

INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ has been established to grow the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector and is open to women of all levels. Every month we will be profiling a different woman working in a different part of the sector. If you would like to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Natasha](#).

We'd like to introduce Grace as our next Woman of Focus. In addition to her role at McConnell Dowell, Grace also chairs the Auckland WIN chapter committee.



GRACE SCHAEFER
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER



1. What company or organisation do you work for and what is your role there?

I work for McConnell Dowell Constructors as one of two Business Development Managers covering New Zealand and the Pacific. The other is Marianne Rogers who covers the South Island. We work in the New Business & Strategy team and we are responsible for setting the strategy to grow the company by having a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of our customers and the opportunities in each market sector in which we operate: three waters, transportation, marine, industrial, power and resources.

2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?

I originally trained and worked as a geologist but returned to Auckland University's Civil Engineering faculty to do a PhD. My doctoral thesis focused on how major New Zealand road construction firms and their clients and NZ Transport Agency made strategic decisions to adopt specific systems and processes for environmental sustainability. I have a good understanding of the industry and the important relationship between organisational strategic objectives and the institutionalisation of new organisational initiatives. I then spent about a year at the Ministry for the Environment's Auckland Policy Office which gave me a really interesting insight into policy development and how Government operates.

PhD's are a hard sell in the non-research job market. However, I worked with the previous Business Development Manager, and after he left I took on more and more responsibilities, and successfully delivered a couple of key initiatives for the New Business team. Eventually, these efforts were recognised and I was appointed to the Business Development role nearly two years ago.

3. Tell us about a project are you currently working on and why it interests you?

Due to the nature of my job, I am constantly working on multiple initiatives at a time. I may find myself working on the company business plan to prepare for our Strategic Planning Sessions; research a business opportunity and tee up meetings with a client and their advisors to better understand their project and what's important to all the parties involved; undertake promotional activities such as facilitating introductions between clients and our key staff; coordinating marketing collateral, and organising project site visits or client functions. This job requires you to be comfortable interacting with a range of people from projects right through to the C-Suite, and yes, it is

heavily male-dominated. Everything is happening at the same time, which makes it a very dynamic experience with a lot of variability. It is very mentally stimulating, which is great!

4. What's the hardest job you've ever done and why?

I believe that the challenge is not the job but rather it is the combination of the nature of the job or project you're trying to complete, your professional experience (call it your technical knowledge) to undertake the task, and the stage you are in on your personal growth journey. Do you have a belief and confidence in yourself or are you holding yourself back in some way? Do you know when and how to ask for assistance or do you try to muddle through it on your own? Do you understand the drivers and communication styles of your colleagues - let alone that of your clients? Are you able to recognise and adapt to ensure that you can successfully achieve the desired vision and outcomes?

5. Can you think of one example where your "diversity" has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?

My diversity could be my gender, my ethnicity, non-engineering background or personality! Everybody, male and female, brings such different personal and professional backgrounds to our work that we can't help adding value in different ways. It fundamentally shapes how we approach each situation and person. Because my background is quite different from others in our industry, I come at conversations from a slightly different perspective and will consider angles and details that perhaps someone with a pure engineering background might not see. Ultimately, what is important is having a questioning, open and collaborative mindset.

To learn more about opportunities for a career with McConnell Dowell please [click here](#).

Or, you can [connect with Grace on LinkedIn](#).

