



Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce Podcast sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax. I'm your host, Mike Merrill. And today we are joined again by Anne Pflieger. She is back by popular demand. We had a great discussion with Anne about her role as national president of NAWIC. That's the National Association for Women In Construction, and we felt like it was fitting to have Anne back to talk about her specific role in construction. So, Anne wears many hats in her day-to-day job. She's also not only the president of NAWIC, but she has a job in construction. So she works with estimating, safety and an HR administrator for Charles Construction Services Company. She's also the prequalification and estimating administrator at Hancock Structural Steel. So, Anne, a pleasure to have you back. We're really excited to talk about some of your role in construction specifically today. Thanks for joining us.

Anne Pflieger:

Thanks Mike. It's great to be here again.

Mike Merrill:

So, Anne, can you tell the listeners how COVID has changed processes for estimators and project coordinators?

Anne Pflieger:

Construction made us remain essential during COVID. So, we were able to still be on the job sites building projects, but there was a lot of things that did need to be changed and we needed to adapt very quickly. We had to have a lot stricter social distancing on the job sites because workers' sanitation was a huge thing and anybody that was not crucially needed on a project, they would work remotely. So technology had a huge part in that, by being able to stay connected to the job site through virtual platforms such as Zoom and other like Teams, Microsoft Teams to meet, those project

managers and those positions that would normally be on the job site were still able to feel connected. Also in the state of Ohio and I'm sure that this was done in other states as well, we also have to have inspections of our jobs and that needed to be done in order to continue moving along with the projects.

So the county and the state set up ways for the superintendent on the job to virtually go through and have them do the job inspection. And that was actually very challenging for some of our more seasoned field superintendents. A lot of them have been very, don't want to change, some of them even hate having their smartphones. They want to go back to the flip phone. So for my role in HR and safety and IT, there was a lot of training that I did throughout the pandemic to bring them up to speed and try and instruct them and that's very challenging when you're virtual trying to train somebody virtually how to do something because you're not right next to them.

So, that was very interesting, but I think what it did was it just kind of pushed forward the things that we need to be doing, using technology more. When we're traveling to job sites for a meeting or when the inspectors are traveling to job sites, that travel time takes up a lot of the day. And I think with the way that we're using technology now more, we're going to be able to get more done because they're not having that travel time. If they can just hop onto a meeting virtually and inspect an area on the job in order for them to approve the inspection, or if they need to reinspect something really quick because they fixed it, I think that that's going to help move our projects forward quicker and be able to get them done maybe even a head of schedule, depending on. Can't control weather yet with technology, but we do have that option.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. That's great. I know, kind of like you stated, you became a glorified technical support agent for your field employees. Is that right?

Anne Pflieger:

Yes, that's definitely right and when you're trying to explain to some of the older gentlemen about using technology, I even had to explain to one who's my age and he's totally against, he doesn't even, he hardly uses his tablet that we give him, but yeah, they were reluctant, but they knew it had to be done in order for them to keep moving and they wanted to work so, to travel and things, they had to do it.

Mike Merrill:

Well, it sounds like you were able to work through that and most of them are probably caught up to speed. Would you say now in 2021, is it easier to be a project manager or coordinator then than it wasn't 2020 and prior?

Anne Pflieger:

I think you have more tools to make it, I won't even necessarily say it's easier for you still have things that happen on job sites that you have take care of. That will always, always be. But I think that the resources and tools you have will make those situations easier to take care of and even progress the project along as well. So it will help definitely.

Mike Merrill:

So have you got some new software tools now that you would feel are indispensable at this point that you really think you'll depend on moving forward?

Anne Pflieger:

I think really the use of the virtual platforms like Teams and Zoom, that will definitely be something that we'll always use because it's a great way to connect. It's a lot cleaner than just even doing FaceTime or something like that. So, and I know that they're all improving on what they have to offer. Kind of Zoom is adding some things and Microsoft Teams as well. So they've been seeing what is being used in each one of their, their software and they're improving on that. So I think that as we go along, it's going to get even better.

