



2022 Women in Construction: Sophia Tampakis, Lilker Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C.

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Name: Sophia Tampakis

Title: Senior Designer, MEP Engineer

Company Name: Lilker Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C.

What was your greatest professional achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months?

I started working on the mechanical design of a hotel in midtown Manhattan in 2017 that propelled me into a client-facing role and gave me the opportunity to approach engineering from a different lens than what I was accustomed to. The fast-paced, solution oriented day-to-day taught me a lot about other engineering trades and introduced me to the business side of the industry. I continued to manage the mechanical side of design and construction until the hotel opened in May 2021.

Why should women consider a career in construction?

It's important to remember that women have a different approach to problem-solving, project management and work ethic that provides a balance to the industry and shouldn't be ignored.

Starting out in the construction business, who or what empowered you?

My dad inspired my eagerness to pursue engineering from a young age, introducing me to all types of machining and teaching me that it's ok to get your hands dirty. He taught me the importance of seeing the big picture and attacking a challenge in small doses. My dad gave me that gusto to speak out and speak up if I thought he (or any man) was wrong (he rarely was) and to ask questions without the anxiety of being wrong or feeling dumb. My parents encouraged my pursuit in engineering on those days when I felt like giving up.

Who within your own firm has helped you succeed within the construction industry?

Although my career at Lilker has only recently begun, Santiago Cabo-Freixedas has provided a safe space to learn and lead while also challenging me with new and innovative approaches to engineering.

What advice would you offer to other women getting into the construction industry?

It's easy to get bullied or ignored in this industry but we have to stand our ground because we have just as much a reason to be in the "room" as men do. I was (and still sometimes) am more likely to back down from a confrontation even if I know I was right. I second guess myself because a man isn't afraid to press his opinion. It took a while for me to break the habit of saying "Sorry" or starting a sentence with, "This might be wrong, but..." I never hear men say that in a meeting or in an email. Confidence is key in this industry when you're a woman at the table. Men of any level (senior or not) will try to walk all over us if we don't establish our seat and legitimacy from the start. (And by the way, do not be afraid to repeat yourself to ensure your voice is heard.)

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