

Tania Johnston

***Mechanical Construction
Association Canada
Chief Executive Officer***



How did you get your start in the plumbing & heating industry?

My role within the industry is a little different, I'm not on the tools, I don't work for a contractor, manufacturer, or supplier. I do however work on behalf of the industry as a construction association executive. I fell into the role quite accidentally. Twenty-three years ago, I was teaching Windows 95 and how to right click day in and day out to a classroom of adults. MCA Canada was looking for someone to fill a vacancy for six months, I jumped at the opportunity, and well the rest as we say is history.

What is your current job and what do you love about it?

Over my time at MCAC, I have held numerous positions but in 2020, I successfully competed for the opening of the CEO position. I can honestly say that I absolutely love my job! There is variety, it's extremely challenging, there is continuous learning and problem solving but the most important aspect is the members and my desire to help them become more successful in their contracting businesses.

What is the best career advice you ever received?

Get out from behind your desk and computer! For some, this doesn't come easy, and it can be emotionally exhausting but when you get out there you will find yourself connecting with people who may be going through some of the same career/job related issues that you are experiencing. Find yourself a mentor, or just as important, a sponsor. They will provide you with important on the job advice and will be there to support you as you navigate down your personal career path.

Get involved with associations and attend as many industry events as you can. Become involved in committees, partake in as many education opportunities as possible. Learning and connecting with industry people will create so many opportunities and open so many doors that you don't even know exist at this very moment in time.

If you could go back in time and give your younger self career advice, what would it be?

Be open to unexpected opportunities. I was convinced that I would be a schoolteacher for life. Never in a million years did I think I would work for a construction association.

Also, don't stay in a job where you are unhappy! There are so many opportunities, don't settle. You have one life to live, be happy!

What are you looking forward to professionally/where do you see yourself going?

I made the transition to my current role during a tumultuous time, the beginning of the pandemic. As we emerge to a new normal, it has been rewarding to reconnect and re-engage with our members. Professionally, I look forward to leading our industry as we navigate through a very interesting time for our sector, whether that it is improving efficiencies in the built environment, delivery of clean and safe water, improving indoor air quality, or attracting and retaining young people to our skilled workforce. I am extremely passionate about the importance of getting trades back into the school system.

What energizes you outside of work?

I am very fortunate to be a cottage owner. Spending time at the lake allows me to decompress from the work week, spend time with my family, and garden. Pulling weeds is therapeutic. Perhaps in my retirement from the association world I'll become a landscaping contractor.

It's so important to find that work, life balance. Admittedly, it may be my greatest weakness.

What is the biggest obstacle you've had to overcome?

In 2017, I applied for the MCAC CEO position on the retirement of our leader of 25 plus years. Despite feeling that I was ready for the role, the selection committee went in a different direction. Was I disappointed? Absolutely! After licking my wounds, I realized that I had two options. One, leave the association that I had loved for so many years, or make the most of the situation and support the new leader of the association. Obviously, I went with door number two and found myself extremely fortunate as I was given many new opportunities to support the association and I was encouraged to step outside the walls of our office to connect with industry people.

Early in 2020, the job opening came open once again and this time I was honored to step into the role of CEO. It has been an extreme honour and I find myself feeling more grateful each day.

What is your "superpower"/what are you really good at?

My superpower is the ability to connect with people. It's rare to find myself intimidated by an individual or walking into a room where I don't know anyone. Can it be uncomfortable? Of course, it can. However, I have learned that you just need to let the conversation flow organically. Let the individual talk about themselves. Not to mention, when you engage with people, you learn.

While on the topic of learning from people, I'm also not afraid to admit when I don't know an answer to a particular question or have the knowledge in a particular area. Ralph Suppa has been in an informal advisory role to me since 2020. Passionate people want to teach and share their knowledge and wisdom, never be afraid to ask for it.

How do you challenge & inspire yourself to grow?

We are so fortunate to live in an era of where information is at our fingertips. I choose to frequently listen to podcasts produced by mentors or many days I will have a webinar playing in the background over the lunch hour and if I can pick up just one take away from the conversation I consider myself further ahead than I was yesterday. I also walk the talk by participating in a female executive peer group. I can't say enough about peer groups!!

How would you/what would you say to attract other women to join our industry?

It's important that we show people, not just women, that there is a role for them in this industry. It's a very well-paying career, there are endless opportunities for growth and advancement, and maybe you'll even discover that you are a natural entrepreneur and desire to become a company owner. Our job is to tell those stories of what those roles could look like and to support through continuous education, empowerment, and advocacy work on their behalf.