Mike Merrill:

Sure. Do you feel like these tools have helped get a better grasp on accuracy of data collection and the tools that they're using now?

Anne Pflieger:

Yes, definitely. Something that Bluebeam is becoming more accessible and acceptable, I should say, now with everybody using it to update the drawings realtime, instead of having to update them and then send the files, then having comments of, just that back and forth takes forever. So to be able to do that in realtime really is helping because it helps especially with asbuilts, as you're progressing with the project, keeps everybody up to speed on where you're at with it. And then at the end, it's much easier when you're putting all that stuff together because it's already been done throughout the whole project.

I remember I was on the project side before I came to the estimating side. And I remember when you had to have three copies of asbuilts. You did not have a plan copier, so you're hand-doing all, every single sheet, your hand-doing it. Now you can do it on your computer and you can make notes, it's just amazing what you can do. And that's been progressing for a few years now but I think now it's really being pushed forward even more because of the pandemic. Believe me, I would never have chosen this way to push technology forward, but it had to be done.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. That's a great point. It kind of became a defensive reaction that we all had to take, but ultimately it was for the greater good of advancement of processes for sure, so,

Anne Pflieger:

Yeah.

Mike Merrill:

So, are there any other big tech innovations that you're seeing coming down the pike? You mentioned Bluebeam. Is there anything else that you're excited about or that you think will be better now that we've gone through this transformation and adjustment?

Anne Pfleger:

I think drones are really moving forward quickly, used on the project. You could use them for a multitude of different things. Not just the progress of the job, it can be used for inspections of, you have to go into a building maybe to, just had a fire and you had to do some work in there, or even for asbestos removal. You can take the drone in there to look for that. Asbestos is horrible. You have to have certain people certified to do that abatement and to be able to send a drone in there to just find the areas where that needs to be removed is going to save a lot of, not only time but the health and wellbeing of the employees. So I think that drones are going to be more and more used. Again, they've kind of started being used in the last few years for all those types of things, but it's really being pushed again because it's safer, it's keeping, you have your workers, they're separated, you can get realtime information. You can get progress reports that can be sent to the owners and other people on the Teams.

One thing that I really thought that was very distasteful actually before COVID that even the way that they have the software out there that you could put cameras at certain spots on the job site to have video time-lapse, and that is really becoming better and better as things go on. Again, I think that the pandemic kind of pushed that forward as well so that people could really show not only what's going on with the project, but the end product.

So if the company that built that building, whatever it was for, they could use it for marketing material because it's that good of quality of video. When everything first started, it's kind of blurry, but you have the video even on, and that has really gotten tremendously better. It helps out with, when you're doing punch lifts on the job, you can actually have a team in the office and somebody flying the drone and go into something, if you're looking for a sort of thing and the architect says it's not done, you can show them if it's done right then and there and they could check it off. And you really see drones and other video-type software really becoming more and more useful for all types of projects.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's a great point. And I had a guest on the other day and they mentioned how it's interesting that

they could find an owner manual for their 1992 Honda Accord, but this multi-million dollar building doesn't have one. There's no, but now we have the opportunity to have that type of documentation or manual so to speak, of that building, because we've got these tools.

Anne Pfleger:

And a lot of the manuals are searchable if they're electronic, which is another key thing. I actually literally, we've been spending the last couple of weeks putting together a digital operations manual for a product that we're completing and we had to bookmark everything and make it so that everything was very searchable on, and they could have it at their fingertips. They didn't have to flip through, and this book was almost 5,000 pages. Imagine if it was hard copy, trying to find one thing that you needed.

Mike Merrill:

Glad you didn't need to do that in triplicate, right? By hand. So, I love that you brought up the safety impact and HR impact with the drones are helping improve for employees. Are there any other things related to safety and HR that you've seen have changed because of these reactions?

