

Woman's Place In Right-of-Way: Agent, Manager, and Beyond

by Lone Good

The idea of "woman's place" is traced back thousands of years. With few exceptions in history, biological and economic necessity has placed woman as keeper of the hearth fires and home, with man as warrior-hunter, pathfinder, and right-of-way agent! Twentieth century society has changed this; no longer are women relegated to home, limited education, and professional lockout, thus we find the woman right-of-way agent.

Women were first noted working as pathfinders in religions of ancient eastern nations. In ancient Greece, though only 5% of the population was free, of this group some women were given instruction and became advisors to kings, with equal status with the philosophers of the day. They served as Oracles and Priestesses, advising military leaders on campaign tactics and right-of-way routes!

But, with the fall of Rome, the woman's place was definitely not as a "pathfinder." In spite of Plato and a few other political theorists, not until the impetus of the French Revolution, did the idea that women might share and take part in the political and economic decision-making process take root. The next two hundred years brought, if slow to occur, remarkable changes.

The first Right of Way woman in the North American Hemisphere involved with "Pathfinding", "Right of Way" and "Utilities" was a pioneer woman of the west. Working in a cookhouse of a logging camp near Myrtle Point Oregon, she was sent by the Lumberman-operator of the camp, to obtain the right to cross over the adjacent landowners property for a short cut to the local telephone exchange office!

Today, the International Right of Way Association estimates that of

the approximately 10,500 members, about 10% are women. However, only 17 women have earned the Senior designation (SR/WA) as of publication of the April issue of RIGHT OF WAY.

In a drive to include women in the responsible position of right-of-way agent, utilities have led the way. In interviewing women within right-of-way it has been found that women are well-qualified to assume these responsibilities, having training in engineering, real estate, and law, or within the company served an apprenticeship in the company before becoming an agent. Barbara Jean Brown, first woman right-of-way agent for Pacific Gas and Electric assigned in 1979 to the department, credits her determination and additional outside educational studies as helpful in attaining her position.

Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company has about a dozen women right-of-way agents and several right-of-way managers in their organization. Job functions such as detailed title search and personal negotiation skills seem to fit women well. As expertise is gained, the trend of increased management responsibilities filled by women will increase.

In an informal survey of different utility groups the following demographics of women right-of-way agents were discovered. Twenty-seven women were surveyed.

Previous Company Experience in some other capacity prior to Right of Way Agent position 100%
Age - over 30 98%
10 years company service 98%
Marital Status - Single 70%

In summary, women utility right-of-way agents interviewed did not join their companies as a right-of-way agent, but worked their way into the position. The women interviewed acquired their initial training "on the job", supplemented by IRWA courses and in-house training programs. Mature and intelligent, who have the ability to relate well with others, we have added a new element to the profession. An element of out-going friendliness, yet a firm resolve to perform our job well, a resolve only possible because we are who we are--woman!

Lone Good, Right-of-Way Agent for Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, received her Bachelor's degree from the University of San Francisco in 1972 and a Juris Doctorate from Armstrong College of Law in Berkeley in 1976.

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