

Thriving in Construction | 05 – Change is Inevitable and So Are Women with Gladys Artunedo

Patricia Bonilla: Our guest in today's episode in the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast plays a really crucial role in planning, execution, monitoring, controlling, and closing up projects. She's also responsible for the entire project scope, the project team resources, the project budget, and the success or failure of a construction project. Please help me welcome our today's guest, Gladys Artunedo, Lunacon's Construction Project Manager. Welcome, Gladys to the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast.

Patricia: Hi Gladys, how are you? Welcome to the Thriving in Construction. the Podcast.

Gladys: Thank you for having me.

Patricia: So we're here. And I want to thank you for coming here. We're here looking to inspire women into coming into construction. How do you get into the construction space?

Gladys: Well, I have an architecture degree from Cuba. From a very young age, I knew that's what I wanted to do. Because I love creating spaces. So I started architecture in [inaudible] of Island. And that's what I've done, basically, all my life. First day in Cuba and now here, even though I don't have a license, I've been working in construction for 10 years.

Patricia: 10 years. Wow. So you're a project manager in Lunacon, what it's like to be a project manager?

Gladys: First, working in Lunacon is being a bless to me. Being a project manager allows me to combine my two passions, which is the love I have for construction, and the love I have for numbers. I really love numbers. I also have a degree in business administration from Florida International University. So buildings and numbers are my passion. And what can I ask more than do what I love equate construction with pride?

Patricia: Before you became a project manager, what were you doing before becoming a project manager?

Gladys: I begin construction here we're in estimating. Yes, I began doing estimates for a construction company. And at a later time, they started to offer me to go to the field and supervise the jobs. That's how I changed from the office to the field.

Patricia: What was like to go from the office to the field?

Gladys: This is what I like, this is my love. I really love the feel. I really love to see how you start building the thing. After you say done, that gives you a sense of accomplishment that you cannot put into words. So that's what I like.

Patricia: So what do you think about, you know, you come into the field, you're a woman, and you are.. when you went to the field, what was your role?

Gladys: [inaudible] supervisor.

Patricia: Supervisor, and you were supervising who?

Gladys: The workers.

Patricia: The field workers? And so are they were they women or men?

Gladys: Men.

Patricia: All men?

Gladys: All men.

Patricia: And what was that like?

Gladys: Well, it hasn't been that hard. But you always encounter barriers when they see you. They feel like you're not able to do what you have to do. Let's see what she can do. She's not going to make it at a later time when they see that you're not there to take their jobs from them, but to help them to do their work. They learn to respect you and appreciate you.

Patricia: So you overcame the barrier by helping them be better. But how do you feel when you face that challenge? You know, like, "I'm the only woman here."

Gladys: It is challenging. It is. I think women can bring to the construction industry positive attributes that maybe men can, we can bring empathy, we can bring sensitivity. We can bring a sense of teamwork that sometimes men don't have. So when You can bring what you have to give what you have to share, the outcome has to be good.

Patricia: Tell me a moment where you have applied empathy in construction?

Gladys: Well, for example, we all make mistakes during our life, it doesn't have to be the wrong in we work. But if you look for the solution to the problem, I'm not pointing fingers. So you look for the result you're showing empathy.

Patricia: Beautiful. So do you find that men are able to be empathetic? Or do you think they focus more on the problem and talk about the problem?

Gladys: They focus on the problem, and they try to point fingers and they yell at everyone that doesn't let you anyway. Forget about the problem. Look for the solution.

Patricia: That is so right, that is very, very, very wise. And now when you decide to be going to architecture, how long ago was that? How old are you?

Gladys: I'll be 50. Let's wait

Patricia: Congratulations!

Gladys: So I was at 18.

Patricia: And what gets you to be in architecture? What do you say? Who told you what [overlap].

Gladys: Not a leader. When I enter a space, I don't look at it as it is. I always start changing spaces for the purposes of functionality. So very early, I knew that what I want to do create spaces, functional spaces.

Patricia: Functional spaces. So would you say that's your passion? Yes. And now, I'm curious, because a lot of times we are as project manager in your role now, which is not really the role of an architect, you get to be in a project, you make decisions on a project with a set of drawings that has been already designed by someone else. And maybe you see a drawing, and you're saying this is not functional. So how does that make you feel when you are? There's not much you can do? It's already done? The budget has been set for this contract. In this way. What can you do?

Gladys: I tried to find a way of getting a very [inaudible], share my thoughts about it. And see, I know it's not my business for staying away. But I share my thoughts, and maybe I can help.

