



Women in Manufacturing: Leandra Young Interview

How did you get your start in manufacturing?

I did a coop in pharma manufacturing when I was in undergrad and enjoyed it. After I graduated, my first position was in a plant; my academic background is Chemical Engineering, so it was very natural to work in a manufacturing environment. I later went on to work in telecommunications but again, came back to manufacturing.

What drew you to the industry?

I enjoyed the pace of the environment – always something to figure out and it was always something different each time. This worked well with my desire for variety. I also liked working with the production floor – they always know what is going on way before the “office folks” know since they are right at the ground level.

What are the biggest misconceptions that women have about working in manufacturing?

Many women feel like you have to look/talk/act like a man to be successful. That is not required. You can be yourself – as long as you deliver results consistently. That is what is truly important. Some women also feel like you have to choose between your family and your career. You can have both – you just have to know that sometimes there are days when work takes precedence and other days when your family will take that place. Being able to communicate that effectively is key to your success.

What are some of the main challenges for women working in manufacturing today?

There are still not enough women in leadership roles. You need women in higher executive roles to advocate for the younger women coming behind them.

Are you personally involved in any initiatives or programs to overcome these challenges? Can you provide more details?

At Corning, I’m the lead for Corning’s Women in Manufacturing & Friends. It is a grass roots initiative that grew out from Corning’s corporate sponsorship of the national WiM organization. This platform has allowed me to help initiate a culture of change – where women AND men work together in the manufacturing environment to support, develop and inspire women at all level within the Corning footprint. We have panel discussions, lunch and learns, networking events and informal mentoring opportunities that support this initiative. It is in its 2nd year and we have grown the membership from 11 to 160 women and men.

What skills do you feel are the most critical to succeeding in manufacturing today?

Technical and organizational savvy: Manufacturing can be task oriented at times but it is important to understand that technology is at the center of it. Being comfortable with evolving technology – whether it is a product line extension or an innovative product or a new data analysis application – is key to success. Knowing that you don’t have to be the smartest person in the room but you definitely need to understand how to effectively work with those folks – that is key as well.

What advice do you have for fellow women already working in manufacturing?

If you need help, ask for it. It can be a woman. It can be a man. It can be someone at your level, below your level, or above your level. Feel comfortable approaching the individuals at any of the levels in order to get what you need to be successful at what you are doing or want to do. Understand that managing your job or career is your personal responsibility. People will help you but ultimately, you have to take ownership of it and run with it.

What advice would you give to a woman thinking about entering the manufacturing field for the first time?

Do your homework to know that it is a good fit for you: If you are in college, I would definitely suggest trying to get into an internship program or a co-op program. If you are entering the field as a production worker, ask questions about what you will be doing during the interview OR ask someone you may know what it is that they do in their position. Manufacturing can be so rewarding but having a clear view of what it is and know if it aligns with your expectations and career objectives is important. It's not for everyone and that's ok. Just do your homework and ask questions so you can assess if it's a good fit for you. After you assess all of that, you can make the best decisions about what you would like to do, where you would like to do it, etc.

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