

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: Agnès Khyn

Position: Health Safety Security Environment Advisor,
Stantec NZ

Tell us a bit about your current role

I am a Health Safety Security Environment Advisor for an engineering company, where I get to support all our NZ locations, at all levels, to implement one of our company's core values: *We put people first*. It is a worldwide organisation, and we are challenged everyday to adapt concepts and tools to our region, while keeping the focus on what is important.

I focus on the 'conversations' part of the role: engaging where possible to the 'why' and what we want to achieve when I am approached about the 'how to'. In these discussions, the 'how to make it safe' gets solved by the expert in the task, and the 'how to record it' gets simplified.

In my role I get to be involved with the NZ leadership team and I support our key HSE contacts throughout all our locations in the country. I am also lucky to be working on internal company wide HSSE projects.

What got you started in Health and Safety?

When I was a teenager, I was asked to choose what to study to do the job I wanted to do for the rest of my life (pretty normal in France). Well, at 15 years old, you don't know! I knew I wanted to do something different every day, help people, and not sit at a desk all day. I decided I wanted to be a firefighter. After discussions with my parents, we agreed I would do the minimum studies in this field. I found that Health Safety and Environment studies could help getting into the fire brigade later.

My parents did well; the two years at university opened my mind and I realised that before extinguishing a fire, there was so much more that could be done to prevent the fire from happening. I started shortly after as a HSE Coordinator and since then, I have been learning more and more in ever organisation and role I have held!

I was also always the annoying child in my family: I would always ask "What if...?" and wanted to plan things well. So, I guess the HSE field was just there waiting for me!

Who has helped you get where you are and how?

My first role in HSE was through an internship programme. My boss showed me all the ropes and explained to me all the systems in an automotive manufacturing business. She quickly fell ill and did not come back to work. I was pushed by wanting to fill in for her, doing my best to keep everything going while she was away. She checked in on me regularly and gave me more tips to progress. It was extremely challenging as I was only 20 at the time, but it got me into the industry really early.

So many more people have made a difference for me and got me where I am. My roles in NZ have been supported by other international HSE professionals giving me a chance when hiring me for their team, looking for a fresh perspective and an international background.

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 I can really look back on was when I decided to not work in France anymore. I ended up on short term contracts in Finland, on the construction site of a nuclear powerplant. This was hard for so many reasons - six different languages in one business, the size of the work to be done, the size of the site itself, the weather conditions, and I was a young female.

I observed an unsafe situation while our teams worked on the façade of the building. I was scared that something could go wrong. I stopped the work – I could not explain further due to language barrier - and went for a chat with the manager. I knew exactly how the task could have been done in a safer way, so I shared it with them. Unfortunately, the manager did not appreciate it and let me know to mind my own business, and that they know what they are doing; it was normal practice.

After a little while, and a big breath, the manager came back to me and drew on the white board a solution for the situation. We agreed it was the best way to do it, and we went to check in on the team to ensure it could be implemented.

Yes, the solution they drew and explained to me was exactly the one I was telling them about.

My lessons learned and points to remember:

- Listen to your gut feel. If it's not right, even if you can't speak the same language, stop the work.
- Even if you know the solution, don't say it until you really need to. Make them find the solution by asking questions.
- Even when scared or seriously concerned, approach your stakeholder gently and from the caring perspective. The way you communicate is more impactful than the message itself.

This was early in my career and an example I often use to explain my journey.

How do you encourage others to learn and grow?

I would advise to take the time to observe and ask questions, to not assume anything, and to embrace being challenged!

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

There is so much I have learned! But if I need to pick one... Be PROUD!

Be proud of who you are, what you know, your purpose and what you can bring to others; whether it is at work, at home or in the community.

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.