

Lowering the Ladder to Learn and Grow

Welcome to the Lowering the Ladder Series - a selection of interviews designed to inspire, empower, and encourage each other in the health and safety profession. Those times when we lower the ladder to help someone up, or are encouraged to climb the ladder ourselves, can be turning points in our lives, supporting us as individuals, and the profession as a whole.



Name: Marcia Bueno

Position: Managing Director, MB2 Consultants

Tell us a bit about your current role

I am now the Managing Director of MB2 Consultants. Previous to this, I was the GM HSW for Sanford Ltd, in charge of developing and coaching Sanford's ELT in the execution of the HSW Strategy, identification and minimisation of risks, and management of compliance issues, management of resources and alignment of leadership behaviours, processes, systems and assets to Sanford's overall vision and strategy.

What got you started in Health and Safety?

I am a Chemical Engineer and started as an intern at an industrial paint processing site and later hired as a Process Engineer.

I was very lucky to have had the opportunity to start my career in a company where health, safety and environment-related issues had to be part of all roles; this was business as usual. All meetings started with a Health, Safety or Environment topic, related to a specific job to be executed, or a learning to be shared.

As a Process Engineer in charge of a team in a Pilot Plant formulating and processing powder coating, I was responsible for the health and safety of my team, as well as for complying with all health, safety and environmental regulations which has always been part of my job. Overtime, it became something I wanted to learn more about and eventually I added more skills/competencies. During this time, I completed a post-graduate course in Safety Engineering at my own expense. This was the starting point of my career move into the Health, Safety and Environmental space, and brought me to where I am now.

Who has helped you get where you are and how?

Looking back at my career, I guess I had a lot of help even from those who, at that time, didn't seem to be helping. I can say everyone helped one way or another, even when it was in a direction not aligned with my expectations, as it opened other different and always better doors, for more learning and improvement.

Among all of those, I guess I have always had very supportive leadership that helped me through the exposure to big challenges. Particularly in the health and safety space, in my first HSE job, I had the best mentor ever - the company's HSE Global Manager. I have a lot of respect and gratitude for all her support and coaching during tough times, including union/government negotiations, exposure to media, presentations to executive team, and developing auditing skills.

In the technical side, I was starting my career journey in the Health Safety and Environmental space, at a time where much was known and regulated in the safety and environmental space, but very little in industrial hygiene. From coaching on exposure assessments, best practice in industry, and supporting me in challenging management practices, she was my inspiration and evidence of success, as a woman in a leadership position.

Were there any pivotal moments in your career, that were difficult at the time, but you look back on and understand the value of the experience? What did you learn and how has that helped you?

One moment I remember was when I had just started an internship in the quality control laboratory in a food processing company with a desire to be a process engineer.

In a conversation with my manager at the time I was told that as a woman, the maximum I could aim at was to work in the lab and perhaps achieve a Lab Manager position, but never work in the operations side. This triggered me to think about what I expected for my career and develop a plan towards my goal, never giving up. I left the job and eventually found a much better one in a paint manufacturing company, where I had many opportunities, and finally got a job as a Process Engineer.

Of course, I still had to challenge barriers relating to gender in male-dominated leadership teams, but I also learned to use skills I had but wasn't aware of, such as influencing, negotiating, and obtaining support for continuously improving work, alongside the operations team, having them as allies to get things done.

Integrity is one of my strongest values and often we are challenged on this. I am very glad that I have always had strength (and courage) not to deviate from the right path in such situations. I learned that being true to my beliefs has always helped in earning trust and respect.

How do you encourage others to learn and grow?

Just be curious and know that you will never know everything as things change all the time, and most of all, know who knows the subjects better than you, especially those you are not very good at.

Don't shy away from sponsoring yourself regarding development; don't rely on any company to be your growth sponsor. Own it, it will always pay off. No one can take your learnings and experience from you; it is an asset you take for life.

Share one thing with us that you have learned in your career

As health and safety professionals, we tend to 'scare' people with technicalities; we are very proud of our knowledge and often expect everyone to understand what we are saying. I have been there, so my biggest learning is: if you want people to understand what you're saying and be interested in what you bring to the table, learn the business language, and learn about other work areas with the same interests as you.

When did you last lower the ladder?

If you have an inspirational story to share, the WISE NZ Group would love to hear from you. Please get in touch via LinkedIn.