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Women in Leadership
Inspiring leaders

'Being a woman isn't a barrier to working in the rail industry'

Why do women make up just 16% of train workers? We meet the women aiming to break the stereotypes and inspire a new generation

Lottie O'Connor

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Shares

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Only 5% of train drivers are women. Photograph: Alamy

Women make up just 16% of the rail industry: that's a lower proportion than women on FTSE 100 boards (currently 23.5%). In 2012, Adeline Ginn founded Women in Rail, with the aim of providing ongoing support and networking opportunities, as well as promoting the industry as an attractive career choice for other women.

We spoke to Ginn, and some of her fellow women in rail about their career choices, opportunities in the industry and the advice they would offer to others hoping to follow in their footsteps.

Adeline Ginn, founder of Women in Rail and general counsel, Angel Trains

First it is essential that you take the time to identify what gives you energy and excites you – a role that gets you out of bed in the morning.

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When I found myself that job, it was a dream come true but I became terrified of failure. When you start in your career it is tempting to look around at your colleagues and let your lack of self confidence take over. I was desperate to fit in with what I perceived would be expected of me, and it made me unhappy in my work. That is until a trusted colleague took me aside and told me to stop trying to be somebody else. To find true happiness in your work you should trust yourself; identify your own strengths and weaknesses and develop them because, ultimately, you are your best asset.

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progressive thinking organisations, as well as career advice and inspiration for senior women. Sign up now to become a member of Women in Leadership and receive exclusive benefits.

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Then you must build your own self-confidence. Take little steps out of your comfort zone and do things that challenge and scare you. When I founded Women in Rail I had no idea how people in the industry would react. But I remained true to myself and put my fears aside. It was the right thing to do

because the reaction was overwhelmingly positive; it is now a big part of my life that puts that special spring in my step.

Maggie Simpson, executive director, Rail Freight Group

Being a woman isn't a barrier to working in the rail industry. Of course there are challenges, and there are areas where we need to keep working to overcome them, but you need to see beyond gender. Just be the best that you can and don't hold yourself back.

In the past I have struggled with this. As a mother I have duties that often men don't deal with, and I felt awkward working part time when others weren't. I felt self-conscious pushing for meetings to suit my hours and so avoided it. But I've realised that I was the only one who felt this was a problem. The best contacts I have avoid scheduling things when I'm not around and brief me when I can't be there. Don't build barriers in your own head: they don't exist in anyone else's.

Collette Gibson, train driver

There are no limits to the career path you could pursue. I began my career as a nurse and had never dreamed of joining the railway. Now I'm a train driver and have been for a decade.

When I joined the rail industry, it never occurred to me that I could become a train driver until I read an article written by a female driver. I just assumed it wasn't the done thing - and it wasn't really: only 5% of train drivers are female. From that moment on, becoming a train driver became my goal.

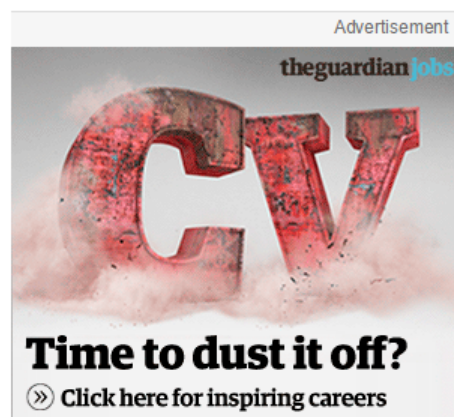
My best advice would be to do what you want to do, be brave and push boundaries. It's worked well for me.

Chloe Cook, engineering apprentice at ESG Rail

The best advice I have received so far is to take every opportunity you are given. That might mean going on depot visits, attending exhibitions or any other learning opportunity. I have made sure I take every chance to grow and develop my skills.

In particular I have found that attending networking events has really helped. If I hadn't been introduced into networking I would never have known about Women in Rail and Young Rail Professionals, two organisations that have really supported me in the beginning of my journey.

Women have a huge part to play in the future of the industry and I am looking forward to making my impact.



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Amanda White, head of rail, [Transport for Greater Manchester](#)

The rail industry is very diverse. There is a need for skills right across the spectrum, so don't be rushed into labelling yourself too soon. Give yourself time to try different things and work out what you really want to do, and surround yourself with people that inspire you along the way. Sometimes in my career I really questioned why I had agreed to certain roles or activities, but now I can see that together they were giving me the skills that have made me qualified for my job today.

You will naturally excel in the things that you enjoy so trust your gut feeling and follow a route that excites you. And when you get there stay true to yourself and take every opportunity you can.

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