

WTC 'Untangled' pt 1 with Stacie Alexiou

[00:00:05] **Christi Powell:** Hey, podcast audience, this is Christi Powell with Women Taught Construction. I'm here with Angela today, our co host, Hey, Angela, hope you're doing well today.

[00:00:15] **Angela Gardner:** I am.

[00:00:16] **Christi Powell:** We're really excited about having an engineer on our podcast today. Stacy, thank you for joining us.

[00:00:22] **Stacie Alexiou:** Chrissy and Angela, it is my absolute pleasure to have the invitation and to be able to be a part of your incredible platform that you have both created.

[00:00:34] **Christi Powell:** Well, we are going to learn a lot from you today because you're doing some very impactful things, not only in the green space and in the energy space, in serving others, and just putting together some great tools for small businesses. I think that we're going to be really excited in our Audience is going to be really, um, enthralled with the kind of information that you're going to share with us today.

So let's get started with, tell us why engineering, what, what gets you excited about engineering?

[00:01:04] **Stacie Alexiou:** So I'm a third generation Merchant Mariner. My grandfather, um, who was born on a small island in Greece, and I'm on that island today speaking to you. Yay. Yay. Wow. I'm super proud to be a part of, um, Merchant Marine family.

So he was the first that I know of, and then my father as well, and my husband is also, um, in the Merchant Marine. So the connection at the start of my engineering career inside of a Merchant Marine environment gave me. Was instead of just seeing things in book that were one dimensional and not really understanding how they breathe inside of an environment where they're working, you get to go out on a ship and rip these things apart and rebuild them and see them breathe inside of a space and understand how all this stuff works before you're in charge of a team that's actually operating it.

[00:02:07] **Christi Powell:** Wow, that's amazing. I want to be on the ship, actually.

[00:02:11] **Angela Gardner:** I bet you do, Christy

[00:02:14] **Christi Powell:** . So how did, how did you get there? So you've got a lot of skills. You're in a powerful position. How did you get there for the young folks that are listening? Right now, just kind of give a brief synopsis of what do you think your attributes were that helped you get to where you're at today?

[00:02:31] **Stacie Alexiou:** Yeah, so definitely curiosity, being willing to put the work in and embracing every work opportunity that I could. Potentially get access to early on, my father said, something really pointed to me, um, that stuck and influenced my choices, um, in terms of seeking out work. And he said, whatever you make right now, it's not going to mean, but the work choices that you pick, the places that you choose to accept access to, that's going to allow you to write your ticket one day, because you will.

Be able to have access as a learning student to things that several chapters down you would have to be hired in that position and be qualified. So now while you're not qualified, get your hands on every possible work experience that you can. Rip things apart and be an intern. Present yourself in places regardless of what the dollar currency payment is.

And understand that that currency will come back to you in a much richer way in your life experience. Amazing advice. I love that.

[00:03:48] **Angela Gardner:** And your dad influenced that, right?

[00:03:50] **Stacie Alexiou:** He did, yeah. He's first generation Greek. He was in the merchant marine. He sailed for two years when he was younger. Um, he's, uh, the child of a single mom and he had to help with the finances.

Um, when he was younger, so, um, his, he was motivated, um, for different reasons, but the fact that he imparted it on us, um, has made me seek out multiple jobs, every opportunity that I could. Um, and then as we shape the skills that we have, you start to realize, okay, I need to set boundaries and I need to reserve my time for the things where I can really make the most impact and deeply develop my skillset.

[00:04:30] **Angela Gardner:** Oh, yeah. It sounds like you had a really strong grandmother. Oh,

[00:04:35] **Stacie Alexiou:** two strong grandmothers

[00:04:37] **Christi Powell:** as you're rolling your eyes for the audience. That's just listening.

[00:04:42] **Stacie Alexiou:** Oh my goodness. The, the women, uh, the lineage that I've come from, there is no shortage of strength and grit and resilience. I'm so grateful to have come from a line of women that taught me there is no, no.

There's another way to approach, there's another way to work. There's another way to learn. But there is no, no. The only no is the one that we tell ourselves when we decide to give something. Mm-hmm.

[00:05:10] **Angela Gardner:** Oh, that's, wow.

