

MONTH 4

STRATEGIES

CARDS 1-7

LEAN IN



Relieve stress in the moment

Some days the hurdles and slights may feel relentless—find small ways to cope and take care of yourself while still getting your job done.

Relieve stress in the moment

This may be different for everyone but may include reminding yourself to relax, breathing rhythmically to a specific count, and choosing not to obsess about what happened.¹ Consider creating a personal mantra that allows you to get back to work and focus on the task at hand, such as saying to yourself, “I can do hard things” or “I have earned the right to be here.” After you’re out of the situation, take time to recognize and process the feelings you have around your experience.

“Honestly? I chew a lot of gum. It helps relieve the stress.”

Sara, 34, a sheet-metal worker with 8 years’ experience

“I have definitely spent time crying in a porta potty over things said to me. I’d hide for a minute and compose myself. It didn’t solve the problem, but it did help me feel slightly better in the moment.”

Ashley, 29, an insulation worker with 4 years’ experience



Ask for what you want

Use specific requests to ask for what you want and need on the job.

Ask for what you want

Staying silent is likely to cause frustration and resentment, so even if it feels difficult, it's important to speak up and ask directly for the things you want or need.

Think about what you want and why you need or deserve it. Be specific about what you're trying to achieve: do you want to eventually have a leadership role or do you want to learn new skills for a new job in the future?² Specific asks can help you be more successful at getting what you want, because they let the other person know exactly what you need.³ Try writing your thoughts down on paper to help clarify what you want to communicate. Practice saying it out loud to yourself or role-play your request with someone you trust.

"I straight up use my words to ask for help or information. It doesn't have to be hard. Deep breath, say stuff."

Sara, 34, a sheet-metal worker with 8 years' experience

"I feel that it doesn't hurt to ask, you just need to have the courage to ask and the confidence in your abilities to learn something new. I have learned most of my skills by asking for new assignments."

Renee, 46, an operating engineer/building inspector with 6 years' experience



Use a snappy comeback

Use a funny or sarcastic retort to defuse the situation and signal you will stand up for yourself.

Use a snappy comeback

Being funny or sarcastic might be easier for you than being serious, especially if you are trying to defuse a tense situation or make a key point in a playful way.⁴ Humor can also increase group cohesiveness, communication, creativity, and leadership.⁵ Many women find it helpful to share a few one-liners. Consider practicing with your Circle or with someone you trust to get comfortable responding quickly.

“You need a smart mouth as well as thick skin, because it’s like reverting to grade school playground antics. If you don’t snap back or nip it in the bud, they’ll needle you until you break.”

Cristina, 47, a plumber with 19 years’ experience

“Humor is the best way to deal with things I think. On my crew people are constantly slagging each other. You have to have tough skin, and you have to be quick, or you will be eaten alive.”

Angela, 33, a concrete worker with 14 years’ experience



Escalate the situation

Bring situations that threaten your safety or job performance to your jobsite safety officer or your union steward.

Escalate the situation

While every person's comfort level differs, you may be faced with some situations that clearly cross a line. In these cases, it may be time to reach out to someone you trust in a position of authority who has experience dealing with tough issues, such as a jobsite safety officer, general foreman, or union steward. Keeping a written record of the issue, including when the incident or incidents occurred and whether you have already discussed them with your supervisor, will help you feel prepared for these conversations and allow the union to take further action if necessary.

"I had a situation that warranted a lane closure and bucket truck. The supervisor insisted we work around it, but I put my foot down as the senior tech on site. I contacted my steward and had him explain to the supervisor that the scenario was unsafe. It was a Saturday morning, and the supervisor ended up making a site visit. The director praised us for our commitment to workplace safety."

Kim, 41, a communications specialist with 20 years' experience

"If nothing gets done, I go to the steward and repeat. If neither my supervisor or steward do anything, I call the business agent and OSHA."

Ann, 47, electrician with 10 years' experience



Plan for a difficult conversation

Take time to prepare for difficult conversations by reflecting on the communication style of the individual and the problem you want to address.

Plan for a difficult conversation

When you are approaching a conversation you feel will be difficult, take some time to prepare. This research-based process can help you be most effective. Start by thinking about the person you're talking to and their style of dealing with conflict: How do they prefer to be communicated with? If there's time, consider getting input from others who may also have had challenging conversations with this person. Next, define the actual problem. Is it a communication issue? A fairness issue? Finally, determine your goal. Ultimately, what do you want to happen?⁶

You can also be purposeful about when and where you have the conversation. You may find that your foreman or crew member or union representative is reluctant to have tough conversations in front of other crew members. If you can, make a request or start a conversation at a time when you know the foreman is feeling positive about you or your crew's work.⁷



Create good working relationships with your crew

Look for fellow crew members who can serve as allies, and build positive working relationships with them.

Create good working relationships with your crew

Your fellow crew members can help others see your perspective and make the case for you to be given new opportunities. If you're having trouble figuring out who is likely to be an ally, a few behaviors can serve as signs. You can look for men who listen to you and don't assume what you want for your next assignment, who speak respectfully to everyone, include you in conversation, and seem willing to help.⁸ You can also try finding something to discuss other than the task at hand: discovering that you have the same interests or a shared favorite sports team or hobby might make it easier for another tradesperson to see you as a peer instead of an outsider.

"Although I don't normally socialize with many of my coworkers, I do try to take an interest in their pastimes/families. It helps me understand their processing, priorities, and it helps with a form of camaraderie."

Amanda, 31, an electrician with 4 years' experience

"It's important to ask questions to your whole crew. Even just basic stuff like if they are married and where they live. It shows you care about the people in the crew and their lives, and people are more willing to help you if you've gone out of your way to be nice and take an interest in their lives."

