




# WOMEN WHO ROCK THE RIGHT OF WAY INDUSTRY

They've faced the music and kept on singing

BY YASMIN L. STUMP, ESQ.

On 2022 International Women's Day, I began writing this article, and it led me to thinking about relationships between and among women in the right of way industry, including my own. I have had the privilege of connecting with numerous accomplished, admirable and supportive women within the IRWA family, some of whom I quote in this article and have fondly named "women who rock the right of way industry." Interestingly, this positive female comradery arose out of traveling on a highway to hell working with other women in the industry.

This bumpy road was abysmal. I ascended to lead a group, and a handful of people, predominately women, treated me atrociously. Initially, they made horrible statements behind my back and then to me one-on-one. Later, they expanded the breadth of their vicious electronic communications by copying my clients, colleagues and friends. Their words were not merely snarky, but visceral insults, which were, as one person who read them said, "jaw dropping."

Certainly, I am not a neophyte to female cattiness. I was in a college sorority, and my senior year as an undergraduate at Indiana University, I was a finalist for homecoming queen. Although the honor was not based on physicality but academic and extracurricular achievements, it was not favorably received by some of my female classmates. Like other women, I know that, unfortunately, part of our cultural experience involves young women being competitive with other females over being the most popular, having the best grades and physical appearance and winning over boys. However, after college, the female gossiping and back biting in my life dissipated almost completely. I never experienced it with other women in law school and seldom have I encountered it in my professional or personal life.



### Find Out What It Means to Me

I discussed my negative experience with few people, and although I felt alone on this road, my research on the subject of women treating other women badly revealed that I was not. In her book “Tripping the Prom Queen,” Susan Shapiro Barash noted the truth of the adage, “Men punish the weakest member of the group; women punish the strongest.” This sad statement recognizes that women leaders are often vulnerable to attack not by their male, but female, colleagues. After years of working to overcome male discrimination in the workplace, it is chillingly ironic that women would seek to impair the advancement and achievements of their female counterparts.

The IRWA female rock stars also confirmed that I was not alone. Yoli Matranga, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, immediate past IRWA Region 1 chair and a Chapter 27 past president, had similar negative encounters with other women in the industry. She offered sage advice based on her own experience. “It was painful, but I learned so much about myself and how to lead. No one should face obstacles that prevent us from giving our best. It happens, so grow from it — don’t let it defeat you.”

Like Yoli, I strongly believe that any life experience, even a difficult one, provides opportunities for insight and knowledge. The growth that I gained from my experience emanated from my intellectual curiosity about why adult, professional women sometimes treat other women abominably. I set out on a quest to understand the reasons for such behavior. My research revealed that several reasons exist for why some women treat other women badly. Arianna Huffington, co-founder of The Huffington Post, believes physical appearance is the reason because women are threatened by more beautiful women. However, in my opinion, while some women may be jealous of other women for this reason, it seems too simplistic. A Psychology Today 2013 article entitled, “Women Who Hate Other Women: The Psychological Root of Snarky,” says that maternal influences also play a role in how women view and treat other women. Mothers are often critical of their daughters or teach them not to trust other women. The article also notes that genetics may affect women’s perceptions of other women. Additionally, Dr. Nancy O’Reilly, author and trailblazer for women’s empowerment, believes our culture creates an atmosphere of competition between and among women due to the expectations of female perfection promoted through social media and reality television. In a featured series of articles on her website about the topic, O’Reilly explains that the “queen bee theory,” where some women believe that there is only room for one woman in a particular role in an organization, and their need for male attention and approval are both factors that can create competition and animosity among women. The knowledge I gained in my research was compelling and provided clarity, and since the time of my experience, I have spoken to several women’s groups about the subject, which, while it enlightened others, proved cathartic to me.



The women of Yasmin L. Stump Law Group, PC at the 2021 Indiana Conference for Women, which the firm sponsored.



Candice Ringgold and Jessica Brown, RWA

### We are Women, Hear Us Roar

During my more than 30 years in the right of way industry, I have been dedicated to serving as a mentor to younger, less-experienced professionals, especially women, and as a board member and corporate sponsor of organizations that inspire and support women. As the founder and a president of a woman-owned business, my philosophy is that it is my obligation to give back to the right of way industry, the legal profession and my community, particularly in ways that encourage other women.

When women support other women, it has a powerful positive impact. As Kristina Breeding, SR/WA, former IRWA Chapter 13 president and 2022 International Education Conference co-chair explained, “Women are powerful when they join forces and use the sisterhood to learn, network and thrive. It was very important early in my career to find strong females to connect with. I have tried to lead by example with other females, new to our profession or on my team, to uplift and mentor them and help them grow. I try and live by the philosophy of assisting others to grow beyond myself and building a better future for our industry.”

Patricia Quinn, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, IRWA International Relations Committee Nominations and Elections Committee vice chair, Region 4 representative and a past Chapter 16 president, benefitted from other women mentoring her and becoming a mentor herself through career positions and informal collaboration in energy leadership groups. She commented, “I think that perhaps these indirect collaborations have encouraged and benefitted me to advocate more for myself. In turn, I put myself out there (I hope) as open and available to assist with support in any way.”

### The Future is So Bright, Younger Women Need to Wear Shades

Younger female industry professionals shared that their experiences working with other women have been overwhelmingly positive. IRWA Chapter 14 President and 2020 IRWA International Young Professional of the Year Jessica Brown, RWA, said, “I have been blessed to work with several women who were not only top-tier infrastructure professionals, but they also showed me how to carry myself with grace and kindness. They left an impression on me that lasted long after the projects we worked on together, and it is my career goal to be remembered in the same way.” Brown corroborates what I have heard from other young women. Perhaps negative female competition and animosity is generational and left in the past.

Denise Skinner, SR/WA, IRWA International Secretary, past Region 2 chair and Chapter 74 president, noted that coworkers’ backstabbing and sabotaging others is due to their own insecurities and fears. She provided valuable insight for facilitating female comradery. “If we can instill ourselves and other women with a level of self confidence in their and our abilities, then we would no longer see other women as ‘the competition’ but as part of the team.” Indeed, the need to strengthen right of way professional teams is critical as the industry moves forward. Quinn eloquently expressed her aspiration for our industry’s future. “I hope that we have broadened our definition of leadership to the extent that it always surpasses a gender identifier and is welcoming of many perspectives. I want the torch to pass to a new platform of discussion and more integration in our environments, so we spend time solving the complex problems of our global experience and move forward with sound solutions.” ★



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