Patricia: Any has been sometimes good [overlap]. So why would you tell a woman that wants to start in this space? What would you tell a girl that it's maybe 18 years old or 1617 and is thinking about, "what should I sell?"

Gladys: I will say anyone follow your dreams. It doesn't matter what it's been said about it. So find the truth, your truth, and never stop dreaming. If that's what you like, we only have one life, so it's not worth it to waste it. So follow your passions and you will find your own thoughts.

Patricia: Do you think men are superior than women?

Gladys: No.

Patricia: Do you think women are superior them?

Gladys: I think we're kind of equal. But sometimes women can do more things. The same time things that men don't. No, they're not superior at all. If someone's superior [overlap]

Patricia: And what sense Do you saying, you know, women can do more or multiple things at the same time that will even for example,

Gladys: We have to work, they only have one. They go to work from eight or five or whatever time they go to work. And that's it. And when we in or out of home, then we start our another work. Raising child, taking care of the family, of household. So for life, we have two girls, they only have one.

Patricia: And we don't want to generalize, right? There's I've known men that are seen single parents and you know they do a really good job. So this is not about but there's for most of us most of the time, you want to be a mother and you want to be a wife, a good wife, and you want to have your marriage and you want to have a nice house, a clean house and friends and family and mother and you want to do the work.

Gladys: Absolutely.

Patricia: So how do you do that? What three things do we need to keep in mind if someone else, there's a woman in construction, and she decides to have a family and kids. What is the in your opinion is required, or we got to keep in mind in order to be successful in all the roles that we decide to embark?

Gladys: I would say the key is a perfect balance between work and life. You don't want to work point that doesn't allow you to take care of your family, and vice versa. So finding the exact point when you find that balance between your work and your life, that's what allows you to grow in life.

Patricia: But how do you do that? I mean, your...

Gladys: I guess I'm doing like every other woman. I go to work. I don't I kind of don't think about what's happening at home when I'm working. So while I work, that's my purpose. That's what I've seen. That's what I do. And I don't think about whom when I'm at work. The same when I get home behind the door is work. I take it again next morning. Of course, if I had to do anything special, I don't mind. But that's the time for my family. That's the time for my life. Because we need to take care of us as well to be able to take care of others. So finding the right balance between your work and your life.

Patricia: And how do you take care of you?

Gladys: Doing the things I like to do. I love music.

Patricia: Really?

Gladys: Yes, I do. I don't think I don't want to save a war without music. So music has to be surrounding me every day. I have to see whenever I can.

Patricia: So you play an instrument?

Gladys: No, I used to play piano, but I didn't stall it. I forgot it. I won't be able to do it right now. So when I was like 15, but I love music. Yes. I like my silence. I love my silence. I love my quietness. Sometimes. I need my space without my husband, without my son. So I'm able to recharge.

Patricia: How do you do that? You get home and you tell them, "Hey, I... [overlap]

Gladys: I only without they noticing. I find my space to a little bit to what I want what I love.

Patricia: And when you're in that quiet space, what do you do?

Gladys: I listen to music. Sometimes I meditate. But I do it in the mornings. I also work out in the mornings, not because it's not about fitness. Because that gives me the energy I need to. So working out helps me to get energy. So I work out in the mornings. And I've played between working out and meditate and when I get home in the [inaudible] music, relaxing.

Patricia: I love it. I love it. And how do you motivate yourself?

Gladys: I always say if there's at least one person in the world that can do something, I can do it. So I don't put barriers for myself. I might not be able to read up first for I'll try. I'll try. I'll try. And if as I told you if there's someone that can, I can.

Patricia: And who was your biggest motivator when you were growing up? Who inspire you or along your life in your 50 years who has inspired you the most?

Gladys: Maybe my dad, this is something you might not know. I don't think you know, but my biological mother died when I was three. So her sister raised me. She's my mom. She's all I known. She's my mom, I don't even remember my real mom. So my dad was but he wasn't a wasn't like mom and dad and sister. Like a family. He wasn't around. But he can live with me full time. But I always... he was always my role model.

Patricia: And how did he inspire you? What did he do that inspired you? What is it that you learn from him or...

Gladys: I actually did something that he also did. He graduated from university when he was 40 something. I got here when I was 40. I already had a degree from Chiara. But I started in university again, and I graduated at 47, 46.

Patricia: So you came here as an immigrant at around 40, and you went back to school in the US. And wow, you were like the oldest one in the group? Or are you average people...

Gladys: I think actually, I did my, my degree fully online, because at that time, I worked out across a company, as a superintendent, I used to work more than 60 hours a week. So I couldn't find time to go physically in person to campus. So I started fully online, the whole career online.

Patricia: And how did you do that?

