

WTC 'Impact Driver' with Renee Sacks 2

[00:00:00] **Christi Powell:** Hey, podcast audiences. This is Christi Powell with Women Talk Construction, and I'm here with Angela Gardner, my cohost and Renee Sachs from Sachs Communication. We're just really glad to be with you here today. If you haven't checked out our Breaking Barriers Forum, please do so, so you can meet some of these great guests that we have on.

Angela, how are you doing today?

[00:00:24] **Angela Gardner:** I'm good, but you know, sometimes the energy level, you know, with all that we do.

[00:00:30] **Christi Powell:** It's a lot, isn't it? Sometimes. Yeah, I'm just now getting my Morning wind because, um, I have a jet lag right now, so I'm finally awake. Like for a minute there, I was in a fog. We usually record these podcasts right in a row, but I do want the audience to understand that it may look glamorous what we do every single day, but you know, it does get to be a weight on your shoulders.

So what. Keeps us going for me is passion. And so that passion wakes me up in the morning. And then when I get really defeated, the emails and the texts about how I've made a difference in their lives and that they're staying in the industry, that's what keeps me fueled. How about you two? What keeps you fueled, Angela?

[00:01:16] **Angela Gardner:** You know, for me, it is my daughter, letting her know that she can do anything. And that's, you know, cause I've been on boards. I've run my family business. I've done all these wonderful things that there weren't many of me. I want her to know she can do that too. And then. You're exactly right. When we get those conversations that are all excited about, and they are in cosmetology and they listen to our podcasts and their love following us.

I mean, that, how awesome is that? You know, even someone outside of our industry loves our message. And I mean, that's probably the exact same thing that Renee hears all the time, right? Renee, how about you?

[00:01:52] **Renee Sacks:** Oh, well, energy is a thing with me. So I'm a very early riser. And, um, my children are all grown, and so I have grandchildren now, but my family has become my work with the Women Builders Council.

And so I have hundreds of women who continue to serve as a role model for me, and perhaps I for them, and the energy that I get is really my work. So, as I find new opportunities to create new things and create new conversations in the industry and begin to create change, I'm Actually, I have studied energy because I started 4 a.

m. and so I can go until 6 or 7 but not be tired. Oh, wow. Does that come in a bottle? No, I don't think. I think it comes because you really, to echo what you said, Christy, you really have to love your work. When you love your work, it's the fuel for your energy. It's the fuel for everything. I look at my children, I look at the women that I work with, I look at all of the corporate leaders and the people who are really succeeding are focused on their energy and focused on just doing good.

And it's not an, it's not a number, it's not an age. And so I really believe that, um, that's where my energy comes from. My passion to do what I do. It wasn't always true at the very beginning of my career. Um, I was very intense and I really didn't understand why it was so intense and worked so hard. But now upon reflection, decades later, I see that what's, what's going on is the work and the change that we're creating and the hope and opportunity that we're giving to other people, both women and minorities in the construction industry.

[00:03:35] **Christi Powell:** Within the residential building and construction industry, ECI Software Solutions offers an integrated suite of 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.

ECI, for doing all that you do.

Well, this is a perfect segue. For you to introduce yourself, I already know how amazing you are and I know what you're doing for our industry and doing for the women in our industry all over the country. Would you take a few minutes and just introduce yourself to our audience? Let them know what you've accomplished and really what your, your three key points are that you're really trying to hit home, um, as you're advocating for women and minorities every single day.

[00:04:28] **Renee Sacks:** Okay. I'd be delighted to. First of all, when I started, I was a university professor. I earned my PhD in my 20s and thought I was going to take an academic track to my career. And then after about 6 or 7 years. Uh, with an avid consulting practice, I moved into forming my own company. I formed my own company in 1986, way before a lot of people were born.

So I've been in business for 38 years and I do a lot of things and I bring a very integrated approach to the work that I do. So I started out thinking I was a public relations professional and then I became a marketing professional and then I became an advocate. And then I became an event producer and so I have a tool kit that surrounds me, um, that allows me to do a number of different things.

So, currently, I served as the executive director of women builders council. I've done that for the last decade, and the organization is really growing. And it's creating significant and substantial change. I had SACS communications, which allows me to have a team of incredible multifaceted professionals in media and graphics, editorial and logistics.

And so we're able to accomplish a lot for the clients we serve. And then more recently, I, I've always been in the professional development sector because I was a professor when I before when I started my company. And so I believe that education and information are really important to help people create opportunities.

And so, for the past, since 2020, I have been 1st, co leading and now leading the send regional program, which covers New York, Long Island in New Jersey. And that's a program that is funded by JP Morgan Chase. And it is guided by the University of Washington Foster School of Business, and it is meant to, we were an experiment, the 15 cities in the Ascend Program, the Ascend Cities Program, we were an experiment, the Ascend Regional Program, and the focus of that program is creating market ready, small, diverse businesses.

