

WTC 'Diversity of Think' with Thea and Dena

[00:00:00] **Christi Powell:** Hey, podcast listeners, this is Christi Powell. I'm here today with Angela Gardner, our co host. We get to talk about some super special guests today. Um, with WLBM, if you don't know what that stands for, it's the women of LBM. So if you've heard of LBM strategy, some of you have, some of you haven't. LBM stands for lumber and building materials.

So they are with us today. They're the founders of women of LBM. And we're going to talk a little bit about, uh, women in construction week and some other really interesting things. That they are doing to help uplift women in the industry. So thank you today for joining us, Dina and Thea. Thank you for being here.

Thea Dudley is a credit overlord and Dina Cordova Jack from the Missura group. She is with us today and you'll learn a little bit more about them during our talk today, and they're going to tell you exactly where. To find them and follow them and get connected with WLBM too. So you women that are out there, please connect with these ladies after you listen to the podcast.

Yeah. Making big impacts in our industry. So let's start with an icebreaker today. Women in Construction Week was last week. I don't know for sure what date this is going to publish, but just so our listeners know, it was last week for us today on a Friday. Okay. But I wanted to talk about what was the most exciting thing that you experienced last week in Women in Construction Week.

And Dina, I'm going to let you go first.

[00:01:34] **Dena Cordova:** Thanks, Christi. Thanks, Angela. We are really glad to be here and very excited to talk to you today. I think for me, the most exciting thing for women in construction week was really watching the celebration that was happening all across the country. And and also, I had a chance to hear from a few women who had participated with the, and I, over the years in a lot of the things that we had done.

With women of LBM and at the LBM strategies conference and some educational things that we had done and just the impact that that we have been able to make. And it definitely lets us know. It's very affirming that we are on the right track to help and uplift women.

[00:02:17] **Christi Powell:** And you're doing a great job of that too.

Angela, let's hear what you have. Well,

[00:02:21] **Angela Gardner:** mine? Okay. Yeah. So mine is my son, my 24 year old son reached out to me and needed to do an essay on equity. And I was like, well, son, William, it is women in construction week. Just do it on that. And he did. And I got to read it and it was so special.

[00:02:41] **Christi Powell:** Oh, that's like a mom crown, right?

Angela Gardner: What about you, Christi?

Christi Powell: I love it. So my most exciting thing was not so exciting being on vacation during women in construction week. That will never happen again. But, um, probably the most exciting thing that I heard were a couple of students that attended an event that we're a part of, were really, considering the construction industry after that event.

So that really was exciting for me. All right. I know really what we do, why we do what we do, right. So people recognize our industry and how fruitful and amazing it is and want to join. Um, how about you, Sia? What, what was most exciting for you last week? Um,

[00:03:22] **Thea Dudley:** Well, it's really hard to be cleanup batter with you guys.

I'll come up with, you know, these great things. I think for me, there was not really one big high. It was really just watching every day unfold, whether it was on LinkedIn, whether it was locally, seeing everybody get on board and just get excited about it and actually talk about it. I think that's the biggest highlight to me as we're having the conversations.

[00:03:43] **Christi Powell:** It is. I mean, three years ago, we didn't see that, right? Yeah. Three, four years ago, we didn't see that, and we see it now. It's like a great time to be alive as a woman, in my opinion.

[00:03:54] **Angela Gardner:** And you both are doing it too! So give yourself a hand!

[00:03:58] **Dena Cordova:** Yeah! We're doing it. We're doing it together.

[00:04:01] **Christi Powell:** We are doing it together.

[AD] Hi, don't forget, womantalkconstruction.com has a forum of community where we all get together and talk about what's going on in our lives. We have workforce development opportunities, scholarships available. If you have them, please post them there. Um, we also have jobs, whether you need a job or whether you want a job filled, that's the place to be.

And our network of amazing people are there to help make connections.

Christi Powell: So Dena, I'm going to ask a little bit about what you guys have got going on. What inspired you to establish WLBM and what impact do you hope that'll make within the lumber and building materials industry?

