

Taking control of your own career

ATKINS

Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group

Rachel Cook thought she had achieved everything she could in her career until undertaking Skills 4's career development programme in 2012/3.

Now, four years after completing the Skills 4 training, Rachel has been promoted twice and is one of the few female Directors at Atkins, one of the world's most respected engineering, design and project management consultancies.

She is responsible for leading a business with more than 250 civil and structural engineering staff across the South East of the UK delivering consultancy services across Strategic Highways, Strategic Rail and Local Transport markets.

Now, Rachel is using her experience to act as a role model and ambassador to encourage other female (and male!) employees to take control of their own careers, manage their own development and grab opportunities as they arise.

Rachel's career at Atkins had gone to plan having joined the company after graduating in Civil Engineering and geology from Glasgow University but she felt it was beginning to meander after 15 years in the business until the Skills 4 career development programme sparked a change.

"It was the single most important piece of training I had ever had in my time 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. It gave me time to think and focus"

Rachel is highly experienced working at a senior leadership level across multiple industries and is passionate about building teams, developing others and celebrating strengths - a natural leader who believes in enabling everyone to succeed and having the ability to do so.

She credits the Skills 4 training with helping her to understand the power of exposure and image –




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"performance is not enough, it is about taking control of your own career, being in the driving seat and leading by example," she says.

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.

Since then she has held some key roles, including operations manager of Atkins 80 man oil and gas business in London, Global Key Account Manager for BP, one of the company's key accounts BP and most recently the move to the Transportation sector as Practice Director which included a further promotion to Grade 16 Director.

"Changing industry after 16 years was a risky thing for me to do after building up so much knowledge about rail and gaining so many client contacts," said Rachel. "I was looking for a new challenge as I felt I was not learning at the same rate and an industry move seemed like a great challenge".

"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, self-belief and exposure."

In the summer of 2013 she was asked to host a major conference for the Energy business with 250 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, but one of the most exciting things I've ever done" she said. "It was a brilliant experience, really great for my profile and the feedback has been fantastic.

"Atkins has been so supportive. I have two young sons and have now been working on a part-time basis for 8 years, splitting my work between home and the office. Women here are promoted on merit and output, not on the input of hours.

"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 to be recognised.

The fact Rachel has earned two key senior level promotions in four years is testament to that she revels in being able to support other women progress in the company.

"The fantastic thing about the Skills 4 career development programme in Atkins is that it is run over four days over a long period," she says. "You learn some tools, go back into the business, start using them then go back and learn some more. It is very successful."



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