powell:** about me. Right. We talk about that a lot on our podcast. It's not about me. Yeah. I love it.

I think Angela's got something she wants to ask. She's got that face. Okay. You want, we're just going to like drill you today.

[00:19:15] **Angela Gardner:** I know. So this is a little bit different, but it's kind of been asked, but I'm going to put a twist on it. So, you know, there's a lot of the next generation kind of getting out there and getting into, even then doing their own thing, running their own companies.

In fact, our next person that we're interviewing. Did that just that right out of college. So what advice would you give to those young women considering starting their own businesses? You know, that might be hesitant or unsure or where, where do they begin? What do you suggest to them?

[00:19:44] **Liz Walsh:** So I think it's taking your dream to reality.

Putting pen to paper would be coordinating. Um, I have seen people who think they can do it all on their own and somebody else already looked up and researched. How do you become an LLC? So I think asking for help and being open to that, to that assistance. Again, the SBAs, the women, the small business development centers, the women business centers, they're all primed and ready to help.

I think sometimes we, we women, why do we think we have to do it all ourselves? You know, from start to finish. So ask the questions, recognize that you don't know everything. And I think that we need to do more confidence building and just from a, from a grade school level and just have it intertwined with everything, because sometimes it's really, somebody has a great idea, but because they don't know all the questions and don't want to admit that they don't have the confidence to say, help me.

So I would say reach out to partners. And one of the biggest things is. You know, a market analysis and a market study to make sure that you're going to be, we've had to really kind of adjust, like, you know, with Twitter and, uh, you know, this is all, some of this is all still new to me, but depending on what the product is, you really have to have good Good, solid information on where that would best sell retail online.

You know, there's just, I think people are really fortunate today. Business owners, business, potential business owners. There's so much free online that they can do all their research. But I think that then Christy, you use the word silo. And if you're just researching on your own, you're siloing yourself.

So get out there and talk to other women. The one thing I will say about the women in the, in the WeBank network is anybody asks a question, somebody raises their hand, you get an answer, yeah, that's great, yeah, you get an answer, it's amazing, it's, you join, you join this really groovy, loving sorority without even realizing it, sisterhood, right,

[00:21:56] **Angela Gardner:** sisterhood,

[00:21:57] **Liz Walsh:** little sisterhood, yeah, yeah, so I would say, I would say that for young people, and you know, it's interesting because We for 2022, we don't have all of our demographics in for 2023 yet, but 12% of the new businesses that were started were by women under the age of 34.

Hmm. Now that's just in my region. We had 245 new business starts in 2022. Nice. Which is pretty good. 'cause we were still coming off of the pandemic. 20% were women of color. And again, 12 percent were that younger was that younger generation. So the, the, the landscape's

[00:22:39] **Christi Powell:** changing. It is changing and it's great that it is changing and the collaboration between everybody.

One of the things that, um, when I took this role three years ago, I was boots on the ground for 26 years, as you know, and I really didn't even know how to talk. Like a girl, so there's that, whatever that even means, I'm still struggling with that, but being in the construction industry for as long as I have been, and then being able to take a role as an executive for our company.

And as a WBE director, we have been the minority. In WeBank, there's not a lot of women wanting to get certified or even enter our industry because they have this vision of it being so hard. And so, you know, they don't have the experience. They don't have the confidence, whatever, whatever the case may be.

And I noticed when I joined three years ago, uh, WeBank there, there's just not a lot of construction companies that are either supporting as a. What do you call them? Corporate sponsor or actually boots on the ground doing the work, right? No W's. Tell me, I know the landscapes changed a little because I've been seeing these webinars with people like Turner.

And Brasfield and gory all over the country. I do get to travel the country for those that are listening. So I am a little familiar with all the RPOs. I probably sit on webinars all over the country, either in person or out. Are you seeing an uptick in the construction industry coming into WeBank, not only as a corporate sponsor, but as a player?

[00:24:14] **Liz Walsh:** We're seeing it more on the W B E side, to tell you the truth. Okay. The construction companies actually comprise 21% of the total industries of the wbe. Mm-hmm. , the next largest is the 18%, which includes legal. Um, okay. The scientific real estate. And then after that is manufacturing, which is 11%. Okay. So, 21 percent construction is pretty high.

Now, where we are Christie in the Philadelphia marketplace. It makes sense more rural areas are our largest number of construction firms are actually in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Okay. But so, so some of it makes sense, I think that career technical. Yeah. Yeah. I think are fortunately, it looks like so for those listeners who don't know, it's what we used to call the text.

Okay. So. We've gotten away from the vote tech terminology, because that was where the air quotes in case this is just audio bad kids went and it's, it's changed. There's a respect now for people in the trades that hadn't existed before. So, before coming here. I spent 20 years of my career in workforce development.

Mm. I've worked with a lot of CTEs and I think the CTEs are really pushing those non-traditional trades. Um, especially for women. We need to get a movie like, uh, flash Dance Back. Yes. Yes. You know, to, to show, but we really need to start highlighting that, but so we're not, From a corporate sponsorship level, that's kind of coming a little bit slow.

It's coming more in, like, a hospital. We work with chop children's hospital, Pennsylvania, because they're doing large construction projects. So, we're getting a kind of through larger. Organizations and the buildings that they're doing, but we definitely are seeing an uptick in construction and I don't know.

I don't know if you see, because you're obviously so much more close to it than me, but. With it being accepted as a viable career, you know, there's, there's a, we

[00:26:34] **Christi Powell:** still have challenges to overcome,

[00:26:36] **Liz Walsh:** right? There's definitely challenges. The, I think are really trying to change that they are and rightfully. So, and I think, unfortunately, the, you know, the student loan debt crisis.