Anne Pfleger:

Now on the safety side, there are more technology for, there are exoskeletons that they're building for people to be able to safely move things, pick things up. One thing that on the HR side is that they're actually and this is a company that NAWIC has partnered up with recently, it's called People First, and it's a platform for employees to, if there's some sort of HR situation, it could be harassment, it could be whatever type of situation that's related to HR that an employee can start the process of an incident right there on the app. And it makes it a little bit easier for those members that, those employees that don't feel comfortable going and talking to somebody about it because there's that, not that person on person conversation that you're having about the situation, especially from a woman's side. We tend to be a little bit more emotional and to be able to get something started, to have it looked into, and the way that this is set up with People First, and they're getting out to different types

of industries, actually. They reach out today what to get into the construction industry.

But it makes the employees feel comfortable knowing that since their company signed up for this, that there is going to be no retribution or whatever type of incident that they bring up. Because that is one of the fears of women in the industry, especially trades women, is that if they bring something up because somebody is treating them differently or harassing or bullying them, they're going to have repercussions for bringing it up or it's going to make it even worse because she said something. So having this opportunity, and what's really neat about this software is that if somebody sees an incident and they're not part of the incident, they can report it. So again, it gives other people an opportunity to stand up and say something. And honestly, I think that's what we need to be doing more is when you see something going on, stop it, intervene because once one person sees you intervening and making a difference, I truly believe that that will make them want to do the same and stop other things from happening.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's a great point. We had Stuart Binstock who's, I don't know if you know Stuart, he's the president of CFMA, Construction Financial Management Association. And we had him talking about suicide prevention and also the impact of injuries on a company, even on their bottom line financially, and the true costs that impact a company because somebody was injured or heaven forbid killed. And so that was a big thing he mentioned continuously was just like at the airport, if you see something, say something and so many of these things can be prevented. And I love that you tied that into even from an HR bullying perspective that we as an organization or as an industry need to raise the bar and really have more accountability to help make it a safe environment for anybody who wants to come participate. We need every hand we can get right now. And we're short-staffed everywhere. So that can help our business by being more inclusive, like you've mentioned.

Anne Pfleger:

Definitely.

Mike Merrill:

So were there other, I know contract tracing, I'm sorry, contact tracing and other things related to COVID have been a big deal and something that we've had to adjust and adapt to accommodate and be accountable to. Are there any things along safety management like that, that have changed and that you think might continue forward even after the pandemic's gone?

Anne Pfleger:

I think we will see more regulations, safety regulations coming out about sanitation on the job site. This is one of the things, again that women have been talking about for many, many years, just sanitation on the job site and proper fitting women's PPE, and the workers had that in the light with OSHA for a while. They've reached out to us wanting to have conversations about working out some regulations to get put in place because the pandemic has showed them that yeah, what you guys have been talking about all along. We should have been doing all along. We might've helped to alleviate maybe some of the spread. When you're working on a construction job site, you are in there with each other, sometimes you have to work very closely with one another.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. That's a great point. So, tell me this, I know this wasn't really in our pre-dialogue, but I am very curious. You are a woman in construction. We've talked about NAWIC. When I read your resume, I about needed to take a nap in between because there's so much that you're responsible for. So, how did you get in this role and position? When you were a little girl, did you aspire to be involved in a construction company or? Tell us about that journey a little bit.

Anne Pfleger:

Yeah, actually I was kind of a tomboy growing up, but I actually worked in the transportation industry and that is a very heavily regulated industry just like the construction industry. But how I got into construction is I was recently divorced and a single mom and the trucking company I worked for was an hour away, each way. So I was like two hours on the road. So I wanted to find something closer to home. So I applied for a receptionist position at a local general contractor,

Charles Construction. And I met with... It's a family run business husband and wife, and I interviewed with the wife and had a great conversation and I thought it was going wonderfully. And towards the end of the conversation, she said, "Well, I'm not going to hire you for the receptionist position." And I was like what to say, what happened here?

