



Adbri & BlueScope: Initiatives to attract female talent into operations



INTRODUCTION

What is the very first hurdle many companies encounter when looking to increase gender diversity in their workforce? Recruitment.

The barriers that prevent women from being attracted to specific roles, feeling like they have an opportunity to apply for a role, and even stepping through the front door, are often subtle and overlooked. Yet they have a measurable impact on gender diversity within a workplace. The changes that need to happen to remove these barriers are attitudinal as much as they are practical.

This article will follow the experiences of BlueScope and Adbri. We identify the initiatives and mindset shifts that have helped both companies make increases in female representation in their workforces.



As pointed out by Adbri's National Manager, Logistics, Edwin Ng, there is no silver bullet when it comes to lifting gender diversity within an organisation. Success is found in the intersection of numerous approaches that together create a holistic environment where barriers to greater female participation are removed. And the very first question to be answered is often "How do we attract more female applicants?" These two NAWO members have been committed to finding answers.

BlueScope began its journey into workforce diversification in operator/trade roles over seven years ago. Now, a number of years down the track, they are starting to see changes and it started with recruitment.

BlueScope realised that it was these operations-based roles that provided the greatest challenge. They could see that attracting women into non-traditional roles wasn't going to be a quick and easy fix or something that a simple female-focused recruitment campaign would solve. It went deeper than that. However, they needed to start somewhere, and looking at their recruitment practices was one of their primary areas of focus.

An initial examination revealed that position requirements needed revisiting and recruitment practices and messaging needed to align with intended audiences, highlighting the journey BlueScope was on. Initially, the recruitment team began to make the following changes:

- **UPDATING AD IMAGES** Using new images that conveyed the future vision of their workplace.
- **REMOVING MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS** Part of identifying and removing barriers to employment was the removal of mandatory applicant requirements (such as forklifts and crane licenses) and instead a shift to realising they could train the right people on the job and that these kinds of mandatory inclusions were gender limiting.
- **CASTING THE NET WIDER** Traditionally it was held that you needed to have a manufacturing background to come into manufacturing and they began questioning that and consciously exploring sectors outside of manufacturing.
- **FOCUSING ON TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND THE RIGHT BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES** This shift in thinking about what made a suitable candidate was a key step in reaching a place of greater diversity today.

Recruitment was then redeveloped around a message of 'come and join us and we'll give you this training' as opposed to applicants needing to have specific requirements upfront. This was an introspective process and an eventual shift in the mindset around mandatory qualifications and manufacturing. And it worked.

The result? A sixfold increase in the representation of women in operator/trade roles which has now reached 18%.



Once BlueScope started to see the results of these initiatives the conversation came to the big topic of how to support new and existing female talent so that word of mouth would be a further recruitment tool within local communities.

“We feel proud to have workforces that are more representative of the communities we live in.”

● BLUESCOPE EMPLOYEE

The success of these recruitment initiatives flows naturally into the conversation around retention and the different aspects of a workplace that feed into that space. Stay tuned for our upcoming articles on Psychological Safety / Shift Patterns / etc.

ADBRI

Adbri's journey toward increased gender diversity began roughly two years ago when they stepped back and examined organisational data that gave them insights on the number of women in their workforce and how these figures compared to industry averages. Despite operating in a male-dominated industry, the data showed they were still below industry averages when it came to female representation in non-traditional female roles. This insight became an opportunity to look a little deeper at gender diversity.

For Adbri, there was a business case for increasing diversity, not just a social one. With the rise in staff turnover and staff shortages in most industries post COVID-19, it made sense to be casting the net wider in regard to who the company was attracting to their business.

The Adbri team began by looking at the number of female applicants for non-traditional blue collar roles. The low applicant levels gave them a clear starting point for discussing how they could create initiatives and campaigns to specifically target female applicants. Their first approach was to run gender-neutral recruitment campaigns. This shift involved:

- Removing any technical language that only within-industry applicants would understand, introducing images that showcased their more diverse teams and bolstering their diversity and inclusion statement in all adverts.
- In terms of placing advertisements, changes were made to reach a wider audience. This meant not just advertising in manufacturing or construction categories, but thinking about the focus of the role and where to find like-minded and skilled people. The decision to make a concerted effort to find places where Adbri could advertise to give them access to a broader pool of people paid off.
- Move from hiring based on relevant experience to hiring based on attributes and defining what this looked like for Adbri - like BlueScope, Adbri moved toward an attitude of 'if they've got the right attributes, we can train them'.



Further initiatives to increase not only gender diversity but diversity, in general, were important to Adbri. They also continued to:

- **HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH MANAGERS** About the role of new female applicants and the downstream changes that might need to happen to not just attract, but retain, female employees.
- **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES** via direct initiatives and in partnership with not-for-profit organisations nationally.

The Driver Academy Program targeted at career change-ready candidates, was based on the philosophy that with enough care and attention they could train any individual with the right safety mindset and alignment with their values. They began actively looking for candidates and worked hard to provide all the information a candidate needed to make an informed choice about working at Adbri as an Agitator truck driver. Any applicants that weren't quite right for the Driver roles, were kept in the pipeline and considered for other roles in the business.

The Driver Academy Program in Melbourne and Sydney resulted in 30% of new rigid truck driver hires being female. This is an incredible figure and well above the industry average.

Along with the tangible benefits that come from a more diverse workforce, there are definite non-tangible benefits:

- The sense of interest and engagement that occurs when everyone on the team brings something a little bit different to the table.
- Pride in being part of a company that has a workforce that is representative of the greater community.

The success of these recruitment initiatives flows naturally into the conversation around retention and the different aspects of a workplace that feed into that space.

For enquiries please contact:
Louise Weine
Chief Executive Officer
0423 120 786
lweine@nawo.org.au

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