Supporting Women in “Non-Traditional” Jobs
In your groups, review the statements below and discuss the questions:

- *Non-traditional jobs pay 20 to 30 percent more than traditionally female jobs.*
- *Non-traditional jobs can give women greater satisfaction by expanding career opportunities.*
- *Non-traditional jobs tend to have established career ladders so women can work their way up to higher wages and better benefits.*
- *Non-traditional jobs offer better benefits than traditionally female jobs. Many are unionized.*

1. What are some of the barriers women face in gaining entry into non-traditional jobs?

2. How can we challenge some of these barriers?

3. What support can the union give in supporting women?
4 Myths That Keep Women Away from Non-Traditional Employment

http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/07/myths-women-non-traditional-employment/

Myth #1: Women don’t have the physical strength required to work in construction or other male-dominated blue collar work.

Physical strength is quite subjective, but the first thing that I hear from those who oppose having more women in construction and blue-collar work is that women are not capable of physically demanding jobs, as demonstrated in this comment that I received on an article that I wrote:

Physical strength is generally not a biological fact. We raise boys to learn that strength matters and that they need to be physically active and fit, while girls are encouraged to be dainty and frail. This isn’t always the case, as many girls do play sports and are involved in many active pastimes, but it’s a common misconception.

Strength is a social construct, not a biological fact.

Strength is important, and most men do have more lean muscle than women, but that alone won’t make a person capable of lifting heavy objects, or you know, using a hammer.

I’ll use an example of a traditionally male job: firefighters. Many states have separate requirements for how much weight an individual needs to be able to lift, which is generally an average weight for an adult, about 150-200 pounds. And when women are subjected to these tests, they fail at higher rates than men.

So, we can dismiss women as physically inferior, or we can help individuals learn how to carry heavy objects based on their body type. Lifting for men is easier when they use their upper body strength, which is where most women are lacking. This uses men’s strength to their best advantage.

But if you let women determine how best to carry large weights, you notice that they tailor the movement to their strengths, by putting most of the weight and load on their hips and then on to their shoulders. It’s a simple adjustment, but it helps us do the same jobs while being safe.
Myth #2: Construction sites are dirty and uncomfortable, and women don’t like that type of work.

I’m not quite sure why this is supposedly an issue that only pertain to women. I know many men who absolutely hate working outdoors in a dusty and hot job site, and I know women who love it.

This preconceived notion is based on the false idea that women are vain and only care about their looks.

If that were the case, women wouldn’t be nurses in such large numbers, dealing with sick patients and wearing scrubs all day. But they do! They also would never become mothers because there is absolutely nothing clean about having or raising children.

It’s an odd myth, but the idea that women don’t like to or shouldn’t get dirty is rooted in women being taught that they must visually please men.

And while there is nothing wrong with genuinely disliking working outdoors in the heat, dust, or snow, it’s simply untrue that this is accurate for an entire gender, and moreover, not another.

In the end, if the job gets done, that’s what truly matters. How we look while doing so becomes pointless when we realize that physical labor is sweaty and hot, and it doesn’t discriminate based on gender.

Myth #3: Women will want special treatment if they work in non-traditional jobs.

Many women in non-traditional employment complain that they are not provided with female bathrooms, personal protective equipment that fits properly, and must perform their work in hostile and intimidating environments.

Perhaps some might call this “special” treatment, but no one should have to feel that their workplace is unsafe and unwelcoming.

Discriminatory behavior has consequences, as in the case of a contractor that did not have restrooms for their female employees, forcing them to relieve themselves outdoors. The female employees of this company were also sexually harassed, intimidated, and pressured to go on dates with male employees.

The victims sued and were monetarily compensated, but what does that say about the culture women endure in jobsites? Treating female employees the same way you
treat male employees is not special treatment. In fact, it seems that some go out of their way to treat women differently, though not rightfully.

Female employees also complain of ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), which is a hazard for women on jobsites that can be easily fixed.

Ill-fitting reflective vests can be uncomfortable at best or deadly at worst. Vests that are too large and baggy can get caught in machinery with moving parts exposing the worker to injury. For women who work near train tracks, baggy vests can be a deadly hazard if it gets caught on moving train parts or electrical equipment.

Providing protective equipment that fits all body types is a necessity, and it benefits everyone on a jobsite.

Being treated like a human being with needs that might differ from male needs is not special treatment. It’s cooperative, and it’s the law.

Myth #4: Women don’t contribute anything different to the job site.

Except that they do.

I have written about the importance of a diverse workplace before and how it truly does create a better working experience for all, particularly those in need of a relatable mentor.

And this is categorically true across all industries and careers.

Women always find that they must defend their place in society and the workplace.

Somehow everything that we want to do is already taken up by the male half of the species, and this is sold as “just the way things are” as opposed to years of discriminatory policies and rampant sexism.

The problem here is that I really want to explain how it is that women can contribute to blue-collar work, but what I say won’t matter if we assume that women are physically and intellectually inferior in the first place.

Yet the truth is that it’s not just about what women can contribute to a job site, but what we can get from such a job.
Some of us like fast-paced and ever-changing tasks that allow us to multitask and be active, and if we are not treated with dignity and respect while performing these tasks, we have every right to voice that.

In the midst of all the sexist and sometimes racist remarks that women must put up with just to perform their job, it isn’t surprising that so many of us want to give up or look at other career options.