Before I could she said, "We haven't been looking or needing a project administrator, but we're going to make a position for you." So they hired me in as a project administrator. And it actually ended up working out because the project administrator that was there gave her two-week notice. So I was able to. I didn't get much training, but that's okay. I've love to just dig in there and figure it out for myself anyways. But it was a really good transition for me, going from trucking to construction because they're both very heavily regulated. And I've been with Charles since 2005, I started on the project side and have moved myself over to estimating and then I also do the safety HR and IT. So, that's how I got into construction.

Mike Merrill:

I don't think, it doesn't sound like you regret it.

Anne Pflieger:

No, no. I love it. I love working in the construction industry and I love being a part of NAWIC and being here to be able to support other women in the industry.

Mike Merrill:

That's fantastic. So is there one thing or another that you really focused on or studied in order to further the career that you've built for yourself?

Anne Pflieger:

I've always been a numbers person and I did, people say, well, why didn't you become an accountant? And an accountant, they're in a box. You can't really go outside the lines, you got to stay within the box. And I'm definitely somebody who likes to stay outside the lines. So I actually ended up getting my degree in business management, which kind of encompassed everything. And I worked on the project side, but when I kind of got a feel for the estimating, I was like,

okay, that's numbers, that's just, I love doing that. So I took some classes, actually, while I was getting my degree... I ended up getting my degree 20 years after I first started. That's a whole, another story. But I did take some blueprint reading classes while I was getting my degree in construction. I needed some extra credit and I just loved it. So I let my boss know that I was interested in learning more about the estimating side.

My boss has always been so very supportive of whatever I wanted to do in my career in construction. So we started moving me over to the estimating side and I actually, I still help out with all of the estimating that we do in our company but I now estimate pre-engineered metal buildings, which I just love. And this is another thing with technology because the program that I use is actually on the web and I can go in it and put all the building specs in and run pricing. If I need to get it down to a certain price, I can play around with it right online, make whatever changes I need to get to the price that our customer was expecting, so,

Mike Merrill:

Well, and I love that you said you told your boss you were interested in getting into the estimating side of things. So you actually stepped up and were bold and shared what you were thinking. And I think that's a gap that a lot of people have. They assume that people are going to take notice or they're going to somehow magically read your mind and know what it is you want. And you put yourself out there and it sounds like it served you very well.

Anne Pflieger:

Yeah. And that is important, but not all people can do that. And that's why I want to be here to be able to help those people that can't or don't know how to, maybe mentor them to have the voice or be their voice.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. We had a recruiter on the podcast a while back that was talking about that same thing about presenting themselves appropriately for the things that they wanted to aspire to or that they want to advance to or graduate into. And I think, especially with this younger generation, it seems like they like to text a lot and they're not quite as good at the in-person

communication thing I've noticed, at least with my own children. So I don't know if you've noticed the same thing or not.

Anne Pfleger:

Yeah. I do see the same thing. You just got to find out how they want to communicate and communicate to them that way. So I know that my boss, he would definitely be one of those people that if I prefer texting, he would text me. I personally like to sit down, have a cup of coffee and talk but you have to be adaptive to that. And I think that's what's important within the companies that we have in construction, it's that culture to be able to adapt it to change to your workforce, because that's the only way that we're going to entice the younger generation to come into the industry, is if we're communicating with them, how they know how to communicate, whatever that is.

Mike Merrill:

So we have to all make TikToks and Snapchats about these things and they'll pick it right up, right?

Anne Pfleger:

Right. Yeah. I haven't gotten into Tiktok yet, I do Snapchat once in a while, but I don't have time to learn a lot of that kind of stuff but,

Mike Merrill:

I know. Me either. My wife's Snapchats with her daughters all the time and they have fun and I, once in a while, I'll give a token little snap here and there just to show that I know something about it, but it's not second nature to me either. So, tell me this, is there one challenge, I mean you've been in these different roles, you've obviously advanced your career, you're in a higher position in your organization. Obviously they heavily depend on you for a lot of different things. What's one business challenge that you encountered and that you overcame and how did you work through that?

