

Interview with Da Young Tuuau, Graduate Engineer with EPC

Da Young graduated from the University of the South Pacific (USP) with a degree in Electrical Engineering in 2017. She has the distinction as one of the foundation students for the School of Engineering at the USP. She is 24 years old and works as a graduate engineer in the Distribution Division of the Electric Power Corporation in Samoa. She is the sole female technical person in a division of more than 80 line men and electricians. Her future aspirations are to go for further studies and become a chartered Engineer with the Institute of Professional Engineers of Samoa (IPES).



1. *How did you end up in this position that you are currently in?*

I have always wanted to be an engineer since high school. There were other career options I was interested in like Medicine and Information Technology but the design aspect of engineering was the pulling factor for me. I always wanted to be involved in design and build things and see them develop from projects into something that can be operated

2. *Did you know about engineering before university?*

Yes I knew about engineering before university. I knew that students sort of shy away from studying it because it was hard and it was also a career that was dominated by men. I wanted to study Civil Engineering but then I went to USP where they did not offer that course so I took up Electrical which was offered and that is how I ended up in Electrical Engineering and eventually EPC

3. *How do you feel working in an environment dominated by men?*

Very challenging because I work at Distribution and most of them are line men. There is a lot of hard physical work and of course there is the safety issue. We need to be on top of the situation all the time. It makes me work harder. These guys have been doing this kind of work for most of their lives and they are very comfortable and set in the ways they do it. So to have someone else let alone a woman suggest different ways of doing things took a fair

bit effort for them to accept it. So at the beginning, I thought I was way over my head but then I slowly started to win them over. I guess the biggest issue was not so much a woman coming into the picture but more so the changes that they have to implement. People in general just do not like changes.

4. *Would you prefer working in an environment dominated by women*

No, it does not really matter to me whether I am working with men or women. Engineering is engineering and what I mean by that is that the outcome of the work is not decided by whether it was done by a man or woman. At the end of the day, we are all assessed by what our Divisional Annual Plan dictates. And if we do not deliver, the last thing that the management and Board want to know is if the work was done by a man or a woman.

5. *What are some of the challenges at work for you?*

The biggest challenge is the paper work. I realise that I am working with people who do not want to document their work. But that is attributed to a few factors. As far as the linemen are concerned, all they are interested in is to ensure that the electric poles are up and the network is ready to transmit and distribute electricity to customers. A lot of it has to do with their educational background. Line mechanic work tends to attract people who did not progress further than high school. I am speaking from a Samoan context. Documentation and writing reports have never been their thing. So that is my biggest challenge at the moment, trying to get these guys to change a few of their old habits and document their work to make it easier for them in the future. These guys are very old school and they believe what has worked for them in the past will continue to work for them in the future. Paper work is important but this is something they do not realise. The other challenge is my lack of physical strength. I want to participate and contribute to the works at the site but I am not strong enough.

6. *Why do you think women are not interested in engineering?*

I know from our year at the University Preparatory year, there were 5 of us women that went to study engineering. Three went to New Zealand and two of us went to Fiji, that was a big haul. Girls are attracted more to Arts, Commerce and Law because I know a lot of girls do not like the physical work that is affiliated to engineering. And also, for some reason girls just do not like Maths in the same way that boys do. At least that is what I gather from my friends at school. Engineering is hard because it is so Maths orientated according to them.

7. *What can we do to attract more women to engineering?*

It all comes down to awareness. We need to get the word out there that engineering provides a good career and it is not what most of the people perceive it to be. Most Samoans associate engineering with what automotive mechanics do, and the first thing that comes to mind is that it is a dirty job and should not be done by a woman. We need to get over these old stereotypes that automatically bring a different impression of engineering to people. So EPC needs to get out to schools and promote engineering and show students the real work that engineers do.

8. *What is EPC like as an employer of women in technical roles?*

EPC is doing fine but at the same time it can do more. EPC is accommodating and supportive of me but it needs to showcase more. Starting by sponsoring women to study Science and Technology subjects and maybe carry out a program to provide internship for women in technical roles. It will give EPC the opportunity to fixate on potential female candidates that they can support throughout school and onto permanent employment afterwards. I guess the leadership at EPC has the biggest role to play. They need to talk and walk and not just some policy on Human Resources documents

9. Where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?

I want to become a Chartered Engineer with the Institute of Professional Engineers of Samoa (IPES) and then hopefully have an opportunity to undertake further studies. I want to do a Masters in Engineering degree.

10. What will be a good advice for any female who wants to become an engineer?

Just do it. Samoa needs engineers and if I can do it, anyone can do it. Engineering offers a variety of areas where you can focus on to be your specialty and it also comes with a good pay compared to the usual jobs that girls want to do