



Women in the maritime industry: Breaking through the barriers of perception

BY JEANNE M. GRASSO

Growing up in a predominantly male family with an abundance of male cousins, I learned at an early age how to work efficiently and effectively with men. I realized that the only barrier to my success was my own perception of who should fill which jobs. As Stephen Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," stated, "We see the world, not as it is, but as we are — or as we are conditioned to see it." That conditioning and those perceptions were quickly shattered by my love of the ocean and the lure it held for me, which launched me into the fishing industry at the beginning of my career.

Much has changed in the nearly 25 years that I've worked in the marine industry — first as a fisheries biologist, then as a congressional staffer, a government regulator, and now as a lawyer — yet much remains the same. While women are better integrated into the maritime community and are ascending to levels of upper management, the numbers entering the field still remain low relative to their male peers. The shipping industry is still unequivocally male-dominated, with

women representing less than 10 percent of the work force. Today, however, we are seeing more and more women entering, or intending to enter, the maritime industry.

The U.S. Coast Guard Academy's latest freshman class was 30 percent female.

As a partner at Blank Rome LLP and leader of the firm's Maritime Industry Team, I work with a great team of professionals, both male and female, who are passionate about the maritime industry. My practice focuses on maritime and environmental law for domestic and international clients. It involves internal investigations, defense of enforcement actions, pollution incident response, and compliance counseling and provides the opportunity to spend a fair amount of time at maritime facilities and on vessels. After 15 years, I still get energized by



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throwing on a hard hat and mud boots, and thoroughly enjoy the reaction that such a vision often garners from the field — "Ma'am, I don't think I've ever seen a lady lawyer in a hard hat before."

This past spring, I was elected president of the U.S. Chapter of the Women's International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA). I am excited to be a part of an organization that can bring such tremendous potential to the international maritime community by inspiring women to see and seize all possible opportunities — shoreside and shipboard — while vaulting into the ranks of senior management.

Women in our industry now have abundant opportunities to network, share stories, join organizations that promote their professional interests, and above all, believe in their ability to succeed in a male-dominated industry. ☀

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