[00:04:55] **Dena Cordova:** Well, a really quick Reader's Digest condensed version, um, because it is a longer story, but, you know, a few years ago, Thea and I have known each other for, I can't even remember how long, uh, it's been quite, it's been quite a while, but both of us had been going to different conferences and, you know, we would always see that there was very few women there.

And thankfully, those numbers are raising, but, um, We also saw that there was just no leadership pathway or education or support or how to for women. So this all began with a few women speaking together at a, at a conference, just saying, Hey, what if, and, uh, I started it out when I was running mountain States, lumber dealers association, and we had like a small round table.

And then from there, we, uh, Rick Schumacher, the editor of LBM journal had asked us to come on board with them. And we really turn this into a, uh, an annual conference format. And then on top of that, doing additional education seminars, classes, so on and so forth. And so the impact that we, that we are making that we will continue to make, and that we hope to make is that just elevating women and teaching them the skills, the leadership skills that they need to know, because.

Rules are different societal expectations. And so, you know, just giving women the tools to be able to ascend and Excel is really what we're all about.

[00:06:24] **Christi Powell:** Nice. All right. You're doing a great job of that for sure. Um, your membership portal is amazing where you are trying to teach some leadership tips, tricks, how to, you know, how to.

Even soft skills, right? Some of the things that you guys are doing on the membership. Some of us need the soft skills. I needed them when I got in this role because I'd been in the field so long. I forgot that I really need to know how to talk to a female, like not the guys on the job site that need materials.

So it's really a lovely thing. Even if you use your soft skills every day, it's always a great reminder to refresh them. So I appreciate what you guys are doing to help women be leaders. I think Angela's got the next question.

[00:07:09] **Angela Gardner:** Yes, I do. So, and this one's for Thea. How do you see the role of women evolving within the traditional male populated field of lumber and building materials?

Where do you see that going?

[00:07:23] **Thea Dudley:** You know, I think if you look at it overall when we talk about how it grows, it really depends on what that particular female wants to do. I personally never want to drive a forklift, but that may be somebody's jam. They might want to go do that. I think the more important thing is to have the avenues open.

[00:07:41] **Christi Powell:** Yes. And

[00:07:41] **Thea Dudley:** that's where that whole sense of community comes from. When, when you just have a very small group of women to begin with, and there's no connectivity outside of your company, it makes it really hard. So as you, you grow your network and you grow that community and you start to talk to other women across the country and you get their viewpoints and you see what they're doing, you start to see anything's possible.

Yeah.

[00:08:03] **Angela Gardner:** And you see

[00:08:03] **Thea Dudley:** it, believe it,

[00:08:04] **Christi Powell:** right? Yeah.

[00:08:06] **Thea Dudley:** Yeah.

[00:08:07] **Christi Powell:** See it, believe it, you can do it.

[00:08:10] **Thea Dudley:** So it does make a huge difference. The community piece for me is, is like the biggest is that networking community piece, because not everyone gets to go to conferences and you see a lot of people maybe in an entry level or mid level and they, they, they don't see where they could go.

And that's not cool.

[00:08:29] **Christi Powell:** Yeah, definitely. I would have never. Saw myself in that position, you know, before I took this role, um, I was in the field, right? Checking with my. My jobs, checking on my jobs, project managing, didn't see any other females doing what I was doing. Didn't even think I had an opportunity to be in a role that I'm in right now.

It just so happened that one of the men in our company, um, saw my gifts and wanted that for me. So thankful for that, obviously. But then I had to have some therapy so that I could be prepared to deal with all the things that I knew I was going to. You know, that I was going to have to face, right. It was going to be a different role and I needed to get my mindset in the right place.

And I just, I just love how that, I love what you're doing to just allow those pathways to open up. So Dana, can you share a specific success story? You talked a little bit about that a minute ago, or a milestone that WLBM has achieved since trans, since you, you know, put this together since inception and how has it contributed to your mission?