Gladys: It was hard. But it was possible. So in the same extent that I say, if someone can do it, I can do it. I always say if I did it, anyone can do it.

Patricia: Yeah, I know, what would you? What do you think are the biggest challenges that a woman can face in construction? Or anybody in this industry? What are the biggest challenges?

Gladys: I think the biggest challenge, or the biggest hurdle the industry has to overcome is to create a culture where males can see us as equal.

Patricia: How do you think we can do that?

Gladys: Showing that we can be able to do at least a thing sometimes.

Patricia: So you think their responsibility to create a culture, very well said that men can see women as equal is our responsibility.

Gladys: It's our responsibility. I think it's everyone's responsibility. It's our responsibility to take our place. It's the owners responsibility to create workplaces where men and women are treated equally.

Patricia: Very wise comment. You say that, for the industry to change, we need to create a culture where men see women as equal. And so how do you do that? And was... who should take charge of that what you mentioned that he should be everyone's responsibility. But if you have the opportunity to create a change, how would you do it?

Gladys: I would say, I will be our company owner, to me is not about gender. It's about performance and results. So that's what I said it's everyone's responsibility. It's not only us because employers, owners, men or women, all levels had to realize that is not about gender. Actually, when you have a workplace gender diverse, do you have a lot of ideas, points of view that can contribute to a better outcome. So having not even gender diverse or a diverse workplace is better than having an all-male workplace.

Patricia: Yes, I totally agree. Now, what needs to happen in order for this change to start happening? What would you do? If you if you have the possibility to create this change yourself? How will you, you know, what would you do first?

Gladys: I think, women in general have to get rid of the idea this is not our place, or it's not a place for us, there's space for everyone under the sun. So we can do as men can do whatever we are. So we have to get rid of the idea that we don't belong here. We do belong where you can do your best.

Patricia: So it's a belief, right? And I believe in when we have a belief about something a limiting belief, we don't take the first step. And so we have to do a good job at allowing at helping to remove the limiting beliefs that construction is not for a woman, is not a space for her, right? And it really is not the man's responsibility. It's everyone's responsibility. Right? That's what you're saying. And I think you're I agree with that. Thank you. Thank you for that. So now, what's in it for you? What is the next you know, 10 years of your life in construction?

Gladys: My next 10 years? I'm just beginning. So my next 10 years could be, I don't know. Maybe I'm running a construction company. Giving speeches for a woman in construction, maybe. I don't know where the word life's going to take me. But what I know is that this is just the beginning.

Patricia: 50 years from now, you're 100 years old. What do you want to see accomplish? For sure what's the end for you? Not the end, you know, because we're a soul, and we're going to transform and we're going to evolve, but what is it that you want to make sure that happens for you?

Gladys: What would make me feel really good is that I left good footprints to my loved ones. And after that I can leave.

Patricia: and what needs to happen for you to feel that you left a good footprint in your loved ones?

Gladys: For example, when my son can make a decision and say, This is what my mom taught me. That's what she told me to do. And he's doing right. That's...

Patricia: That makes you feel good. And what has construction done for you, personally, and also for your loved ones.

Gladys: I think somehow, they admire the effort put in my work. I [inaudible] and my son is a boy. So I don't have daughters. So they see they also see a woman in construction. And they might think, are they, for example, my son at the beginning could think, or maybe my mom could be a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher. But I think a boy thinks, naturally, my mom is an architect or an engineer. That's not one profession, by my nature.

Patricia: So do you say your son when he has a daughter? Do you think he's going to discourage her to be in construction? And if so, what is he going to tell her to her daughter?

Gladys: Do Like Your grandma.

Patricia: So you're already changing the perspective? Your example? One person at a time. What was the biggest challenge so far in this industry?

Gladys: The biggest challenge was, there was a place of work, and I didn't feel good. That was really, really tough. But I didn't give up.

Patricia: Let's talk about that. Because construction can be an environment that is could be toxic, or we, you know, there's a reason why there is, I say industry along with mining that has the highest rate of suicide. Why do you think construction has highest rate of suicide?

Gladys: It might be for the belief. You have to be tough, aggressive role. I don't know, something in construction. So I think it might be that but, as I said, we as women can bring a lot of difference to construction. You don't have to yell at anyone to get a result. So it doesn't have to be like that.

Patricia: I agree. And why do you think there's a lot of people in construction that going to alcohol and drugs and smoking?

Gladys: I've seen basically, it's stressful, stressful. environment, you have to meet deadlines, you encounter a lot of difficulties in the way. So sometimes it can be a lot stressful. And maybe that's the way some people take out the hole it's their way of getting rid of the stress.