And that is an amazing opportunity for me, not only to provide coaching and tutorials and direction for them, but learning myself, taking a deeper dive into what creates opportunities for small companies, because it's very, very challenging. So that has been a lot of my work and sort of all connected.

It's my practice at Saks. My work at WBC and my work, um, with, uh, the Ascend regional program sort of create a fulcrum of the circle of what I do. And so energy, energy is the key to that. It's necessary. It's very, very necessary. And

one project fuels another and the excitement of creating change and creating that next opportunity for small businesses and watching them grow.

Whether they're at WBC, whether they're in the industry as a whole. Or whether they're within the Ascend regional program, it gives me great

[00:07:29] **Christi Powell:** joy. Talk about a little bit of the advocacy that you're doing right now. I know there's a couple of things that are on your mind that are really important to you.

Will you talk to us a little bit about that?

[00:07:38] **Renee Sacks:** So I'm in New York state and New York state is the leader in certification for minority and women business enterprises. Uh, going back way to beginning, well began a long time ago, but more recently I've been active. You've been it since two thousand and eleven, and so I've had the opportunity to work with most of the government agencies, many of the leadership to governors and have had a really great opportunity.

But there's some things that are of importance to note now, you know, from from administration to administration, there's always change in government people change, and there's a serious disconnect in the certification process within New York state. And it's both the certification and recertification. of many minority women in business enterprises that is not happening, but increasingly I've done a review of the cases and the denials.

Increasingly it's pointing to discrimination against women. And so what does that mean? What do we do with women when they're not permitted to have an equal opportunity? There's been, you know, issues related to thinking that women don't own or operate their companies, but the women at Women Builders Council own and operate and run their companies.

And now the system needs it needs a review. Article 15 a, which is the body of legislation that's coming up for renewal. It may be extended. I've heard not to happen next year, but maybe 6 months afterwards. That is the guiding practice. And right now, because of the current law and the way language is being interpreted, because as I said, people change from administration to administration, they interpret things differently.

And so we're, WBC is working really hard and creating consensus within the industry to make changes to Article 15a, to make it more equitable. There are

the certifying agencies within the New York region. There is a small at New York City and Port Authority. There doesn't seem to be as much of a problem.

[00:09:39] **Christi Powell:** I think you covered like a little bit about the Ascend program. So Angela, you want to go on to one of the other topics that we wanted to discuss with Renee?

[00:09:49] **Angela Gardner:** Yeah, sure. So well, um, let's talk about her being an author, you know, of these awesome books. And I mean, you're creating change in our industry. Can you share with us the inspiration behind your latest publication, as well as others that you've produced?

[00:10:05] **Renee Sacks:** Sure. So I've always considered myself a word person. I have a PhD in linguistics. I've studied language, and I know how important language can be used as a tool. And so, for, and for many decades, I've been involved with developing publications that would educate and inform and help create positive change.

So it actually goes back to 1 of my 1st assignments in 1986 for the largest organization of property owners. Of rent regulated housing in New York state, and I wrote a series of 22 books that would help them keep up with the laws that change night. I moved to creating a publication for engineering news record called navigating opportunities for construction professionals.

And I'm very intense, people who know me know that,

[00:10:54] **Christi Powell:** and I think you're amazing.

[00:10:56] **Angela Gardner:** Did you write these at night or something? I, where did you find the

[00:10:59] **Renee Sacks:** time? I'm interesting in terms of sleep patterns. But anyway, um, I get up early. I write quickly, I absorb quickly, and I'm a quick study. So, I wrote a series of over 60 publications.

Over five or six years. Wow. Again, created change. And E. N. R. and McGraw Hill were great. They let me do what I wanted. So we wrote the first, um, magazine called Women First. And that was in 2007. And that changed the conversation that women were in the construction industry. It's a fabulous publication.

Where, is it still out? No, it's somewhere in my files. Women for, and actually I should reinvigorate it, but we, we went from there to the changing face of construction, looking at minorities and women. And this is as early as 2008, 2009. We looked at public private partnerships. That was again, another publication.

So they gave me a lot of liberty and identifying topics that would be of interest to the industry that supplemented an amazing publication like engineering news record. And, uh, we continued to write these and I did a number of events and so it grew my practice and it also grew the industry's, um, understanding of what was new and what they needed to look at.

And so I even did things in design build as early as, um, in the earlier years and that wasn't as prevalent. So I've had the privilege of creating new conversations. That I can bring to the industry through publications. I also forgot to mention that I published a publication called Diversity Agenda, and I used that as another arm.

