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Three women, one passion...engineering

Over the past decades, the number of women who choose engineering as a career has increased considerably. Despite this fact, in 2011, women engineers still find themselves engulfed in a world mostly made up of men. How do they deal with that?

Three young engineering graduates with very different backgrounds have answered "Very well!"

Valérie Tremblay has been a civil engineer for merely a year. She holds a Masters Degree in water treatment and is a project leader in waste and drinking water treatment plants at SNC-Lavalin. Her position requires her to travel across the province thus exposing her to work places dominated almost exclusively by men. "I have never had the impression of being judged unfavourably because I am a woman. Yes, I've had to learn to carve a place for myself but that's only because I'm young. You have to be true to yourself and have confidence your capabilities. My colleagues soon recognized my competence", she confides.

Also entered on the Ordre's Roll in 2010, production engineer Gisèle Tong has worked for Suncor for five years. Specialized in chemical engineering, she oversees the ongoing operations of a refinery, a field made up by a majority of men. "I am not faced with any problem related to the fact that I am a woman and I sincerely believe that women should not let their sex stop them. One's sex is not a gauge of one's competence.

In university, Gisèle and Valérie attended classes where the proportion of men and women was more balanced than it is in the work place.

For her part, Chantale Simard was surprised when she entered cégep: "I knew that men were more interested in computer science than women but not to that extent. In my class, we were only two women out of 30 students! I find it a shame that women aren't more interested in information technology. It's a promising field which draws upon logic, a science in which we as women often perform well."

All three laugh and agree that if, at times, their sex creates differential treatment; it is sometimes a pleasant one. "People offer to carry my tool box...", notes Gisèle Tong.

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK OF INTERNSHIPS?

Chantale Simard does not yet hold the engineer's title. Having graduated in software engineering this past December, she is a programmer analyst for Bell Canada, a job she really enjoys.

Will she do her internship? "I've thought about it for a long time and I've decided to register for it. I chose engineering because I like project management, something I would not have learned by getting a Bachelor's degree in computer science. An internship will give me credibility and open doors for me. I also believe I will learn a great deal."

Gisèle Tong remembers her internship as a learning opportunity and a period she found to be very rewarding. "Before

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starting my internship, I wondered what it was for. I quickly learned that upon finishing our studies, we find ourselves on a beach, so to speak: we see the water but we don't know if it's hot or cold. An internship allows you to get your feet wet: I learned how to work and to understand the dynamics of work relationships. It also gave me the chance to apply what I had learned and tackle real problems under the guidance of a seasoned engineer."

Valérie Tremblay also has fond memories of her internship. "People had confidence in me right from the start. I had an excellent relationship with my supervisor, who happened to be my director as well. For me, this was an important and useful period during which I was able to take stock of my skills. I would say that it is an essential step. However, the junior engineer and the supervisor must invest the required time and energy for this collaboration to be fully productive."

A TITLE THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES

Valérie, Chantale and Gisèle, 28, 25 and 27 years of age respectively, have been working at their current jobs since the end of their studies or internship. Has obtaining the engineer's title brought the two women who are members of the Ordre something extra... a certain added value?

Gisèle Tong answers without hesitation: "I feel more complete with the title of engineer. I can sign and seal my plans. In short, I'm more independent."

Valérie Tremblay agrees: "Because of the title, I can carry out my projects autonomously and assume my professional responsibilities. I no longer need other engineers to review my work. This also makes a difference with new clients. First, they see how young I am but when they learn that I'm an engineer, I gain their confidence right away. The title speaks for me."

Such words are sure to encourage Chantale Simard and other women who aspire to reach the title!