

Workshop on “Challenges of Women Engineers in the Industries”

WOMEN ENGINEERS SUB-COMMITTEE



by Ir. Sharifah Azlina binti Raja Kamal Pasmah

THERE is more happiness in sharing than in keeping, and this was certainly the spirit when a workshop on “Challenges of Women Engineers in the Industries” was held at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Chemical and Bio-engineering Technology (UniKL MICET), Alor Gajah, Melaka. The workshop, jointly organised by the Women Engineers Sub-committee, IEM, and the Section of Chemical Engineering Technology (SCET), UniKL MICET, saw a total of three lady engineers’ speakers from the industry. A total of 80 students and 10 lecturers attended the event.

The chemical engineering students – *all ladies* – and presenters from IEM, were both enthusiastic to impart upon each other the shared knowledge, experience, joy and anxiety of becoming and being an engineer in the industry. UniKL MICET, is located on a sprawling campus at Taboh Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka, which is a good one-hour’s drive from Kuala Lumpur.

After a welcoming address by Assoc. Prof. Dr Ahmad Marzio Mohd. Yusof, Deputy Dean of UniKL MICET, Ir. Sharifah Azlina Raja Kamal, a highway and transportation engineer, briefly took the audience through the organisational structure of The Institution of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) and the stance of the Women Engineers Sub-committee. Due to the concern on the decline in the number of women engineers who remained in the profession, which was then less than 12% of the total registered engineers in the nation, this sub-committee was formed with the objective to encourage aspiring female engineering students to practice and remain in the engineering profession throughout their career life.

Next, Ir. Raftah Mahfar, a geotechnical engineer, deliberated on the numerous activities held by this sub-committee since its formation and, in particular, during the recent years in promoting the enthusiasm and inspiration to be a successful lady engineer. This includes giving talks at universities as well as secondary schools to motivate female students to pursue a career in engineering and be part of the nation-building team.

The presenters, at the request of one of the students, also briefly explained the requirements of becoming a professional engineer after graduating. Another key interest amongst the attendees was the challenges faced in striking a balance on both the career and family fronts. Ir. Sharifah Azlina said, “We do not strike a balance. We

attend to both according to their needs and priority given to each. Ir. Raftah added, “And we multi-task, women are natural multi-taskers, and this is how we get a lot if not all things done.”

Ir. Yee Sew Ping, a professional engineer with a chemical engineering background, continued to give an enlightening talk on her early days as a process engineer and her valuable experience since she moved to become a consulting engineer. She touched on the subject of the contribution by a chemical engineer in areas such as oil and gas industries, wastewater and environment, and manufacturing; accentuating the immense demand for chemical engineers in the near future both locally and globally.

This served as a reminder for the tremendous need for chemical engineers to help the country becoming a developed nation. To the concern whether chemical engineering is ‘safe’ especially among women, Ir. Yee emphasised that given the strict regiment of QA or QC and comprehensive procedures which are the norm in a manufacturing environment, “Changing a bulb yourself at home carries more risks than carrying out a similar task in a controlled manufacturing environment”, much to the surprise of the audience.

Keen interest among the students was demonstrated during the Q&A session such as the grave concern if they have made the right choice of career and how to juggle life in this ever-demanding profession. Assurance was given by the presenters that, although it is challenging, it is also one of the more rewarding careers.

Also to the gratitude of IEM, Ir. Dr Chan Tuck Leong, who is the spouse of Ir. Yee, gave an ad-hoc presentation on chemical engineering and the roles of a chemical engineer. Ir. Dr Chan, who practices in an oil and gas organisation, shared the experience of his career path upon graduating and the various opportunities available in related industries. The slides illustrated the options available to the aspiring chemical engineering students. Being the only ‘thorn’ among the ‘roses’, Ir. Dr Chan affirmed his support for the ladies to pursue engineering as a profession.

After the lunch provided by UniKL MICET, the workshop proceeded with the afternoon session of group work. Each group, consisting of 10 students, was given a topic for deliberation. Their task was to analyse and

explore the subject matter under the supervision of a lecturer in each group. Presentations were made on the findings at the end of the session, and the most creative group walked away with a hamper for their outstanding effort.

The workshop ended with its intended objective achieved. Awareness was raised among the students on the requirements of the engineering profession and challenges that come along with the career. The workshop has also promoted empowerment among the female students to contribute to the development of the nation. As for the female presenters, each left the workshop affirming their commitment to remain steadfast in the profession. ■



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