

Directions

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With a Nod to the Ladies ~ and the Companies that Develop Them

by Ellen C. Davis

Women occupy senior leadership roles throughout business, and that phenomenon is occurring more and more in operations positions as well as the more traditional roles such as HR. It's a good thing too, as women are really operations capable! We want to pause for a moment in this issue focused on leadership to acknowledge senior women in manufacturing, and the companies that placed them in those roles.

Senior women reflect on how they got there.

Our Plant Managers Network has existed for 23 years, and has averaged 20 members over the years. In the early days, there were *no* women in the Network, simply because we couldn't find any who were plant managers! Gradually that began to change. Today we have *three* women plant managers in our Network!

Recently I queried two of the women leaders in our [Plant Managers Network](#) about their perspective of themselves and their companies. One of them was Terri Mauk, Plant Manager of Steuben Glass LLC in Corning, NY. I asked them both what personal characteristics they felt they possess that helped them succeed in a challenging operations role, and what development provided by their companies had made the most positive difference.

From Terri: "As far as factors in me that I believe helped the most, I would list: hardworking, reasonably intelligent with a good measure of common sense, and versatility (ability to interact effectively with different people styles)."

Also from Terri: "As far as factors in the organization that I believe helped the most: Culture which values diversity, managers who were concerned with both technical and interpersonal talent, and were open to people growing in roles outside their technical area (in my case, allowing an accountant to move into manufacturing operations)."

My second respondent is another Plant Manager, who requested to remain anonymous. She responded very briefly – and clearly: *"Desire for it, along with the encouragement and support to break new ground into a man's world."* She went on to cite recent leadership development activities in the company through the Corporate Leadership Council where they are clarifying that success requires a strong combination of basic ability, engagement and commitment, and aspiration or desire.

More women show potential for senior roles in operations.

As some of you already know, we at EC Davis have gathered a great deal of statistical data with our Team Manager Development Center. We have sought to understand the impact of experience, education, and even age and gender on our 12 leadership competencies. One statistical finding that has always been interesting to me is that women TMDC participants overall perform better on the TMDC assessment competencies than men. The women who perform best of all in our TMDC have been college-educated, and they possess the Myers-Briggs NT characteristics, which indicate being visionary, future-focused and conceptual as well as assertive and analytical. (To read more on these and other TMDC research findings, look again at our [June 2005 issue of Directions](#).)

McKinsey Research findings support the TMDC statistical data.

The McKinsey On-Line Quarterly published an article in September 2008 on their findings regarding women in senior leadership roles. In brief: companies that have women in senior leadership roles perform better financially than those that do not. McKinsey also cites other studies from Columbia University and the University of Maryland demonstrating the association of corporate financial performance and women participating in senior leadership roles. (To read “A Business Case for Women,” follow this link: https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/article_print.aspx?L2=18&L3=31&ar=2192.)

So, what can we take away from this?

It’s pretty simple really. Many women can and do serve successfully as senior operations leaders in manufacturing. More and more companies are recognizing this fact and acting accordingly.

We encourage women who read this to challenge themselves to develop the job skills, the work ethic, and the deep desire that senior level success requires of men and women. We encourage the companies to employ the good leadership development practices that Terri and others benefited from in their respective organizations.

We hope to welcome more and more women leaders as members of our [Plant Managers Network](#)!