To get messages sent out to the industry that are related to diversity and equity and inclusion. And so when I And you're phenomenal at that, by the way. Thank you. When I came to the ASCEND program, I said, you know, we really should create a guide on what we're doing with this experimental program. And so we created a, um, a publication called From Peership to Leadership as a Guide to Scaling Diverse Construction Companies.

The focus of it, the core of it, is that peers and peermanship is really an excellent approach for people learning. So you have all this mentoring program, all the agencies have a mentoring program. I had the opportunity to work for the MTA small business development program, which I still serve as a consultant to and their program is award winning.

It is great, but my, my, my pivot on it is when peers, when one contractor talks to another group of contractors, the learning is so much more impactful. It is doing now with, um, ascend. I have, you know, experts come in and talk to. Our group. Now I'm having the cohort talk to each other. We're doing some bookkeeping.

We're doing earned value management. With, which mystifies me in terms of how you manage a project and that's being done by one of the cohort. And so we're beginning to look at the cohorts talking to each other and really looking at the art of humanship as the way of educating, increasing capacity for, um, for many of these smaller businesses.

[00:14:11] **Christi Powell:** We're going to have to start doing that, right? Yeah. There's not enough leaders in our country, in our industry that know how to teach. If we don't start doing the peer to peer. I can't imagine where we're going to be in 10 years.

[00:14:26] **Renee Sacks:** Yeah, because all these programs are also very costly way where the, the, the individual firms and they're growing, they're growing in the fact that they're actually teaching themselves.

That is, um, that that's a, an important growth factor when I, when you begin and set up a lecture, you have to think about the audience and you have to think about. Communicating information, and are they going to listen to you? Are they going to shut you down? And so many of our educators sometimes go on and on and on and don't get to the point, but the way where they're talking to each other and you can interrupt them and say, hey, can we get to the next thing?

Yeah, it's much more informal, but I think more impactful way of creating mentorship. Through the peermanship model, so I focused on that and looking at some of the areas. There's 1 other area that I'm looking at, which, if I can share with you, which is the solutions to barriers. For small businesses, and so we are now in an environment within the New York region within the whole Northeast, where there's projects like the gateway project, which is a 16Billion dollar infrastructure project.

There are other projects from Amtrak. There are other mega projects that are going on within the city that are from some of the agencies. MTA has a 55, dollar capital program. And so how will these small companies begin to get work? What do we need to do? And so 1 of the things that I've begun to look at and actually supported by the send regional program is supported by Women Builders Council and many of the committees that we have at WBC, we're able to take a better look at how we can really overcome the barriers.

It's not just deep bundling procurement. There's more to that. There's a lot more to that bonding. There's the capital. How do you actually reorganize? So these companies will have a shot at a large project. And so we're working, we're looking at the infrastructure markets now and seeing how we can make it more attractive.

Because every business owner has to take a risk, but you don't want to take a dumb risk. And how can we make it more attractive for them to enter this very challenging market? Yeah.

[00:16:40] **Christi Powell:** So one of the things that I've heard from some younger ladies that are thinking about getting into the industry because of all the challenges that you just talked about, they're gun shy because they're like, do I really want to fight that hard?

Knowing that they're seeing what's happening, right? And what's coming against them. But thankfully women talk instruction. We're getting the word out. Renee sacks, WBC, WCOE, because you're part of that. The SN program, those things are helping us move forward. When it doesn't look real pretty on the outside.

So we're so thankful for the advocacy that you're doing for these women, small businesses, women owned businesses, and minority owned businesses. Thank you for all that you do.

Grow Up Greenville is helping further succeed and live confidently in their worth and value. A free life enrichment program, Girl Up Greenville works with middle and high school girls to initiate early, life changing success by empowering girls to reach their highest potential through after school and summer programs, weekly enrichment classes, a summer internship program, individual success planning, and in school leadership groups.

Do you want to learn more and get involved? Visit their website, girlupgreenbill.org. Thank you for everything that you do for our community, Girl Up Green Bill.

I just don't know how, how, how do we support you as an audience, as um, Women Talk Instruction, as Angela and Christy, how do we support the efforts that you are putting forth right now instead of. You know, I think we tend to create the wheel over and over and over again. Um, and I don't think that's necessary.

We need to be collaborating and creating a culture of collaboration. Those forward minded people out there that are not all about starting your own thing and you just want to make a difference. How do we help you?

[00:18:44] **Renee Sacks:** Yeah, so let me add one important initiative that WBC has embarked on, which is our Ambassador Council, now of 75 to 100 young women coming from all the companies, the pipeline for the next board, the Women Builders Council, and we're encouraging all of the firms to send us their younger women.

As a matter of fact, following this. This broadcast I have, um, I have them and we're looking at career and professional development. We are looking at other areas that are of interest to them. They're creating their own events. They're creating their own pathways to growing within their own companies. So, uh, WBC produces a national leadership conference called AIM.

