

Amanda's story

When Amanda Ratucoko joined the army in 1992, the thought of it being male dominated was not the first thing on her mind. The varied sporting and physical activities appealed to her, as did the opportunity of travelling the world.



At 21-years-old, she joined the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers section of her Regiment.

She estimates that some 95% of her peers were male – and being one of only a handful of women, she experienced gender stereotyping in the workplace firsthand. Indeed, her overarching memory was of having to work harder than her male colleagues.

“It felt like women in the military had to work at 120% the rate of men,” she said.

“As there were so few of us, when women made errors, it was easily noticed. It wasn't the same for men.

“In order to progress through the ranks, compared to male colleagues, I felt like I had to work that much harder.”

When on a trade training course, Amanda recalls an incident where she and her fellow female trainees were berated by a male soldier:

“Another [male] soldier shouted from his window, ‘You! Soldier! Stop!’, and we stopped, but he shouted back, ‘Not you, you're girls!’ That type of attitude was commonplace. It was very ‘primary school playground’ orientated.”

Whilst on a physical training instructor's course, Amanda found herself on the receiving end of physical aggression:

“A male peer on the course launched a basketball towards my face from a couple of feet of me. I thought it had broken my nose at first and he said ‘you don’t deserve to be here because you’re a girl.’”

Amanda also remembers the connotations associated with a woman befriending a male commanding officer:

“It was easier for men to strike up a friendship with a male superior, but when a woman developed a positive relationship with a commanding officer that happened to be male, there was a lot of sexual innuendo. It was so stereotypical.”

In spite of the difficulties she continually faced through male dominance and negative stereotyping, Amanda’s self-determination saw her through a career that lasted 23 years, rising through the ranks to Warrant Officer Class 2. Amanda left in 2015 to have her third child, feeling that, at the time, and in such a male-dominated workplace, there wasn’t much empathy with, or understanding of, maternity issues. Her priorities had changed and it was an opportunity for her army career to come to a natural end.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Amanda now lives in Bridgend with her three young daughters. After more than two decades in a male-dominated environment, she has swapped it for the construction industry which is equally male-dominated. Working as a course instructor for a national accrediting body, Amanda now delivers training and assesses would-be instructors.

“I do still sometimes have strange looks, turning up on a construction site as a woman to assess people – but it’s definitely improving. When I’m delivering courses, it’s not unusual to see that some men are surprised that it’s a woman at the front of the room, but I’ve found that if you know your subject matter as a trainer, they really appreciate it.”

Thinking of people facing gender stereotyping in the workplace, in their community or at home, Amanda’s advice is clear.

“I saw plenty of women through my career who were effectively ‘brow-beaten’. A lot of them left, but with grit and determination, there’s no reason why you can’t do something, irrespective of gender. I say to my children, ‘if you fall down, you get back up and you try harder.’”

“Campaigns like #thisisme are so important, especially for our children. They shouldn’t be told they can’t do something because of their gender. Instead, they should be encouraged to set their hearts on whatever it is they want to do and, with determination and support, they’ll get there.”