

# The observer

Sonia Holzheimer, M.AIRAH, is a senior mechanical engineer with GHD, based in Cairns.

## Responsibilities

I brief, lead, manage and work with the project teams to achieve the desired project outcomes, while enhancing our relationship with the client through responsive, effective communication and timely project delivery.

## Passions

Relationships; understanding the client's requirements and client satisfaction. If you don't understand your client and what they want, how can you ever possibly deliver it?

## Finest professional hour

I gave a talk at a local primary school on my profession as part of a curriculum focus on "People in the Community".

The presentation happened to be in a multi-purpose hall where I had provided the air conditioning and ventilation design. To see the children directly benefiting from my efforts was satisfying in itself, but even more rewarding was the opportunity to give them an insight into our often-misunderstood profession, along with a tangible example of what we do.

At the end of the presentations the children provided me with wonderful and immediate feedback: at least 70 per cent – and nearly all of the girls – indicated that they would like to be an engineer "when they grow up".

This was no mean feat, considering police officers and firemen – with their exciting tales of bravery – were among the other professions that gave a presentation that morning. One of the children in the audience was my daughter, who was in Grade 2 at the time.

## Important lessons

Often it is your observational skills which are of most benefit when resolving site issues.

Communication is key.

Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, look again.

## Whom do you most admire?

Margaret Ingels (October 25, 1892 – December 13, 1971) was the first woman to graduate from the University of Kentucky School of Engineering, the second woman to receive an engineering degree in the United States and most importantly she was hired by Willis H. Carrier as the first woman air conditioning engineer.

She captured the interest of many young minds with demonstrations of refrigeration principles, and her speeches inspired young people to enter the air conditioning and refrigeration fields. In addition to her 45 technical publications in various journals, she developed the "effective temperature" scale to incorporate humidity and air movement in the equation for human comfort.

These days gender has little or no bearing on the opportunities that are available to us. But this was not the case for Margaret, who sought a career in a male-dominated field when the lawmakers were still debating whether to allow women the right to vote.

## Dream sabbatical

At a remote vineyard, where I can provide engineering support – as needed – to the vinification process and confirm suitability of their long-term red wine storage through (responsible) daily tastings.

## Words of wisdom

You can have anything that you wish, so long as you are willing to pay the price.

## Greatest personal achievement?

A couple of years ago I ran the Great Pyramid Race, which is a 12km round-trip from the centre of Gordonvale, up Walsh's Pyramid (922m) and back, held annually in August. The race is described as a "never-ending uphill scramble and controlled downhill freefall". I held my own among the 150 or so competitors and hopefully earned my place as a local to the far-north.



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## Favourite book

Any book that I find the time to read to my children! There are some truly wonderful classics that I have relished rereading as an adult to my children, such as *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay or any of the books by Roald Dahl. We have also enjoyed reading together some of the books by Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens.

As I am currently studying for my Masters, reading for my own pleasure is a distant memory. However, I do recall touring the Mornington Peninsula by car with barely a glimpse of the (apparently) beautiful coastline, as I could not lift my eyes from the book *Four Fires* by Bryce Courtenay.

## Favourite film

*Gattaca*: "You wanna know how I did it? This is how I did it, Anton. I never saved anything for the swim back".

## Favourite website

ABC iView, as it allows me to catch-up on *Insiders*, *Grand Designs*, or some other interesting doco while doing the ironing.

## Describe yourself

Driven. Loyal. Honest.

## What is success

Having my life in control, and with time to spend with my family.

## What does AIRAH mean to you?

AIRAH is a source of inspiration, information and knowledge, and provides a forum for discussion where I feel engaged with the industry. ■