[00:09:30] **Dena Cordova:** Well, as I was speaking before, we, we started with a membership of 3 and we are pushing, um, in terms of followers and our, in our really are our tribe that we're creating. We're pushing 300. And, yes,

We're excited. As we've gotten more organized and Willie Yemen as I'll give a shout out to her, who is a part of our team has built our website. And she's responsible for posting a lot of the content and co creating a lot of the content that we are doing. And we noticed the increase in the traffic, especially since over the last year or 2, since we become a more organized organization.

So, that to me is a big success story that the numbers are growing, they're beginning to grow. More quickly as the word gets out and people want to be a part of this, they want to contribute and to help each other, and they wanna contribute content. They wanna give opportunities, they wanna share stories because there's so much power in, in stories.

Mm-Hmm. . And so we, we see that that trajectory just moving upwards and it is getting, um, faster and faster. We are super grateful for it.

[00:10:46] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah, that's awesome. Yeah, that is great. And it, it, and it proves to everyone out there. That's what Christina talk about. The more you share about what you're doing, the more people you will find following you and getting along.

And then, and then you both are, you know. Helping them to see that they can do other things. Right. And I think that's wonderful.

[00:11:12] **Christi Powell:** Let me tell you about the commercial real estate ecosystem that they've developed at Align Capital and why it's such a revolutionary idea. Do you think all commercial real estate brokerages are the same? Does your commercial broker help you with financing your deal? What about helping you navigate through the rising cost of insurance?

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[00:12:00] **Angela Gardner:** So my next question is for Thea, and it is, in what ways do you believe diversity? Can positively influence innovation and growth in the lumber and building materials sector because there is innovation happening in construction, even though people think that we're behind times definitely behind times.

There's

[00:12:24] **Thea Dudley:** innovation happening

[00:12:25] **Angela Gardner:** to

[00:12:26] **Thea Dudley:** share with us. There's a lot going on there and, you know, I think the big thing is everybody thinks different. And if you have a room full of people that are all the same, you know, they all come from the same background. They all come from. You know, the same ethnicity, whether, you know, gender, whatever it is, you get the most bang for your buck from a group of people, if you've got different viewpoints coming into, into play there

and how they view things, because let's face it, our customers are a diverse group of people.

So if you're trying to cater to, to who you're selling to, and let's face it, we're all for profit corporations. We all work for, for companies that are in business to serve people. Serve the community, but it's also, you, you just still got to make money.

[00:13:07] **Christi Powell:** You've

[00:13:07] **Thea Dudley:** got to understand that. And the best way to understand your customer base is to have that same look internally.

It's, it's just so much better. I mean, I had a, I had a boss that I would never have gone to some of the meetings that I went to without him. I'm like, yeah, I don't, there's no reason for me to go interview, you know, the head of operations or whatever you're trying to hire for. And he's like, no, I want you there.

And I want your opinion and I have to look at it a different way. And I'm really grateful that he challenged me that way. There were things I was doing to keep myself in a box that blew it away.

[00:13:44] **Christi Powell:** Nice. Good tips for those listeners out there, leaders. We have a lot of leaders listen to our podcast. That's a great tip.

That's how you can be a better leader, right? They, they really influenced the, uh, her leader really influenced her. So I do want to talk a little bit about, we have some, some time I want to talk a little bit about what you do, Thea, the credit overlord, the company that you've. Started talk about what is your day to day with that?

And what do you need? What do you want our listeners to know about you? And how can they get involved and ask you for your help? Because I know that you, you are definitely the credit overlord, the queen of all the credit overlords.

[00:14:20] **Thea Dudley:** Thank you. Um, thanks for the shout out. I really appreciate it. I've been doing credit and collections and the LBM and construction space for like, 40 years.

And, you know, it must have been like seven or eight years ago, I kind of started developing more and more things going into customers throughout my

career and helping them with their receivables. And then pretty soon, it just kind of happened and before I knew it, you were, you're in people's back offices.