Anne Pfleger:

Personally, where I'm at in Charles, I don't have a challenge because this has been such a great team to

work with. Of course, throughout the year you may have conflicts with personalities amongst employees, but really the company that I work for really cares about their employees and wants to help out. I joke with my boss' wife, I'm the work wife, she's the home wife. So, you get to know them. And I think that that is also very important when you work within a company. I've never worked for a large company. And I know that would be very different for me to do that, to be a number than a person. So honestly, I don't have anything in the company, that I am here now.

Now I can tell you, I did have a situation with a company that I worked for, for short time and was also run by a couple. And the husband had major anger issues, major. And this was the first time in my life where I ever quit a job that I did not have something lined up. But after I called my father one morning, because I was getting to work early, at 7:15, I was calling my father, bawling because of the owner, what he just did. My dad says to me, "You need to leave. Quit." I said, "Dad, I don't have another job." "I don't care. We'll figure it out. Get out of there."

So I know that those things are out there. And I think that that's why it helps me today to understand what some of the women on the job sites or even in their own work environment. I think it's ridiculous that there's any type of harassment going on. Come on, we're here to do a job. We're trying to make a living for our family. There should be none of that other stuff going on, but it does happen. So I think that sometimes you need to go through those types of situations to be able to understand when other people are going through it and how to best lead them to get through it. So, that's kind of, naturally.

Mike Merrill:

Well, thank you for sharing some of those more personal stories and some of your history. I'm sure that there are listeners out there that will find that valuable and inspiring. And I hope that any of them that are going through those challenges are able to make that same decision and leave that environment that's toxic or unhealthy for them and find a better place. There are a lot of great companies out there. We work with thousands of them all over the United States, in Canada and even internationally. And I just take my hat off to so many of them that are quality organizations,

they want to do a great job, they love their customers, they care about safety. I'm just so pleased to be involved in such a wonderful industry. And I love that you've shared so much of your personal history and growth in your organization, but also that you're extending that into your role in NAWIC and helping raise the tide for all the other ships in the harbor.

Mike Merrill:

So in closing, is there one takeaway that you would like to share with the listeners from your role and your position and your experience in your construction company today?

Anne Pfleger:

Well, I think in my construction career, and it kind of goes with my neighbor for all as well. And I think I mentioned this last time when we were talking, but it's still very important, that you can be and do whatever you want to do. Don't let barriers stop you. There's a way to get around them. It may take time. Like I mentioned, it took me 20 years to finish my college degree, but I got it done. And that was something else I wanted to, with my son. I wanted to show him that, you know I didn't get my college degree right out of high school, I still got it. I think that that's important for people to understand. Do it on your timeline. If it takes you a little longer to get where you need to go, that's fine. Just keep your eye at the end and you can do it.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, I love that. Yeah. Life's a marathon, not a sprint, right?

Anne Pfleger:

Definitely.

Mike Merrill:

Love that. Well, thank you so much, Anne, for joining us again today. I had another great conversation and again, just enjoy getting to know you better personally and professionally and look forward to opportunities to connect again down the road when we have the chance.

Anne Pfleger:

Sounds good. Thanks again, Mike.

Mike Merrill:

Thank you. And thank you to the listeners for joining Anne and I today for this conversation. If you enjoyed the things that we talked about or learned something new and insightful, we invite you to please give our podcast a rating and a review, as well as share it with your friends and colleagues within your organization. Of course, we love it when you follow us on all the socials @workmax_ on Instagram or on our LinkedIn page at WorkMax. Again, we're grateful for your participation and listenership and we hope, not only that you're able to improve your business, but your life.