Act and motivate. It's amazing. We have over several 100 women and that attend that it's scheduled for March 21st 2024 and the women who are helping me plan that event. Are all the young ambassadors nice at the topics and issues that they want. So I encourage organizations like W. C. O. E. like Women Builders Council, rather than reinventing another company.

We are there for all women. We have a strong percentage of diverse and non diverse women and men. There's a lot of energy to these young women and WBC has recognized that they need to have a platform and that platform needs to rise along with the more seasoned and experienced women who are making decisions.

And so, again, you learn peer learning is the key. So we learned from them and they learned from us. But my, my thought is, I think we're learning more from some of the younger women and navigating it and we can support them. And so that's certainly what's happening. And I think that the industry should come together on that and continue to support women through these organizations.

Yeah. I like that.

[00:20:37] **Angela Gardner:** Yes. That's awesome.

[00:20:39] **Christi Powell:** That's probably the, the best thing that we can do for each other right now is just keep being supportive. Keep being in their corner. Well, what you're doing is you're actually, you're showing them a path to a better position. And that's very important too. Like even when I was in the field, if I'd had that opportunity, would I have gone for it?

[00:20:59] **Renee Sacks:** Maybe. Well, Christi, I'm going to interrupt you. We're, WBC has launched another new initiative called Building Women, and it's a program for union trades women for leadership. Nice. How do they get their next position? How do they become a foreman, a superintendent? How do they, we have some WBC who were apprentices who opened their own firm.

A local, local 3 electrical contractor has her own company and they move from apprentice through journey person through site superintendent to own their own

firm. So we're looking at that program and we're, we're collaborating through 1 of our board members with all of the union contracting associations.

We have 4 or 5 of them on board to support. Those women that are in the field with leadership, and so they'll all be coming to aim and we're trying to develop new programs for them. So we're looking at every aspect of the industry. I love it. I might add 1 other area sustainability. Climate change. Yeah, you BC energy.

Yes, but has participated in the New York City climate week this week and we have a new sustainability committee and our topic was. Climate change and women, because the impact of climate change is far more impactful on women than any other group, because there is. We need to find the water. We need to make sure the family's okay.

Yeah. Sure. If we have to relocate and it's been studied in the, in the more rural areas, we looked at it in New York city. And so we have a whole committee focused on, um, our sustainability platform.

[00:22:42] **Christi Powell:** Wow. I mean, I can't even comprehend all of the things that you're doing. So as our audience is listening and they probably got lost five minutes ago because you're doing so many wonderful things.

Tell us, tell our audience how to find you. Website link, whatever it is that you use, how they can support you, how they can learn more about what you're doing, how they could possibly sponsor. If you've got sponsorship opportunities, please let our audience know. And Angela and I know what, you know, what it is that you need the most support with and how folks can get ahold of

[00:23:15] **Renee Sacks:** you.

Yeah, I think we want more engagement. And so Women Builders Council website is WBCNYC.org. And that is probably the easiest way to learn more about what we're doing through the organization. So, all of the work I talked about sort of filters through WBC as well. The best email to use would be RSACS. At W.

B. C. N. Y. C. dot org, or at sacks are sacks at sacks come dot com and just put a subject line in that helps me engage because I get hundreds of emails per day efficiently. But I think having the privilege of, of stewarding WBC over the decade has been transformative for the correction. Industry as well as our board,

and as well as the many young women who are coming into the industry to go back to how do you keep them all engaged and get them committed to an industry that is historically male dominated.

So, congratulations and Angela for thank you. Oh, yeah.

[00:24:17] **Angela Gardner:** I love what you're doing for the young professionals. I mean, there, there can't be enough of that right now. So

[00:24:24] **Christi Powell:** there's so many things that we love that you're doing. And we were so glad that we got to highlight you today and what you're doing because, you know, a lot of people just don't know, right?

You don't know what you don't know. And the fact that you're getting out there and, and writing publications and getting people engaged and having events and Rocky, one of our other podcasts, um, guest, uh, Rocky spark. She actually won an award at your event. And that was a highlight of her life. No kidding.

Like she 84 lumber, like brought her in and to attend an event like that. And to be able to get that award just made her so proud, like the picture she was taken afterwards. And that makes a difference like that. really changes a woman's life. Just acknowledging you're good at what you do. And Renee, you are so good at lifting other people up.

And we just can't thank you enough for lifting up our entire audience today and spending time with us.

[00:25:18] **Renee Sacks:** Thank you so much. Love the opportunity. Thank you. That's

[00:25:27] **Christi Powell:** all for this episode. Thank you so much for listening to the Women Talk Construction Podcast with your hosts, Christi Powell and Angela Gardner. See you next time.