

Sarah Lotfi, Civil Engineer at Orenco Systems, Shares Her Story on International Women’s Day



Fewer than 20% of engineers are women¹. Sarah Lotfi, post-sales engineer at Orenco Systems, is one of the few who has successfully navigated the male-dominated career path and established herself as an expert in the field. Let’s meet her!

Sarah grew up in Iran, where she earned a BSc and MSc in civil and environmental engineering, specializing in water and wastewater. In 2017, she moved to the United States to get her PhD in civil engineering, focusing on nitrogen removal from on-site wastewater – an area where Orenco is a leader.

Orenco Systems, based in Sutherlin, Oregon, is a premier manufacturing company that focuses on water and wastewater treatment systems and components.

“My path to Orenco began when Mike, my manager, came across my LinkedIn profile and reached out for an interview,” Sarah recalls. “The timing was perfect, as I

was finishing my PhD and job hunting. I chose Orenco over other offers because it aligned with my research and passion for improving water quality.”

She admits that navigating male-dominated spaces has been a challenge.

“It can be intimidating to speak in rooms where women are significantly underrepresented, as biases about your ideas, decisions, or abilities often persist,” Sarah says. “I’ve been fortunate to have incredible women engineer role models.”

They include her two engineer sisters, Lina and Mahsa, who showed her the importance of resilience and finding her own path. Also, Sarah’s PhD advisor, Dr. Xinwei Mao, gave her guidance and strength to face trials directly.

“Dr. Mao once said, ‘To succeed, you might need thick skin like an elephant to face the challenges,’” Sarah recounts.

Thick skin, however, hasn’t affected Sarah’s drive to protect the world’s water.

“The part of my job I value most is knowing that my work contributes to protecting the environment,” she says. “Every day, I get to play a role in improving water quality, which directly impacts our communities and ecosystems. It’s rewarding to know that my work helps to protect an important resource for future generations.”

Speaking of future generations, she encourages women to choose STEM careers like science and engineering.

“Engineering needs more women. Don’t let biases hold you back – your ideas matter. Find good mentors, keep learning, and trust that your work can make a difference. With dedication and confidence, any dream is possible. Believe in yourself – you’ve got this!”

To learn more about Orenco Systems and Sarah’s work there, visit [Orenco.com](https://www.orenco.com).

¹ Society of Women Engineers: <https://swe.org/research/2024/employment/>