

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF AIRAH

MAY 2017 · VOLUME 16.4

RRP \$14.95

Ecolibrium



The classic pitfalls

(and how to avoid them).





Yarnima Power Station in the Pilbara.

THE PETA PRINCIPLE

Perth-based Women of AIRAH committee member Peta Blight, M.AIRAH, lives by a guiding rule: never be afraid to ask, “Why?”

Ecolibrium: When did you first decide you wanted to be an engineer, and how did you get to where you are today?

Peta Blight: Well, when I told my mum I wanted to pursue sport she informed me she would kick me out of the house, so engineering seemed like the better option. I never quite grew out of the “Why” stage, which made mechanical engineering appeal, because it just explained why things did what they did.

My pathway into engineering was pretty straightforward: I had some great teachers and an aptitude for maths and science, so I went from school straight into university.

During this time I had a couple of vacation work experiences, one with an HVAC company as a mechanical engineer, and then one working in project engineering. This led to a graduate project engineering role where I had the opportunity to see a power station built from the ground up. Following this I was seeking more technical learning and got the opportunity to join Devlin Engineering and Management (DEM) and develop my skills in building services and mechanical engineering.



Peta Blight, M.AIRAH

Eco: How would you characterise your approach to work? What are the fundamentals to your philosophy and process?

PB: Generally, the work I get to do changes on a daily basis, so I need to be flexible in my approach. The main aim, however, is to approach with gusto and try and work through the engineering process to arrive at a solution.

The key learning I have had since starting at DEM is to believe in the fundamentals

and the process. Define the goal, then determine the potential solutions and make sure everyone is on the same page with what you are doing. Coordination and engagement are so important in achieving a good design.

Eco: Do you have a checklist you always follow at the start of a project?

PB: Not a checklist, but we do have a process. As a small consultancy we get the opportunity to work on a range of projects of all sizes and the process works for all of them; it’s just the level that we go to that adapts to suit.

Eco: Are you open to new ideas, or are the old ways the best ways? Do you like to collaborate?

PB: I like new ideas; however, I also trust older heads because you need the best of both to come up with good solutions. I was always taught that good decisions come from experience, and experience comes from bad decisions. So I like to collaborate to take advantage of that prior learning.

Eco: What are your favourite projects you have worked on and why?

PB: Your first project is always a favourite, and mine was Yarnima Power Station, because I was able to see it from concrete pouring through to an operating site. It was my favourite because I met so many interesting people, learnt so many different things, and generally survived the process. I also enjoy site work, because you get to see the nuts and bolts.



The Women of AIRAH WA golf event, sponsored by Systemaire.

Since being an HVAC consultant my favourite projects are the ones where I feel like I've been able to make a positive difference or contribution.

As building projects bring together so many different parties, it is being able to make a solution work not just for you, but the whole team that defines its success.

Eco: Whom do you admire and why? Do you have a mentor? Do you gain any satisfaction from mentoring others?

PB: I admire people who live their values not only when it is easy, but also when it is tough. I have a range of people who provide different types of guidance, so informal mentors mainly. I find these grow and change with me, and I try to find people who will give me the truth how they see it, not how I want to hear it.

I enjoy mentoring, and have had the opportunity to mentor others in sport, engineering and committees. Often as a mentor I feel I get as much out of a conversation as my mentee does.

Eco: Are there interesting, funny or quirky facts you could share with us about your work and what you do?

PB: I am far better with Excel and Bluebeam than I could ever have hoped.

I also drink more tea than I thought would be humanly possible, mainly because my work has a consensus that I'm only allowed one coffee a day.

Eco: What advice do you have for emerging engineers who wish to follow in your path?

PB: Be more than your work. The best people to work with and for have families, passions and causes, and it is what makes us interesting.

On the engineering front, back yourself to have a go and listen to others.

Eco: What's the most important lesson you've learned throughout your working life?

PB: Be resilient and care. Every day is different, every workplace is different, and if you can get up every day and give it your best shot you can get there.

On the other side, we are all people – even the engineers – and we need to work together and care about each other to succeed. Great achievements in engineering are created by people coming together, for all their differences.

Eco: What's next for you, and what are your goals for the future?

PB: My main aim at the moment is to keep developing my technical skills and gain my Chartered Engineering status. In the long term I want to be able to travel more and work internationally.

Eco: What does AIRAH membership mean to you?

PB: AIRAH membership gives me access to like-minded individuals and leaders in the industry, as well as assisting me on my professional development pathway.

Eco: Describe yourself. What are your defining characteristics?

PB: I'm a ginger, with the strong will and temper that goes along with that. However, generally I'm easily entertained and pretty positive about life in general.

Eco: If I wasn't an engineer, I'd be a . . .

PB: Maths/science/sport teacher.

Eco: Do you have hobbies or diversions?

PB: Sports and volunteering, especially around STEM education.

Eco: My most valued possession is . . .

PB: Free time.

Eco: Tell us something about yourself others might not know.

PB: I have an Italian passport.

Eco: In five years I'd like to be . . .

PB: Taller. ■

Would you like to know more?



The Women of AIRAH (WOA) group is developing AIRAH's strategy for supporting women and increasing their participation in both the Institute and the HVAC&R industry.

They work with local divisions to run events, networking sessions and other initiatives. If you are interested in becoming involved in the Women of AIRAH at a national or state level, go to www.airah.org.au/woa or email membership@airah.org.au

Thanks to the Women of AIRAH sponsors

- Delta Building Automation
- Grosvenor Engineering Group
- G.J.Walker ■ Systemaire
- Turner Engineering.