And that's really what you're doing is you're taking apart what drives the cash flow and credit and collections don't really get the spotlight. They deserve. Thank you True. Unfortunately, if you don't have good credit granting and good collection programs, you're not going to have good cashflow. And usually people wait till it's too late and then it's, it's like, I can't help your fire here.

So,

[00:15:09] **Angela Gardner:** yeah,

[00:15:09] **Thea Dudley:** but that's, that's what I do. I go in and I do a lot of coaching and mentoring to a lot of young credit professionals. And it's really gratifying. It's really fun. And that's kind of the gist of it.

[00:15:23] **Christi Powell:** And you're really good at it. So really quickly before the last question, tell us a little bit about what you're doing from a group now and, you know, what your background is and what you've been doing.

is for the future and how our audience can help you and get engaged with you.

[00:15:38] **Dena Cordova:** Oh, thank you. Um, you know, years ago, 30 plus years ago, I started at Georgia Pacific right out of school and I, I became a lumber trader and that's really where I started my journey in this fantastic field. And then.

Intentionally built my career with different other larger companies, understanding all of the facets of this industry, whether it's manufacturing, distribution, uh, retail sales. And I was really fortunate to have a group of people that, that raised me up that never told me that I, that I couldn't, um, and as I grew more senior in my career and left, uh, working in some of those bigger companies, I did a lot of organizational development, um, Which means anything from creating educational programs to designing infrastructure for companies to help them succeed internally in terms of their, their functionality.

And so, as I grew in that, I had the opportunity to step out and do a lot of consulting in that arena. So, right now, what I'm doing is working with companies all across the United States for organizational development, because our industry is traditionally been slow to change. And now we're in a position to where we're forced to change.

How do we do that? What's the structure that we need? What are the programs that we need in place to be able to succeed? So. That's really my focus and it just really dovetails nicely with what we're doing at Women of LVM.

[00:17:07] **Christi Powell:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you for sharing that and I'm sure our listeners are going to be.

really interested in getting to know more about you and

[00:17:15] **Angela Gardner:** what

[00:17:16] **Christi Powell:** you're doing because you guys are fantastic role models for the next generations of people. So what advice, talking about the role models, what advice would you give other women looking to enter or advance their careers in our industry? Dina, we're going to start with you.

[00:17:32] **Dena Cordova:** Okay, that's a great question and 1 that should be asked more and 1 that is being discussed. And, you know, I would, I would say for our young people coming up is find someone quickly that has what you want. And ask them to mentor you and, you know, I was, I was fortunate in my younger years to have some.

Some wonderful men, I was, I always say I was raised by a pack of men, because that was really the truth. There were no women in my area, but. You know, it was talking about this a little bit ago, and we talked about the different experience and diversity and. And all of that, and I would encourage people to do the same when they are building their mentors, their tribe around them, make sure that you have that diversity because you need that diversity of think and to help you.

And that's what's going to help you grow. The fastest is to have that, make sure that you have your solid group around you, people from all walks of life, from all stages in their career, and to make sure that they are able to share with you and give you that diversity of think. Because to me, that is one of the most important things that you can do for your career.

[00:18:44] **Christi Powell:** I love that diversity of think. Perspectives are so important in every role of your life.

[00:18:55] **Angela Gardner:** Hill Electric was founded in 1954 in Anderson, South Carolina. Rooted in the upstate of South Carolina, Hill Electric has garnered a reputation as the region's most innovative industrial electrical

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[00:19:41] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. So what, give our listeners some insight on, you know, what kind of advice you would give to advance their careers in the industry.

[00:19:50] **Thea Dudley:** I would say don't be afraid. And that's one of the things I think, especially for women that hold us back is we second guess. Sometimes it's okay to blurt something out.

Why not? When you second guess yourself so much, you almost talk yourself out of it. And it's okay. I get the luxury and the pleasure of getting to mentor about half a dozen young women right now. And one of the things that comes up quite a bit is let's talk about networking. You should go to some of these different events.

