



Q & A with Reiko A. Kerr - LADWP's First Woman to Lead Power System

Interview By Carol Tucker

Reiko Kerr became the first woman to lead LADWP's Power System when she joined the Department in 2016. From Day 1, she took it as a personal responsibility to create mentoring opportunities to support emerging women engineers and new programs to promote and recruit women in LADWP's workforce. In recognition of her commitment to advancing women in the electric power industry, Reiko recently received the [Society of Women Engineers \(SWE\) Spark Award](#), which honors individuals who have contributed to the advancement of women by mentoring those around them.

Reiko, who is Senior Assistant General Manager of Power System Engineering, Planning, and Technical Services, co-leads the Power System with Andrew C. Kendall, Senior Assistant General Manager of Power System Construction, Maintenance, and Operations. Reiko manages all aspects of the Power System's critical engineering and planning functions including: generation, transmission, and distribution engineering; business development, renewable energy programs, Clean Grid LA, regulatory compliance, and contract administration. One of her biggest responsibilities is to lead the Power System's transition to a clean energy future, including participation in the Energy Imbalance Market (EIM).

Intake had the opportunity to talk with Reiko recently about being a woman in a

traditionally male profession, her vision for L.A.'s energy future, and other topics.

When you first came on board, there was a lot of discussion at the executive level and at the Board of Water and Power Commissioners regarding gender equity at LADWP. Have you seen much progress in this area?

Women make up approximately 35 percent of LADWP's Power System. But if you remove women in clerical, customer services, and administrative positions, it is quite different. Clearly, these positions are critical to LADWP's success, but women should also have access to the non-traditional roles that have historically been occupied predominately by men. In 2018, we promoted six women to management-level positions, which represented a 600 percent increase. In 2019, for first time, we now have female Electrical Services Managers assigned to the field.

This isn't a situation unique to LADWP. The industry as a whole must do better. Mayor (Eric) Garcetti issued Executive Directive No. 11 regarding Gender Equity in City Operations to ensure the City's governance is inclusionary and non-discriminatory for populations that have historically been underrepresented.

What is it like to be a woman in a non-traditional field?

I think it's important to remember that we need our male supporters and mentors. It's a very different message when I talk about the importance of gender diversity versus when Andy Kendall does it. Either way, it's the right thing to do, but the message is different when it is supported by men. When I look at other successful women in the industry, without fail, each has been supported and mentored by male colleagues. As an organization, we must ensure that all employees, including women have equal opportunities in the workplace. It is also important that we confront our individual implicit biases. We all have them and it's important to recognize them and work hard to overcome them.

When the faces of our employees match the communities we serve, we will know we have been successful. We have work to do so that we ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve. Anything less is unacceptable.

There is a lot of institutional stereotyping that is changing over time, but it's still not there. You see more diversity on the vendor side, but not so much in the institutional utilities. What's nice to see is that in the industry, conferences are putting more of a focus on having diverse panels.

How do you navigate the challenge of being in charge of a largely male organization such as the LADWP Power System?

As the new member of the team, I build consensus as I build my team. I earn their respect. When I come into a workplace, I don't make wholesale changes - I want to learn the lay of the land first. Here, I think I've done a good job of coming in and gaining the respect of my team, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, and acknowledging contributions from our team members. That's the key: it's the team, it's not me. I also recognize you're only as good as the people you surround yourself with. So to be successful, surround yourself with successful, hard-working, technically capable people, and the sky's the limit.

You are a role model for women here at LADWP as well as younger women who aspire to careers in STEM. What advice do you have for women either starting out in their careers or working to advance to higher levels in management at their organizations?

Be flexible. Don't map out your career path. Be flexible in your career path and your career choices. If I had mapped out my path when I started, I'd be completely wrong. And I hear that from women all over. I am a finance person, I'm a CPA, and here I am in the Power System. Recognize that skill sets are transferable. So I say get your name out there, get your face out there. Raise your hand and volunteer. But then if you do, don't let them down. Meet your commitments, go above and beyond.

Attitude. Is. Everything. Your attitude is contagious - good or bad. You set an example. Are you open to new ideas? Critical of new ideas? Supportive of your team members? Do you figure out a way to get to Yes? Do you support your colleagues? Do you celebrate other's success (even if that person was your competition)? Are you angry? Are you critical? Do you continually point out problems, or do you identify problems and offer up solutions? Are you grounded in other's perception of you and does that align with your perception of yourself? Be aware of opportunities that

exist. Continue to enhance your skill sets. Don't be afraid to try something new. Know your value proposition. What value do you bring to the table?

What are the biggest challenges for LADWP's Power System?

First – personnel. We need to ensure we have the right work force and skill set for our future utility business needs. As we move to adopting advance technology and smart grid, we need data scientists and statistical analysts to help make informed decisions. We need cyber security expertise and computer science engineers. We need people with the right core competencies and updated recruiting tools to give LADWP a competitive advantage.

There are also challenges created by the silver tsunami, with a high number of personnel retiring. Considering the time required to train new personnel, and the challenge of retaining them, this can create quite a knowledge gap. We need to be able to retain staff in critical classifications to ensure appropriate operations of our system.

Second—infrastructure. We are working to modernize our 100-year-old infrastructure to enable advanced technology and an electric system that will last for the next century while maintaining the same level of reliability. The investments we make today need to meet our future customers' needs.

What are you most excited about?

I'm very excited to see staff's engagement regarding LA100 – the 100 Percent Renewable Study, launched in fall 2017, as well as the Clean Grid LA efforts. This has been a very robust process led by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory with a diverse citizen-based Advisory Group representing multiple interests. We expect to see preliminary results by the end of 2019. Ultimately, the study will provide a roadmap for achieving 100 percent renewables or 100 percent carbon free supply. I think we're on the right path.