



MEET SUZANNE AULTMAN

The mentee becomes the mentor

Sarah Fister Gale



Suzanne Aultman was destined to work in the precast concrete industry. She studied civil engineering at Clemson University in South Carolina and stuck around to complete her masters, she says, because “I wasn’t ready to leave college.”

As a part of that masters program,

Aultman took a course on prestressed concrete and found herself intrigued.

Toward the end of the program, she and another student received email invitations to interview at Metromont, a precast concrete manufacturer based in Greenville, S.C., that had offered students a tour of the plant earlier in their studies. They both did initial interviews, and Aultman was called back for a second interview. It was during that second visit that she met Harry Gleich, a longtime PCI member and vice president of engineering at Metromont.

Aultman recalls waiting in an office to meet with Gleich when she heard him shout down the hall, “Ask her what grade she got in statics class. If it’s less than a B, I don’t want to talk to her.” Fortunately, Aultman had aced her statics class, so Gleich gave her a chance. It was the beginning of a job and a mentorship that has lasted for more than 17 years.

Aultman was hired as a design engineer and worked her way up to chief engineer for the entire company. Over the years, she has helped design dozens of structures. Her first project, the Bookends condominium complex in Greenville, featured a four-color thin brick facade and won a PCI Design Award. Gleich had pulled Aultman onto the project early as a teaching opportunity, giving her pieces to design, offering feedback, and then giving her the next piece. “I’m really proud of that project,” she says. “It is where I learned to design.”

Aultman has spent her entire career at Metromont, though she did take a three-year detour to pursue a second master’s degree in counseling at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. In 2012, a friend suggested she apply to the program. “I’ve always done a lot of mentoring and coaching,” she says, and when she was accepted “all signs pointed to Seattle.”

She continued to work for Metromont from Seattle while going to school full-time and midway through the program began to wonder how counseling psychology and engineering could work together. She knew she would never leave her career in engineering and decided to reach out to Gleich for advice.

“He could have said ‘quit and come home,’ but he didn’t,” she says. He told her to stick it out and that the training would make her a better manager.

Aultman completed the program in 2016 and says she has never regretted it. The training helped her become a better leader, and she now regularly gets pulled into meetings to help assess candidates and resolve issues. “It’s been remarkable,” she says.

Some of Aultman’s other accomplishments include serving with Engineering Ministries International in India, Guatemala, and Jordan, using her engineering knowledge and skills to help design safe, high-quality structures built with local materials for various organizations. In 2009, she was named the National Society of Professional Engineers’ Young Engineer of the Year. A year later, in 2010, she received the Clemson University College of Engineering Outstanding Young Alumni Award.

Aultman has been heavily involved in PCI, too. Gleich sent her to the annual convention her first year on the job and encourages the engineers at Metromont to join committees and participate in the conversations occurring at PCI events. They are “the people who do the work and the ones who lead the industry,” she says.

In 2009, Aultman participated in Leadership PCI. She serves on the Technical Activities and Research and Development Councils; the Design Standard, Blast Resistance and Structural Integrity, and Journal Awards Committees; and the PCI Academy Advisory Board. She is also a consulting member of the Industry Handbook Committee and vice chair of the Standards Committee. Aultman previously served on the Blue Ribbon Review Committee for the seventh edition of the *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete* and on many Daniel P. Jenny Fellowship Advisory Committees.

Being a part of PCI has given Aultman deep perspective on codes and the history of design. It has also helped her build a network and foster relationships across the industry. “It’s remarkable at PCI to see competitors come to the table and work together to make the whole industry better,” she says. “You don’t see that in other industries.”

When speaking to future industry members, Aultman has specific advice for young female engineers. “Speak up, and never be afraid to ask questions,” she says. “There are a lot more women in this industry than there used to be, but you still need to work harder if you want to be heard.” 