Thought diversity is the key to a career in surveying

A new campaign from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors aims to diversify the next generation of surveyors to the industry to tackle new demands and challenges



Gateshead Millennium Bridge: the world's only tilting bridge Photo: © 2012 Shaun Dodds Photography

12:09PM GMT 05 Dec 2014

It was the 26th US President Theodore Roosevelt who said, “The best executive is one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

Today, while most organisations will claim to be no greater than the sum of their parts, it’s difficult to imagine the unrivalled successes of Apple without Steve Jobs, Sainsbury’s without Justin King or Burberry without Angela Ahrendts.

In his 2011 book, former Manchester United manager of 26 years, Alex Ferguson, reflected that loyalty, control and discipline were the most important elements of leadership, no matter the industry.

One industry that has long called out for a new school of thought when it comes to leadership is land,

property, construction and infrastructure.

Sean Tompkins, chief executive of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), is the first to admit it needs to do more to change.

“Industry needs a new level of thought diversity to attract its future leaders – too many people think this is a 'closed industry', which isn’t the case.”

For a start, only 13 per cent of current chartered surveyors are female, a shocking enough statistic before you even consider the data on entry for working-class backgrounds, non-white British ethnicity, or people considering surveying as a second career.

Maria Willis is one in that female 13 per cent having been chartered since 2001, she has now set up her own professional coaching company for those in the construction industry.

“Surveyors need to have great communication skills and emotional intelligence,” says Ms Willis. “You can be the most technically gifted in your team, but without the skills to talk to people, doing the job will be difficult.”

> *The feeling of seeing a building go from planning to completion is unmatched*

Having seen first-hand that not enough is being done to cultivate some of the key management skills the industry needs, Maria decided to get a qualification in professional coaching to help tackle the issue.

“The industry is all about people, and if you haven’t got them working together towards the same goal and communicating in the right way, the quality suffers and costs will overrun resulting in a very unhappy client.”

Ms Willis feels that surveying, like many others areas of construction, needs to get out of blame cultures and shake off its sometimes “tough guy” image in order to attract new talent.

“Companies would see a big difference if they adopted new attitudes towards success. It really is the case that if you invest in people; provide them with career plans, support and guidance then you keep talent and the long-term returns are mentors to the next generation.

“The feeling of seeing a building go from planning and modelling to completion is unmatched, and being involved with that process for the whole time is really something. There are new demands to create intelligent buildings with sophisticated management systems and sustainable technology, and

they are also a lot more interesting nowadays than simply being a box.

“The difference with a great quality building is that it can have the power to change people’s lives – and being involved with that is just a great feeling.”

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