



AGAINST THE GRAIN

"I wanted to show my daughters you can do anything you put your mind to."

BY PAUL SCELSI

Starting your own roofing company is not easy. In fact, owning any business has significant challenges. But being a female owner in a male-dominated industry such as roofing adds more complexity to the goal. Sara Klindtworth needed to take several steps to make her dream a reality by launching Solid Roofing NW in Salem, Ore., earlier this year.

“There are several reasons I wanted to start my own roofing company,” Klindtworth said. “First, I wanted to show my two daughters that you can do anything you put your mind to even if it goes against the grain. You can follow your dreams and being a female doesn’t need to stand in your way. Use your skills and show the world that nothing can stop you.”

Klindtworth also wanted to leave a legacy for her family – a vibrant, family-oriented business that they could be involved in if they wanted to. It appears to be working, as her oldest daughter is planning to help out at the company over the summer once school’s out.

“I purposely designed my company logo to have four trees on it – one for each member of my family,” she said.

Finally, she said she saw the opportunity to help others and needed to act.

“My last reason for starting my business is I want the business to bless those around me. I want to be able to give back to the community and make a difference. Even a small one would make me really happy,” she said.



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From Secretary to Owner

Klindtworth's path toward ownership began in 2008 when she started working as a secretary for a roofing company. Ownership was very far from her radar.

"I worked my way up in the company and basically was running the business," she said. "I learned the ins and outs of operating and all the behind-the-scenes aspects."

Upon gaining more experience in the field, Klindtworth worked her way up the team ladder, taking on roles in project management, estimating, and then finally running the entire steep-slope division on both residential and commercial projects.

In 2016, Klindtworth started thinking about ownership as a goal.

"It became a dream of mine to own my very own company," she said. "Over the next several years, I had to overcome some personal and career-related hurdles and obstacles. I learned from those experiences, which made me a better business owner."

In mid-2022, she and her husband took a leap of faith and followed her dreams.

Continued education is important to Klindtworth, including a particular interest in the specifics of proper attic airflow. It hits close to home because her family lived in a home with mold that caused lifelong health issues for her daughter and husband.

She didn't expect attic ventilation would be an issue when they purchased a new home in 2018, but after a few years of coping with air conditioning that struggled to keep the house cool, she checked the attic. All the intake vents along the back of the house were blocked and her three-year-old roof was already showing signs of failing.

"I personally know the frustrations and problems that come with incorrect attic ventilation," she said. "I want my customers to get the full life out of their roof and not have to worry about any negative health issues or have a financial burden placed on them sooner than they expected or needed."

Klindtworth shares some guidance for anyone who also wants to be a business owner.

"As many before me know, starting a business, let alone a roofing company, is not an easy feat. There's a lot that goes into it," she says. "There's months of planning, forecasting, goal setting, budgeting, networking. But if it's a dream of yours, go for it. You don't want to get later into your life and regret not at least trying."

Another key she found is to surround yourself with supportive people who tell you how

it really is – however difficult it may be to hear sometimes.

“Learn from your mistakes, grow from those lessons learned, and continue to put one foot in front of the other,” she said.

ONE WOMAN’S TIPS TOWARD OWNERSHIP IN ROOFING

Sara Klindtworth offers these impactful tips on becoming a female business owner in a male-dominated roofing industry.

- **Respect one another.** “The first thing I learned along the way was to show respect to everyone you meet. In this industry in particular, our opinions and views may not always line up with others, but we can still show each other respect as a person.”
- **Keep your promises and commitments.** “A close second tip I recommend is following through with my commitments and promises with customers, employees and suppliers. I learned how to not overpromise on something I am not confident I can deliver on.”
- **Learn to work with difficult customers.** “I’m still working on this one. Trying to bring education and knowledge to someone who doesn’t want to listen, or to someone who has a hard time understanding a different perspective, is tough.”
- **Have perseverance.** “Anytime I was up against a challenge I would work extra hard to prove that, as a human, I was just as capable as anyone else in the industry. I was able to gain respect from those around me due to my perseverance to better myself both personally and professionally.”
- **Build and nurture relationships.** “The most important tip, in my opinion, is building and maintaining relationships and showing that respect to everyone you meet with the hope they in turn will show you the same respect.”