Is showing people some alternate avenues, which, you know, looking back, if I, if I had to do my life over again, I would have been a carpenter. I'm just, I'm kind of too old now and too tired to carry, you know, I think it's my daughter went to a CTE for construction management. Nice. So, yeah, so we are seeing an increase in construction more from the WBE side at this time.

I'm so happy to hear.

[00:27:23] **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. Groundbreak is the only platform that reaches key AEC decision makers.

Influencers in our two-state region. Visit [groundbreak carolinas.com](https://groundbreakcarolinas.com) and be sure to sign up for our free biweekly newsletter. I

think the awareness is up, but I think this is a good time for us to talk about some of the policies that are, That are not helping us move forward. So there's been some new policies that have come across, not only with workforce

development, but with the trades, I know, you know, a little bit more about it than I do about the most recent, because we bank literally reports to the president of the United States, is that correct?

[00:28:23] **Liz Walsh:** We bank doesn't RSBA partner does. Okay.

[00:28:26] **Christi Powell:** Okay. I knew somewhere in that circle of environment that they were directly reporting to the United States. So tell us about the policies that have just changed recently that are not helping women and minorities move forward.

[00:28:41] **Liz Walsh:** So, we bank actually has a policy arm called women impacting public policy.

So they're doing more research. I don't know that I am expert enough to talk with any real authority other than we're seeing, you know, some changes in the, in the political landscape and the, the recent decisions related to affirmative action kind of. Really making us take a few steps backwards. Um, our council, the council actually, as a, as a nonprofit, we cannot do any kind of, um, advocacy work, but we can do education work.

Right? We're so we're starting to get together to RPO

as far as I know, that has a law firm on our on our regional council. Nice, the, the legal industry is really taking an interest in supplier diversity and now especially related to to some of these policies that have just been handed down. I just think we need to all stay alert because it's not just the, you know, the, the, the Harvard rulings and against affirmative action, but it's the, the other regulatory changes that are happening to happening to women and our rights in general.

So, you know, the next population, the younger generation, it drives me crazy when people kind of talk negatively about millennials. They're the ones that care, they're going to

[00:30:09] **Christi Powell:** change this. They're going to change it. And

[00:30:12] **Liz Walsh:** even the younger ones than that. They are the intentional shopper that if they're looking at 2 pasta brands on Wegmans shelves, they will turn it around to see if it has that logo, or if it has a tag that has LGBTQ, and they'll, they'll, you know, promote, they'll be intentional.

Yes, they're extremely intentional. They're going to be our voters. Yes. I think we have an obligation to really. And I'm not trying to promote one, one party over another. I just think no matter where you land politically, we need to keep our eye on the legislation that's impacting our daughters. And I'm just a brand new recent grandmother of a beautiful little girl.

[00:30:58] **Christi Powell:** And we got to protect that

[00:31:00] **Liz Walsh:** baby. I'm even more in tune to it now. Yes. Um, I think some of the policy, it's all too new and we can't get scared because, you know, we always have a way of the pendulum flipping, you know, vectoring and coming back. But I think we need to be aware, right? Just

[00:31:20] **Christi Powell:** be mindful, mindful instead of, you know, just going through your day every day, because it's going to take all of us to make the change.

It can't, it can't just happen with a few of us, Liz. Thank you. I could talk to you for another half an hour, but before we go, just first of all, thank you for all your insights, all your wisdom, all the things that you're doing through WBEC East. We're so proud to be a part of your organization. At 84 lumber company.

I'm proud that I think women talk construction is going to be a we bank Member very soon. We're almost there. Yeah So, um every everything about we bank has been really good for our business for our economy For women. And, uh, we're big supporters of the helping. So as we, we, um, dial back this conversation, please let the audience know how to get ahold of you, how to get ahold of your organization, how to sign up for WeBank.

Just tell us some information about what you're doing and how to get ahold of you. Sure,

[00:32:21] **Liz Walsh:** our website is we back East. That's W. B. E. C. E. A. S. T. dot com. We Becky's dot com to get me directly. My email is E. Walsh at East dot com. E. W. A. L. S. H. and to be honest with you, because I'm on the road a lot to Christie, the easiest way to connect with me, you do not have to be from my area.

I'll try to connect you to the right person. My cell phone number is 215. 936 9392.

So we welcome, uh, connections with anybody and everyone.

[00:32:59] **Christi Powell:** I love it. Thank you. And that was pretty brave of you to put your phone number out there. Yes, it was. Thank you. And I'm just gonna say from my own personal experience, she calls you back. Yeah. Oh, she may be busy and it may be a couple days, but she always calls you back.

If she's busy, she still always calls you back. So thank you again, Liz, for being on today. Yes, thank you. Webe East is on all social media channels. Get on their website, find all their resources. Their resources are actually on our website, women talk construction. Um, the breaking barriers forum. com is a great place for you to meet Liz.

She's probably going to sign in there and make sure that you can get a hold of her. If you listen to this podcast and then three months later go, Oh, where was that? We'll try to make sure that she and Steve get her information out there. So you can learn more. Thank you so much again, Liz, for taking your time.

Investing in the folks that are listening to our podcast. We appreciate you

[00:33:52] **Liz Walsh:** and thank you what you do. Wonderful. You're welcome

[00:34:00] **Christi Powell:** Well, that's all for this episode Thank you so much for listening to the women talk construction podcast with your hosts christy powell and angela gardner See you next time