

Women in Green Breakfast: Me Too

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— by Sofia
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On the heels of the recent Women in Green breakfast, I have been thinking a lot about how fortunate I am to have intersected with this political moment at this stage in my life. On May 22nd, a room full of people (women and men) gathered to talk about the *Me Too* movement, to listen to established leaders in a variety of fields discuss their personal experiences and what comes next.



Left to Right: Melissa Gutierrez-Sullivan (Flourish Consulting), Heidi Creighton (Associate, BuroHappold), Betsy Butler (Executive Director, California Women's Law Center), Brenda Radmacher (Partner, Gordan & Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP), Pricilla Chavez (Manager, Diversity and Inclusion at PCL Construction), and Annie Argento, Argento/Graham

This breakfast event featured incredible women in positions of power, and as always, their narratives included a roadmap for how to survive as leaders in male-dominated industries. The lens used the *Me Too* conversation, but the common thread that resonated was: women at the top have scrambled, endured, and have overcome.

Betsy Butler's former role in the California State Assembly, representing the 53rd Assembly District, marks a career dedicated to veterans, working families, the environment, and consumer rights. The California Women's Law Center (where she is currently the Executive Director) focuses on the civil rights of women and girls. Her stories of "playing dumb" to deflect outright harassment in the workplace earlier in her career were not completely

foreign to most of the women in the audience. There are comments we are taught to ignore, or let roll off our backs, even still today, in the interest of “picking battles” and “playing the long game.” As the discussion has changed, and people in power have begun to fall, Ms. Butler described her new willingness to discuss these harassments and harassers.

Pricilla Chavez’s experience in construction, and current impact in moving her firm, was particularly moving. Her first-hand stories of showing male counterparts and coworkers the impact that gender has in their field were hopeful in a grassroots way (changing one mind at a time is inspiring and impactful), but the numbers she brought were staggering. Women comprise fewer than 5% of construction jobs, and 31% of those women report they experience harassment **DAILY**. In 2018.

Some of these issues touched closer to home than others. Early in my career (and in the jobs I had before embarking on my career in sustainability), I navigated situations like those discussed. I too had played dumb in situations where it meant I could ignore light harassment. I brushed off – and lamented later – the bad behavior of customers in service-facing jobs because there was no better recourse offered...what they had said wasn’t “*that bad*”. Thankfully, these choices started to feel far away in my current role and as time has passed, letting those moments slide was starting to feel like an error of youth rather than a reflection of the climate of that time.

But those choices were a matter of self-preservation, and their roots are alive and well (or, sickly, but hanging in there). *Me Too* has remained in the spotlight not because it features the famous and beautiful, but because it is rampant in all corners. The sustainability movement, as feel-good, hippie-huggie as we are often portrayed, is not free from the damaging influence of toxic masculinity, or the societal norms built around it. As gender diversity increases in predominantly male spaces, we need to reckon with and reform this culture that is deeply ingrained and damaging. We already know the value that diversity brings to a team. We in the green building industry are tackling existential issues; the future of clean air and clean water, and the future of dense, accessible cities that make best use of our precious natural resources. Toxic work environments hurt women daily and hurt all of us collectively as potential is wasted and our work is delayed.

There is so much work to do, but, the idea of generational privilege has been stuck in my mind. These battles are not new. They have been fought for generations by women, women of color and women without power or influence; fought by women who did not live to see the change they sought. But also by women who are finally in positions of power (and still rising through the ranks). They have given so much for *Me Too* to come to the forefront. Only through their numbers is this a movement with so much traction, and with immediate action items. And these battles will be carried on by those of us in the early stages of our careers, on the shoulders of those before us, so we can lift up the next generation. I am grateful I did not have to wait until I was 40, or 50, or 80 to see men in positions of power

start to feel the repercussions of their actions. I'm glad I can see a more just landscape from here, even if we're not there yet. We have huge issues to tackle, and equity in the workplace is a crucial piece in ensuring women are safe and able to keep getting the job done.

Thank you to Annie Argento and Melissa Gutierrez-Sullivan for providing this valuable platform. Keep an eye on the Women in Green Breakfast Series. I hope to see you all at the next one!