[00:05:11] **Christi Powell:** That's like, there is no,

[00:05:13] **Stacie Alexiou:** no. Mm-hmm. And, and these women went through things we can't even imagine, you know, they didn't have the tools and the resources and the things that we have.

Um, It's fascinating even to imagine, um, how they, they built and persevered, um, and supported the families that they did. So I'm very grateful to have come from both my mother and my father's side. They're together 53 years this year. That's

[00:05:40] **Christi Powell:** awesome. Congratulations.

[00:05:43] **Stacie Alexiou:** Thank you.

[00:05:51] **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 The region's most innovative industrial electrical contractor, providing machinery installations and facility power to countless companies in the area committed to quality performance, valued service and responsive schedule management electric offers unmatched service to each and every client.

A new approach to a classic value that's Hill Electric. Learn more at hillelectric.net.

So I bet. I bet a lot of that impacted like whenever you decided 10 years ago or a decade ago to start your sustainability business and that's um, WOD and Flux, right? Mm hmm. Uh, so tell us a little bit about that and, and what sustainability is and why it matters.

[00:06:56] **Stacie Alexiou:** Yeah, so, um, 1 of the early experiences that I had that definitely shaped the decision to go into sustainability was, um, I was working on land in a very interesting job, a lot of security clearances and access to things that you wouldn't normally see and Hurricane Katrina happened.

And the ship that I had learned on was getting deployed by FEMA. It was being activated and my 3rd assistant engineer's coast guards license what the ink was barely stamped and I knew that if I wasn't on that ship. In this disaster recovery mission that my brain would be there, my body would be there.

Um, I had experienced a break of 2 jobs when 9 11 happened in New York and those 10 days. It is when 9 11 happened and I worked down there. So you felt the whole country and the world hurting for you and coming to support you. And this was sort of the next major catastrophe that happened. Um, and so I knew that I wanted nothing more than to be down there and be a part of that disaster recovery mission, but the catch was when we were leaving, you didn't know if you were going to be down there for a weekend, a week, 2 weeks, months, right?

You had to be willing to just. Leave your job pick up with the flow. So I did and I remember how against it. My family was up until the night before my father and my sister trying to convince me this is not a good idea. You don't know what's ahead of you. You have a great job here. You're working on some really interesting projects, but there was no shot.

I was. And what I saw down there was the lack of resilience and tools, um, and support systems. Wow. Plans. So I think that greatly contributed to my extreme interest in planning, in understanding data, in getting our knowledge from what has happened and being able to build things better because we understand where we had gaps before.

So we spent eight months. Down there. And then when I came back, I had the privilege to work down at the World Trade Center, um, for just under five years

and then rebuilt up three of those towers, um, as an MEP project director. Wow. And I, I still would see things that could be much more sustainable. Mm hmm.

So we started, um, I, the USGBC, it was, you know, earlier on back then, and they, They were coming up with this idea of a green apple day of service, which was to go into a school and make it greener than it was before. And so I got super excited about it. I was working down at the world trade at the time, reached out to a bunch of my different vendors and said, would you be interested in sponsoring wind up putting together almost three to 400, 000 worth of equipment supplies, no VOC paints, water bottle fillers.

Lunchboxes greener things that would save parents money in disadvantaged areas and also open the students eyes to the fact that this is a path that matters. Yes, and this will make you more strategic in your career. We had three schools that agreed to be a part of it, and it was the first one, and then all three schools fell off because of red tape.

It was either a. Union or a group or an association or somebody that had to be earning from the project. We couldn't give it away. Wow. So here we have all these sponsors and this major green effort that would be a nice chip in, in the path of being able to start opening mines to, um, decarbonization and doing things in a more sustainable way.

And we were dead in the water because we literally could not give this away. So I wind up at that point, Bloomberg was the mayor, um, and I wind up getting a communication into in circles and they said, look, we love what you're doing. We want this in New York city schools, but we don't have enough time to get rid of the red tape.

So, um, we'd love to work with you next year. So of course I responded and said, okay, we have 360 something days left until start preparing next year. Can we start putting some action steps together? And in the interim, somebody said, why don't you tweet Cory Booker? Because he would be responsive to somebody trying, wanting to help in, in Newark if you can't get into New York city.

So I did. He did not respond. It was my first experience being banned on a social media site. I guess I was tweeting at him, and it was my first tweet. So I had no idea what I was doing on Twitter. Yeah, like that would be me. This is like 2012 or something. A friend of mine that worked for Conde Nast said, Stacey, I've never seen anybody get banned in the manner that you did.

