

## Training helps Rachel stay on track

Rachel Cook has had a successful track record in the rail industry, managing major projects as well as hundreds of staff and contractors for her employer Atkins.

Her career had gone to plan having joined the company after graduating in civil engineering and geology from the University of Glasgow.

After 14 years in the rail industry, Rachel made the move into the company's energy business. This had always been part of the reason she joined Atkins, to have a long and varied career across industries but once this was made a reality, she didn't know what was next.

"Changing industry was a risky thing for me to do after building up so much knowledge about rail and gaining so many contacts," said Rachel. "I was looking for a new challenge as I felt I was not learning at the same rate"

Very soon after her transfer, she underwent a Career Development Programme run specifically for women by Jayne Little, Managing Director of gender diversity experts Skills 4.

**"It was the single most important piece of training I have ever had in my 16 years at the company," said Rachel. "Having the opportunity to be with other women across the business, in a safe environment, sharing our feelings and thoughts was both emotional and liberating.**

"I was happy in my work but didn't have a plan anymore. I didn't know what was next. The training helped me put that right."

# ATKINS



Rachel had enjoyed work placements at Atkins while doing her degree and was delighted to be offered a graduate traineeship. She joined the rail business training in bridge assessment and design, doing consultancy and was a technical lead on various projects.

She was seconded to London Underground, managing a team of 120 engineers and with responsibility for assessments and analysis of the bridges and structures on two-thirds of the network. During that time she was nominated by a Director for an Institution of Civil Engineers award – 'Civil Engineering Manager of the Year' – "It was the first time it occurred to me that I must be quite good," she recalls.

Rachel undertook the Skills 4 Career Development Programme at a critical point in her career. It gave her the confidence to tackle and successfully complete the company's Grade 15 promotion panel – demonstrating achievement in commercial, client, people and technical disciplines.

It wasn't long before she was to make a big change – becoming operations manager of Atkins' Oil and Gas business in London.

“The training was invaluable. Engineers are inherently modest and women even more so. To be able to compete it is about more than just performance. It is about image, confidence and exposure.

In the summer of 2012 she was asked to MC a major conference on oil and gas with 150 delegates, including clients, industry experts and senior managers from Atkins. Although a daunting prospect she accepted and after a little bit more training she delivered.

“It was quite a stretch,” she said. “However, it was a brilliant experience and the feedback has been fantastic.”

And importantly she has a new plan.

“Atkins has been so supportive,” she said. “I have two young sons, six and four, and have been able to do this role on a part-time basis split between home and the office. Women here are promoted on merit.

“The Career Development Programme has made a real difference in the workplace. The number of women putting themselves forward for promotion panels now is incredible. More are opting into the process rather than sitting and waiting.

“It has helped me develop my new plan – to take on a really challenging role and make a difference. Over the next 18 months I want to grow revenues and the headcount by 30%. Then I will have built up the industry specific knowledge to lead a major multi-disciplinary project for the business, I can't wait!”.

“There is no doubt the training I received from Jayne helped get me there. I would absolutely recommend it to others.”

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