You should go, whether it's with your mom, whether it's one of your mom's friends, your dad, your dad's friends, you know, whatever. Whatever they're going to that you want to maybe take a closer look at. We'll ask if you can go along and sometimes just listen and ask some questions. It's okay to just blurt sometimes.

Let, don't let fear jam you up so hard.

[00:20:45] **Christi Powell:** I think probably one of my biggest assets has been over the length of my career is I ask so many questions. It's annoying probably at some point that I asked a lot of questions. Um, I'm curious. I want to know, I want to understand what other people do and why they do it.

And I care about them. It's not just that I'm curious, but I care. Like I really want to know people. And I think Being in our industry, you have to be a people person. The P the, the people that work in our industry are the salt of the earth. And I'll never forget. I mean, master Smith said that, and really, really so true.

We, we're like family, right? It's not the funnest every day. It, it does. We don't get along every day, but we do get along and we're, we got each other's back at

the end of the day every time. And so I love our, our industry because of that. Thank you for being on today. But before we go. Thea, please share with our audience how to get a hold of you and WLBM, how to get plugged in, how to support you if the, if there's people listening that want to support you, please give a little bit of information.

Then Dean, after Thea is done, please put your plugs in there for how to get a hold of you as well. Okay.

[00:21:57] **Thea Dudley:** So, www.wlbn.org, and you can reach out, Dina and I are both on there, Awilda, who, who is the executive director, you'll be able to connect with all of us there, get involved, and that's probably the, the best way is just pop onto that, that webpage, and that's going to tell you a lot about the organization.

And don't be afraid to just reach out. You can, all of the information is on there as far as email addresses and things. So it's the easiest, quickest way to get to us.

[00:22:30] **Christi Powell:** So what if they want to get ahold of you to have you speak or help them with their back end of credit?

[00:22:36] **Thea Dudley:** It is Thea at creditoverlord.com.

Okay.

[00:22:40] **Christi Powell:** Okay. Good.

[00:22:41] **Thea Dudley:** Super simple.

[00:22:42] **Christi Powell:** That is very simple. Okay. Good. Yeah. Because I can, I, I know there's a lot of people that struggle with what you're helping people with. So I wanted to make sure that folks will admit this is the

[00:22:51] **Thea Dudley:** first step and most folks don't want to. They're like, it's all good. They'll tell you everything except about their finance.

[00:22:59] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. Yeah, for sure. But now they know who you are and yeah, there you go.

[00:23:04] **Dena Cordova:** Thank you. Thank you ladies.

[00:23:06] **Christi Powell:** You're welcome. Dina. Thanks

[00:23:08] **Dena Cordova:** Mine's not as exciting or creative as Thea's, but my email address is dcordovajack at missourigroup. com if anyone needs to, would like to reach out and for continue this discussion, or if there's anything that I can do to be of service and to help.

[00:23:25] **Christi Powell:** Well, don't let her humbleness fool you. She is a dynamic female in our industry and she may not think she's exciting, but she's probably one of the most humble servants I've seen in my history of being in the construction industry. So Dina, Thea, thank you so much for being on with us today. We really appreciate you.

[00:23:46] **Thea Dudley:** Thank you ladies. And thank you for everything you do. It's, it's, it's amazing. It's a lot of work producing these every week.

[00:23:52] **Dena Cordova:** It is. And it, it really, it inspires us and I know it inspires other to, to keep stepping forward, keep climbing. So thank you guys for, for everything that you're doing to lift up women and to, and to build them.

It's important.

[00:24:08] **Angela Gardner:** Thank you for doing it with us. Yes. Better together.

[00:24:11] **Dena Cordova:** Yes, absolutely. We're doing it together. Yes. Well,

[00:24:14] **Angela Gardner:** that's all for this episode. so much for

[00:24:17] **Christi Powell:** listening to the Women Talk Construction Podcast.

Christie Powell and Angela Gardner. See you next time. Transcribed