But we kept pushing forward and said, We can't give up this, you know, massive amount of support that is going to do good and open eyes. We wound up getting into school in Newark. It was three combined schools. And what sold me on this particular school was one of the guidance counselors told us that.

Only 45, excuse me, 55 percent of students do not graduate every year. Really? Wow. Yeah. And that, um, to push the envelope even further, they said, look, unfortunately the people who they idolize. Are the ones who are throwing money around in the neighborhood and that's one career path that they're looking at more than the career paths that have more longevity.

So we went in with the whole question and answer whole presentation day. We put in new LED lights. VOC paints, we took out all of their, their water, uh, water fountains. We put water bottle fillers in, we gave them water bottles. We did, um, everything we could to open their eyes to how being more sustainable is this aggregate effort that we can all be a part of, even in small ways together, and it took off.

Um, they came down from Washington from the USGBC, um, Emily Riordan, who is the one who named the day, um, came and was there with us. And I mean, goosebumps. It was no matter where you are, right. You can have, you can make this cool. And what, as we were speaking, we, we did push the envelope. We said, look, here's your career path.

If you choose to go work with this guy on the corner that is asking you to do things that aren't going to be great for your future. And here's your career path. If you start learning about sustainable things and hear the markets that are blowing up in that direction. So that was a pro bono project. It was the 1st, 1 that I did in terms of led.

And a year later, I wound up. Moving from Tower 4, we beat the deadline in Tower 4, it was the first of the towers on the World Trade Center compound, and I got moved over to Tower 3, and now I had a stakeholder role, and I'm going to be short about this because I don't want to take up too much time, but I wound up having to go for two emergency surgeries, spend six months in a wheelchair recovery, another six months learning how to walk, and during that time, The impact of what we did in the led project was so strong in my mind and the other part was the stigma of being a woman in an engineering construction based field and not wanting to come back and accept.

Being less than what I was delivering before. Right. They held my job and were great about that. But you can hold a job. But I, I lost my income. I lost my

insurance, right? I couldn't live in an apartment that, uh, but I couldn't move out of it either. Um, and continued to pay rent in New York City, but my brain was on fire.

Yes, because my body can move. So I would tell them, don't pick me up for PT. I'm going to wheel myself there. And as I would, I was, my eyes were going to every type of electrical mechanical device that was in this recovery facility. And 1 day, I'm rolling myself to PT and on the right side of me is the administrative head of this whole recovery facility and I start talking to him and.

The next time I'm rolling myself to PT, I see him again and a few times later. So now I'm telling him, do you know how much energy you could be saving? Those aren't LEDs. Do you know that those are, uh, 64 percent higher amount of wattage than that? You could put this in and this. And so one day was he interested?

Was he what he, so I think part of him was like, Really, we are going to have to check on her medication

[00:15:56] **Angela Gardner:** good 1

[00:15:57] **Stacie Alexiou:** because I don't know what she's talking about. But then we continue the conversation and it opened up more and more and he realized this is a real thing. And 1 day I am. In this room that I had to live in for like 11 weeks, and I'm trying to dry my own hair in a wheelchair, which is a really interesting activity.

If anybody's ever tried to do it, all of a sudden, I see these two suits below me, like, you know, gentlemen's shoes with suit pants and my hair is over my head. And I'm thinking, who is. In my room about to talk to me, and so I flip over my hair and, um, here it's the chief engineer and the chief administrative guy and they actually want to have a conversation about what this woman has been telling this administrator as she wheels herself to PT.

A year later that turned into our first job as One Flux. And just under a year after that, we hit our first million dollar project that then grew to a multiple million dollar project. And wow, the impact of 30 million pounds of greenhouse gases removed.

[00:17:12] **Christi Powell:** Groundbreak Carolinas is focused on connecting the design, construction, economic development, and commercial real estate communities in the Carolinas. Our 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 a, e c, decision makers and influencers in our two state region.

Visit groundbreak.carolinas.com and be sure to sign up for our free biweekly newsletter.

So your story is going to inspire so many people that are listening. Yes. Right? 'cause you overcame so many things that we all. Have to deal with in our life, right? And young people, when we're young, we don't think that we're going to have to. You're invincible over hurdles, right? You, you, you're in this invincible, but you also have in your mind that, you know, life's going to be just great.