Alex, 30, a commercial painter with 4 years' experience



Ask for help from a mentor or sponsor

Lean on a mentor or sponsor to give you advice and coach you through difficult situations.

Ask for help from a mentor or sponsor

You may be tempted to prove that you can handle everything on your own. But that's not necessary—or effective—all the time. And there is no shame in asking for help. If you have a mentor, consider reaching out to them for advice: mentorship and sponsorship are critical to success.⁹ Research shows that people underestimate how much others are willing to help.¹⁰ And asking for help can benefit both of you: you can give another person the chance to share their strengths while learning something new and expanding your network in the process.¹¹

One study shows that people with mentors are up to 5 times more likely to get promoted.¹² Your union may also have resources that will help you navigate tough situations and build the skills and networks you need to succeed.

“Women mentors are necessary to help overcome barriers.”

Renee, 46, an operating engineer/building inspector with 6 years' experience

MONTH 5

STRATEGIES

CARDS 1-12

LEAN IN



Be direct

Use direct communication to address your concerns immediately.

Be direct

There are several benefits to being direct in the moment,¹³ and direct communication tends to produce solutions if handled appropriately.¹⁴ Indirect communication, on the other hand, which relies on nonverbal cues like gestures and facial expressions, can lead to a loss of trust and to the other person having to guess at what you mean.¹⁵

In order to communicate directly, speak clearly and make your message straightforward. Focus on the facts,¹⁶ and take comments at face value.¹⁷ If you're approaching someone because they've said something that offends you, consider explaining your reaction to the comment and sharing information about why it offended you.¹⁸

“Over the years working as a pipefitter there have been many times when some people have said things to me that are rude, vulgar, and/or completely discriminatory of women. I never just walk away and have always spoken up for myself. I find that it does not happen often anymore.”

Lorrie, 46, a pipefitter with 16 years' experience

“Don't let things you find offensive slide—speak up early and often.”

Lori, 50, a carpenter and scaffolder with 15 years' experience



Speak with confidence

Project confidence in the moment
(even if you don't initially feel it).

Speak with confidence

You may not feel confident at your jobsite, especially early on. Or you may feel confident but find that it doesn't come across to others. But practicing a confident speaking style (even if you don't feel confident in the moment) can pay off.

When people project confidence, even overconfidence, they're likely to be perceived as competent.¹⁹ Research shows that people judge how competent you are based on just 7% of what you say. Of the rest, 55% comes from your body language and 38% from your presentation.²⁰ Projecting confidence does not require that you *feel* confident, just that you take actions that show confidence: look people in the eye, pay attention to your posture, and speak clearly.²¹

“You have to speak with confidence so they believe in you and give you a chance.”

Renee, 46, an operating engineer/building inspector with 6 years' experience

“I speak with confidence. Even if it's because I'm confident that I don't know how to do something. My coworkers trust me if I say, 'I got this,' because when I don't, I confidently say, 'I've never done this, please show me.'”

Jade, 35, an ironworker with 8 years' experience



Use your work to gain respect

Show someone you can do a task, rather
than tell them you can do it.

Use your work to gain respect

Good work can speak for itself. Doing tasks well can be a way to show off your accomplishments without saying a word. This not only gives you something to be proud of, but it also shows your crew that you know your trade.

If someone does happen to compliment you on a job well done, resist the urge to minimize it, which is what many women do. Instead, acknowledge that you worked hard—they will likely respect the effort you put into it.²²

“One way that I have gotten a lot of respect from them is that I just never drop from exhaustion or fail because of strength. One perception is that women are not strong, and so I’ve made myself physically very strong.”

Gretchen, a laborer/carpenter²³



Show your technical knowledge

Using terms specific to your trade will help make the point that you have the training and experience to be successful.

Show your technical knowledge

Use technical language and terms to show you know what you're doing. By responding to or asking questions with the most specific and technical language possible, you will send the message that your training has properly equipped you to handle the job.

Also, consider bringing numbers or examples that prove a point you're trying to make. Men tend to rely on using lots of facts and stats to prove themselves, and they take women more seriously when they do the same.²⁴ Talking to your foreman, crew member, or union steward about your perception of an issue isn't always enough. You might share the number of overtime hours you got, compared to the number of hours for men on your crew. You might explain how an ill-fitting harness is dangerous—and that the manufacturer spells this out on the warning label.

"I have people often explain things in detail to me about what this is or why because I'm a woman. I always try to use the best technical terms when talking to them so they know I know."

Anonymous, 30, an ironworker with 3 years' experience

"I try to explain to the guys why we do things the way we do, or show them what the standards say in the books."

Blue, 36, an ironworker with 8 years' experience



Look the part—whatever that means to you

Use visual cues, like how you present yourself, to signal that you are competent, confident, and prepared.

Look the part—whatever that means to you

In general, it's important to make sure you have the right tools to signal that you're ready to work. And if you have them, a well-worn tool belt and used tools can signal to others that you have experience. If you're unsure of what to bring, consider posting the question in a Facebook group for local women in that trade or asking your local union to connect you with a tradeswoman you can ask for advice.

To you, "looking the part" may mean choosing to wear a uniform or dressing to blend in on your jobsite. For many women, this is a successful approach.²⁵ On the other hand, you may feel most powerful when you embrace your personality in your clothing, appearance, or tools. You may find that in doing this you're showing up to the jobsite unapologetically as yourself, which conveys confidence.

Ultimately, it's up to you to consider what's most empowering for you to convey and decide how you want to present yourself.

"I am currently leaning into girly, while still doing badass shit. I painted all my tools with glitter nail polish and have sparkly office supplies and tool pouches while running circles around the guys physically and mentally."

Katy, 32, an electrician with 8 years' experience