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# Rail Professional

## All the right reasons

**Jodi Savage** says businesses should promote women not because of their identity as a female, but because of their professional identity as a superior employee

Last month, Jeremy Corbyn, at the time a contender for the Labour leadership role, sparked a public debate by suggesting that creating 'women only' train carriages would bring enhanced safety to the women who use public transport late at night. Mr Corbyn may have had women's best interests at heart, but the public reaction that followed clearly demonstrated that many women disagreed with his suggestion and did not want to be singled out, even if it were for their own 'protection'. This got me thinking about whether women are treated differently from men in the rail industry.

It is fair to say the rail industry sometimes may not make it easy for women to blend in. For example, from

my personal experience, the personal protective equipment I have to wear when I am on the shop floor, or when visiting a customer depot, makes me look like a child wearing grown up clothes. This makes me stand out from my male colleagues. The reason simply being that the companies don't yet supply female size suits, but I understand this is an issue that has been recognised by the rail sector, and is currently being addressed by Network Rail. Along with this, I often have to walk the whole length of a long depot to visit the single ladies toilet. It is often positioned further away than the conveniently located men's facilities and I usually arrive to find the facilities are locked. Again, this issue is now addressed, but it has taken a long time. These are examples of just two of the many areas where the industry has realised it needs to



make sure both sexes are equally equipped to do their jobs.

Lord Mervyn Davies recently suggested that introducing gender quotas will increase the number of women on boards across the boardrooms of FTSE 100 companies. This idea has been effective in Europe where voluntary or



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actual targets have been introduced, and has increased the number of females employed at director level. Sure, without the intervention of this target, this positive change wouldn't have occurred, but we need to review the impact of this at a deeper level. If these companies have reviewed and amended their recruitment processes, and altered their marketing to attract more females, that's great. But if women have been rewarded new positions simply because they are female, and the company needs to hit diversity targets – it's not so great. I don't know a single woman who would want to be promoted because she's female; it wouldn't be rewarding, and it would not help the deeply engrained lack of confidence suffered by many women in the workplace – a subject Women in Rail is tackling. Businesses should address their processes and ensure they are promoting women not because of their identity as a female, but because of their professional identity as a superior employee.

#### Capable of all roles

During a recent discussion at the Department for Transport with female engineers from across a variety of transport industries, we highlighted

the various barriers that are preventing women from embarking on a career in engineering. One lady made a comment that resonated with me; she said that when female engineers are put forward as role models to other women, they shouldn't be portrayed in their orange hi-vis coat and hard hat. This is because this isn't a true reflection of what it's like to be an engineer in the rail industry. She had a point, but what is the alternative? Should we instead show women sat behind a computer being an engineer? Would this make engineering more or less appealing to women? In my view, it's important that we project an image that showcases how women are capable of doing all the roles in the rail industry. To do this, we must ensure we are showcasing a wide variety of women, in a wide variety of roles.

Women working in rail are usually more than happy to act as role models, and promote their career and their industry to the talent of the future. They don't want to be singled out, they want to be able to do their job to the best of their ability and have the right equipment and facilities to do this as effectively as possible. Women want to be appointed to a new role because they are absolutely the right person for the job, because they

**'...when visiting a customer depot, PPE makes me look like a child wearing grown up clothes. This makes me stand out from my male colleagues'**

worked hard, and they deserve it.

I'm sure Jeremy Corbyn didn't think his comments about 'women only' carriages would start such a long and public debate. Also, what he maybe didn't consider is that women make more journeys than men and represent 46 per cent of the UK workforce so if we really were to have 'women only' carriages we had better start building longer trains to accommodate them all!

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