You know, nothing's going to happen. I'm going to go to work. Everything's going to be fine. And they're not thinking about, you know, maybe my brain can be on fire. Maybe I can start a business. Maybe I can do things that I've never done before. And so this podcast has been so helpful and inspiring the next generation and just women in general.

That are really excited about themselves, but are afraid to say it, or afraid to do it, or afraid to just reach out and, and, and say their, their ideas or put it on paper, or just consider doing something different than they've always done. So, I thank you for sharing that before we get off today. We would love to hear.

How to get ahold of you, how to do business with you. If you'll talk about that a little bit, we would love to hear that. And then we just can't thank you enough for inspiring the young people that are going to be listening and all the women.

[00:19:13] **Stacie Alexiou:** It is my pleasure. If it's all right, I just want to add one thing.

So often we hold ourselves back until things are ready, until things are perfect, until we feel like we can show up and be received the way that we want to. The earliest of meetings that I had were in the most unconventional settings. The first time they agreed to walk with me, I was, there are a lot of ramps and the ramps, when they go down, um, it's one thing, but when you're wheeling up a ramp and somebody isn't wheeling you, there's this sort of The very awkward state that happens when you're having a business meeting and you have gentlemen that are walking alongside you and here you are in a wheelchair and nobody's wheeling you.

You're wheeling yourself because you are that independent person. But here there's this sort of underlying struggle. And in one of the first meetings with them, I remember trying to get myself up this ramp and we're continuing to talk and we're across from each other. And one is on this side, one is on this side, and I'm trying not to show any sense of struggle while still getting my sentence.

out and it's summer and I'm wheeling myself up and I'm starting to sweat from the leather of the wheelchair and moving yourself and thinking to myself, I am not going to break a minute of my composure. I'm going to continue my conversation because I have a goal to be able to open their eyes to this potential project.

But all of the little things like the bumps where you hit it, and then you can't get over it. And all of a sudden the guys are halfway down the hallway and you're halfway behind the hallway from them. Thinking to yourself, laughing, half thinking, can you, can I just ram over this bump fast enough so I can catch

[00:20:57] **Christi Powell:** up to

[00:20:58] **Angela Gardner:** where they are?

[00:21:00] **Stacie Alexiou:** Um, there was a lot of, a lot emotions

[00:21:03] **Angela Gardner:** of those little motions

[00:21:04] **Stacie Alexiou:** and Right. You're fumbling to get out the door. You, you know, trip over things. Things fall and spill right before you have a meeting. You've got coffee in your lap, but you're across from a screen. I would love to say to all the women who are thinking about.

Taking the next step. Don't wait until you have perfectly manicured your tapestry. Nice. Get the important things together and take that step because it's the start of a conversation. It doesn't have to be the whole conversation, but start it so that you can make progress.

[00:21:38] **Christi Powell:** Awesome. Thank you so much, Stacey.

That's so such great advice. So let our audience know how to find you, how to employ you, how to get inspired by you to continue to be inspired by you and remember audience that, uh, breaking barriers forum. com. Okay. Stacy will get signed up there. That way, if you hear this podcast and then don't remember.

Where you heard it from, or where you're supposed to connect with her, you can connect with her on our forum.

[00:22:07] **Stacie Alexiou:** Yeah, and we'll make sure that we get you a link that people can access and then they can find us through that link. Our coaching platform is reverse engineer method, and our company is what influx so we'll make sure that you have a link and people will be able to.

To click through there. We're really excited to continue the conversation with you about decarbonization and sustainability and really make it an approachable topic that people can talk about with one another and understand that every one of us has the ability to affect the total aggregate progress that we make.

Nice.

[00:22:41] **Christi Powell:** Thank you so much, Stacey, for being on today.

[00:22:43] **Stacie Alexiou:** Thanks Stacey. Thank

[00:22:45] **Angela Gardner:** you.

Well, that's all for this

[00:22:51] **Christi Powell:** episode. Thank you so much for listening to the Women Talk Construction Podcast with your hosts, Christy Powell and

[00:22:57] **Stacie Alexiou:** Angela Gardner. See you next time.

[00:22:59] **Angela Gardner:** Transcribed