



Robin Shotko

Married 24 years  
Mother of 3 daughters



March is Women's History Month; celebrating all women and their contributions to the world. Within this month of recognition is WIC Week – Women In Construction. Each year for a full week (Mar 6-12), is dedicated to recognizing the 1.1 Million women and the amazing work they do for our industry.

While we aim our spotlight on one of our own amazing team members, we also hope this feature will serve as a guiding source of inspiration for women anywhere and everywhere.

Helping to spread the message about career opportunities for women in construction is more than just possible, it's a must-have for our industry!

*Robin is an Executive Office Assistant who wears many hats at Thermal-Tec. She is head of administrative operations at our West MI headquarters. She handles HR, accounts payable/receivable, written safety compliance, customer service, company events... you name it. It's difficult to find an aspect of the business that she doesn't take part in. Robin is also assistant to company CEO, Linda Blanchard.*

Having just completed the business's best year on record (2021), the Thermal-Tec office has been a buzz. Inside the building, a copy machine hums non-stop with various admin staff making fast-paced rounds. The energy is high on this particularly busy Friday and with only a 20-minute window amongst the mayhem for our interview - we got right to it!

**How did you get started in the construction industry?**

*"I knew the former office manager at the time and I was looking to get back into the workforce after owning my own business."*

Before Robin worked at Thermal-Tec, she not only had experience running a business, but she also worked in the automotive industry and at an auto body shop.

She went on to explain how working at both, the body shop and auto dealer had provided fundamental work experience that helped her confidently navigate those male-dominated industries.

**Was there much of a learning curve once you made the transition into the construction industry?**

*"No. I had previously worked in the automotive industry - So it was more about taking the time to learn what we do and how we do it. If there was anything difficult to learn, I would find a way to figure it out. I would ask the crew managers or Linda. Probably the hardest thing for me was the transition from a larger corporate environment to working for a family-owned business."*

We chatted a bit more about the similarities and differences between the office environments of large corporations vs those of construction companies. It wasn't surprising to hear that one of the major differences was the way women can be treated. But there were other differences. Differences in perception seemed to play a part as well.

## Holding Your Own in a 90% male-dominated industry.

**"You may never be able to change the male-dominant attitude but you can change the respect level ..."**

**Why do you think there aren't more women seeking out jobs in the construction industry?**

*"I think there's a stereotype. A lot of it comes from TV. First of all, you don't see a lot of women doing it. And the ones you do see on TV are dressed-like and look like men... Maybe they(women) don't realize the type of office environment that exists in a construction job like this."*

The Thermal-Tec HQ office can be described as classic-conventional or time-honoring and traditional. From the moment you enter the office there is a sense of pride that mirrors the quality of work. Awards line the walls alongside pictures and plaques of past company philanthropic endeavors and families. It looks nothing like how a construction business office would be portrayed on TV. Robin reiterated how she suspects many women may not realize the actual office environment for a construction business is quite like any other office setting.

*"You can be a classy, educated women in this industry. But you need a thick skin... I would rather work with guys. I grew up with*



## Safety and Compliance is a Good Gig

*brothers. I don't get intimidated easily where a lot of women could feel intimidated in that environment."* Shotko said.

**What might women be intimidated by and how do you handle it?**

*"Things that men in the industry will say, how they'll look at you, even the comments they'll make... I truly do think that being in the construction world, you (women) could easily get intimidated, but It doesn't bother me. I don't get offended easily. I try to be more comfortable talking to anyone on their level."*

**What do you enjoy about your job?**

*"I love talking to our clients all over and knowing that our company is specialized to help solve their problems."*

She's referring to Thermal-Tec's specialized MR Multi-Ply Roofing Solution. The proprietary roofing solution serves as the industry standard for restoring and recovering metal roofs of critical manufacturing - facilities with incredibly high heat tolerances. It's a dangerous job that requires a multitude of safety measures for any company to comply with.

*"I've had to come up with different proposals for certain jobs to show our compliance and staying on top of new safety policies that are constantly evolving. I'm very proud we're part of Isnet and Avetta. I now feel comfortable writing and putting together our safety compliance for all of our jobs all over."*

Robin went on to describe the intricacies of job proposals and the document preparation that goes into establishing the company's safety record and compliance measures. All of this goes into the bidding/ proposal process to establish how Thermal-Tec and its installer crews are prepared for any situation.

**Only 9% of construction companies with an annual income over \$500K – identify as women owned.**

**What's it like working for one of those companies?**

*"First of all, I have the most respect for Linda." (Thermal-Tec co-owner, Linda Blanchard).*

*"Watching her work and handle herself in a male-dominant industry makes me respect and admire her even more."*

Robin went on to describe a recurring situation that plays-out at the office where someone (a man), will call asking to speak to the owner. Thermal-Tec is co-owned by a brother and sister. Often there will be push back from callers who only wish to speak directly to male ownership.

*"I've seen men discredit Linda just because she's a woman, but watching her be very strong, and instead of becoming angry she handles herself with grace and responds by showing her knowledge of the subject."*

*She's a very strong, independent women and that makes us a strong company. I've learned because we are women, we have to know more about what we're talking about than a man would have to – because men in this industry do not listen to women. I've seen it."*

### Shotko's words to women in ANY industry

*"Anything is possible – If you work hard at any profession you can succeed. Believe in yourself. Stand up for yourself. You may not be able to ever change the male-dominant attitude but you can change the respect level by knowing what you're talking about and listening to the needs of the client. That is something I feel as a woman that might help ... we listen a little more."*

## Raising the Roof For Women in Construction

After concluding our interview, there were two recurring themes that jumped out at this writer.

*Standing Up for Yourself*

*Taking Initiative.*

We'll find these themes echoed over and over when reading the stories of women in the construction industry. And many of those stories elude to a positive mentor figure guiding the way – or the influence of family. Robin's story has both.

## Daughters of Construction People

At the time of typing this article, it's worthy of note that Robin's youngest daughter, Abbey(pictured), recently joined Thermal-Tec, part-time, while pursuing her degree. This is noteworthy because it continues the narrative illustrated by Thermal-Tec CEO, Linda Blanchard, in last year's interview for WIC week 2021.

When asked how women end up in the construction industry, Blanchard responded:

*"Many of us are daughters of construction people."*