Patricia: And if you can change that, what could you do? What three things could we do to help the industry evolved from being so cutthroat and unforgiving and not empathetic? What three things can we do? Or in other words, what can we do to bring empathy into construction?

Gladys: As I said, when you look for a resolve with which I think that's what we all show progress on because that's, we work in because we are supposed to either resolve to summer. So that's your main purpose. That's what should drive you in your way. So you're going to find difficulties on the way but let them pass more forward.

Patricia: But you were saying that you were in a company that was very toxic. Yeah. And so you had a focus on finishing and delivering the outcome, and you still didn't feel good. So what caused that? What caused that you felt the way you felt in this place?

Gladys: The environment, they were toxic. Their mindset was your in construction. Okay, you're a woman, but you're surrounded by men, this is how we are here, we yell,

we throw out some things, we fire people. So I didn't like that. But at the same time, I love what I do. And I wanted to see the result, I wanted to see that we don't. So I didn't give up. I finished actually I finished on the certificate of occupancy.

Patricia: So basically, I've heard you say, in this toxic environment, which is common in construction, I have very common I've seen on many projects where the person in charge of the project, it's punching holes through the walls of the trailer, they take their stress out of the walls, and they punch them and it's crazy. And they talk to people in such a derogatory way. So when you look at that, how do we change that? We change the people? How we change?

Gladys: We change the mindset, that's not what's going to take you where you want on the contrary, that's going to take you apart for your result. So you have to give the other side What's your problem? And what can I help you with, so we can both get the result we want.

Patricia: So you change your mindset?

Gladys: That's not going to help me or you, but that's not going to bring the solution.

Patricia: Do you think people are, I think hurt people hurt people. That when you're hurting inside, there's very little you can do for other people. Do you think there's a lot of that in construction? Hurt people, people that are hurting not necessarily happy?

Gladys: Yes.

Patricia: Where did you notice that? What kind of population? The steel workers the supervisor or everyone? The owners?

Gladys: Yeah, everyone but I would say some leadership positions. I don't know if it's a stress they go through. But yeah, that hurt people and their peers.

Patricia: Thank you very much. Thank you for being in this industry, for being an empowering woman, for giving your energy and your all to this industry and helping other people and making such a great contribution to the construction industry.

Gladys: So last message to all women that want to get into the construction industry, it's not the word construction can give you guys what you can give the construction. If you're an electrician...

Patricia: I totally agree with that. And I believe that's our role in life, right? It's not what you take, it's what you give, and you do it with your family, right? You don't go take care of your family, see, what I might going to get from that? And I believe that's the role even when you go or waiting for someone.

A lot of times people say, you know what are you going to do for me? And it's the other way around, it seems the giving when there's a receiving and that's the quiet, I think

that's a key for happiness, contribution and giving, they make you fulfilled and when you fulfill, you're happy. And when you're happy, you know, the sky's the limit. And I think women in general are givers, you know, women in general are trained to this. And probably this is a one reason why if you enter into the construction space, you are going to be used, you're happy, you're successful.

You're fulfilled. I mean, I will say women that I know, again, there's not that many, there's but the ones I know most of them are very good. You know, I don't really can recall a woman that is in this space and stays in this space. And it's not good. There's not the many.

Gladys: Because the ones that are here, we are here because we want to know. No one forced us to be here.

Patricia: Construction is not a space, that you're going to be there because you're forced to be there. You can't fake it. I don't think she can. And for a woman is not a handout, you have to work hard at it. You need to prove that you can because you're right. Who said it before, typically when somebody meets you, they don't think you know, they don't think if somebody doesn't know you they don't think you know.

They think you're the secretary or maybe accounting, maybe but mostly the secretary. And that's you can be going into a meeting, and they don't necessarily think that you are the project manager or the superintendent or the you know the Secretary and if you're networking and selling that's what you're going to that's what you're going to get.

And there's when I've been selling to the government and networking and doing conferences, people don't know. Let's say somebody doesn't know me and they think I'm the secretary. It doesn't 99% I'm not going to have a sign, "Oh, I'm the president of Lunacon. I'm not going to have a sign," but it's what they think. Yeah, it has happened to you.

Gladys: Yeah. A lot of times.

Patricia: But you don't let it bother you. Because you prove you prove yourself. And you don't do it by force. You do it by yourself. And that's the difference. We don't force our way into the space because we can't we just do it. We walk the talk. And so are you. Is there anything else that you want to tell the women out there that want to join the construction.

Gladys: Go for your dreams, don't let anyone stop you from what you want in life. And that's it.

Patricia: Thank you.

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