Finding Inspiration from Others

For women who are interested in becoming an owner in a male-dominated industry, Klindtworth advises that staying resilient, especially in the face of criticism and negative comments, is critical.

“Don’t let anyone tell you that you cannot do it because you are a female,” Klindtworth

said. “We are just as capable as anyone else out there.”

She suggests taking a similar approach to her own journey: Start by immersing yourself within the entire company from the ground up. This includes customer calls, roof and attic inspections, and learning how to explain every aspect of the roofing process from start to finish, like the various components involved in each and every project.

Continued education to deepen your knowledge base and buildings relationships with other contractors, suppliers, and vendors will also make a difference.

“This will help you become more knowledgeable and confident when interacting with customers and even your employees,” she said. “And, above all, approach every situation with honesty and integrity.”

Klindtworth credits the National Women in Roofing organization with helping her along the path to ownership in the roofing industry. She joined the Oregon Council of National Women in Roofing and attends monthly meetings where members share their victories, struggles and solutions together.

She was part of the record-setting National Women in Roofing Day event just before the 2023 International Roofing Expo in Dallas. Now in its sixth year, organizers drew more than 500 attendees representing all aspects of the roofing industry.

“It’s an amazing organization that helps support, mentor, and encourage women,” she said. “I was beyond blessed to be surrounded by so many like-minded individuals who just want to encourage and support each other.”

She said it’s also worth researching local opportunities for group support to learn and network with other women in the industry. This is especially helpful if Klindtworth finds herself in a tricky roofing situation or just wants to bounce some ideas off a fellow female in the industry.

“If there’s a time you don’t know how to handle a situation or you just want to ask someone, ‘Hey, have you ever encountered this?’ I just shoot off a text to someone from the group and we discuss it. It’s such a great resource to help along the way,” she said.

Another valuable resource Klindtworth taps into is the Harness & Heels Facebook group, founded by Kristina Hill, co-owner of HomeShield Roofing & Exteriors in Lincoln, Neb.

“It’s an amazing group. There’s people from owners to sales to vendors and manufac-

turers, insurance. All aspects of roofing are in this group,” she said. “It’s been so beneficial to be able to come to a space with no dumb question. There’s brand new people in the roofing industry in the group. There’s veterans in there. We can ask a question and not get talked down to.”



Klindtworth wanted to create a legacy for her family – a vibrant, family-oriented business that they could be involved in if they wanted to. Her oldest daughter, Allyson (far right) plans to help out at the company over the summer once school’s out. Also pictured with Klindtworth are daughter Lauryl, and husband, Jason.

Rising Above the Skeptics

Despite her success, Klindtworth said she still encounters skepticism or is blown off because she is a female. She counters this by educating and explaining entire roofing systems, which when paired with detailed proposals, have a tendency to earn someone’s respect.

“Business ownership is a great opportunity in any industry. It shouldn’t be such a surprise or out of the norm for a female to own a roofing company,” Klindtworth said. “People don’t think twice if a female owns a company in most other industries but in construction people have a tendency to question and wonder if they know what they are doing. We are trying to normalize women-owned construction companies and other male-dominated industries. Professional woman organizations are helping with this effort. So are programs that teach and encourage construction skills to male and female students.”

The good news, says Klindtworth, is that a lot of the roadblocks in front of women in male-dominated industries are being taken down.

“Equality is being built up and it’s exciting times,” she says. “Fifteen years ago when I started I could not have arrived at a job site meeting as the only woman and be given the time of day. But today, most people are encouraged by it.”

During a recent lunch stop, Klindtworth got out of her work truck and was approached by an elderly woman.

“She wanted to tell me how excited she was to see me and thanked me for breaking the mold in our industry. It totally made my day. So it seems for every hurdle I encounter there are ladies like this who encourage you and are encouraged by you,” Klindtworth said “If I can encourage just one female to follow their dream, it’s all worth it. It just takes that first step. Walk out in faith and start your journey.”

*About the author: Paul Scelsi is marketing communications manager at Air Vent Inc. and leader of its Attic Ventilation: Ask the Expert™ seminars (airvent.com). He hosts the podcast, “Airing it out with Air Vent,” and he’s the chairman of the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association Ventilation Task Force. He is the author of the book, *Grab and Hold Their Attention: Creating and Delivering Presentations that Move Your Audience to Action*.*