

The Future of Female Talent in the Manufacturing Sector

Measuring women's perceptions about career paths in the manufacturing industry

September 15, 2014

Introduction

In August 2014, [Women in Manufacturing™ \(WiM\)](#) co-sponsored a survey with accounting and advisory firm [Plante Moran](#) as part of its efforts to support the attraction, retention, and advancement of women who are pursuing or have chosen a career in the manufacturing industry.

The survey, which was completed by independent research firm intellitrends of Clarkston, Michigan, collected 877 total responses from two groups: 1) young women between the ages of 17-24 and 2) women currently employed in the manufacturing industry. The objective of the survey was to provide insight and data on the following issues:

- Perceptions and expectations young women have about manufacturing as a career path
- How these perceptions compare to the personal experiences of women working in the manufacturing industry
- Opinions from women in the manufacturing industry on what changes are needed to make manufacturing a more viable career path for women

Survey Highlights and Findings: A Summary

The survey shows that most women working in manufacturing today hold favorable opinions about the sector as a career path for women and would recommend a manufacturing career to a young woman. However, the survey also showed that companies must do a better job of promoting the sector, as women outside the sector continue to hold outdated views of manufacturing.

There are several promising findings about young women which indicate that recruitment into manufacturing careers is possible. Most importantly, there is significant overlap between the top factors young women are seeking in careers and the factors they believe are present in manufacturing careers. Young women reported that they are seeking careers with high salaries and interesting/challenging work. Just under half of young women indicated that the

manufacturing sector offers these two factors, a reasonable number for manufacturing industry leaders who are seeking to recruit more women.

Recruitment efforts can be augmented by women who are in the field today, the majority of whom have positive views about their careers in manufacturing. In addition, women in manufacturing give the sector high marks for offering interesting/challenging work, multiple career paths for women and good compensation.

Of course, the results also show opportunities for change. Improving recruitment efforts is important because, when asked about the “key words” that come to mind about manufacturing, it is clear that antiquated images (“factory/warehouse” and “male-dominated”) continue to cloud and narrow the understanding for today’s young woman.

On the whole, these survey results should be seen as a call to action in a space where there is great opportunity. Young women today are interested in pursuing careers with high salaries and interesting and challenging work with opportunities for advancement. Young women do not currently know it, but these are aspirations that manufacturing can meet – as women who are in manufacturing today score the sector high in these areas. As a result, recruitment efforts should strive to update young women’s impressions of the opportunities in modern manufacturing.

A detailed breakdown of these results follows:

1. The majority of women working in the manufacturing sector today report positive thoughts about manufacturing as a career path for women.

- 82% of women in the manufacturing sector report that the field offers interesting/challenging work.
- 74% of women working in manufacturing say that manufacturing offers multiple career paths for women.
- More than half of women working in manufacturing say that manufacturing is a leading industry for job growth for women.
- Half of women working in manufacturing say that compensation is the most significant benefit for women working in manufacturing.

2. The majority of women working in the manufacturing sector today would recommend that young women pursue a career in manufacturing.

- 64% of women working in manufacturing report that they are “very” to “definitely likely” to recommend a career in manufacturing to a young woman today.

3. Young women's stated career goals and objectives align well with their perceptions of manufacturing career.

- Young women ranked “compensation – salary and benefits” as the top factor that defines a highly attractive career area for them, followed by “interesting/challenging work.”
- Just under half of young women indicated that they believe that the manufacturing field offers salaries that are “better than most – excellent.”
- 46% of young women reported that manufacturing careers involve “interesting/challenging work” that is “better than most – excellent.” Another 39% said that manufacturing careers are “okay” in the area of “interesting/challenging work.”
- 70% of young women ranked manufacturing as “better than most – excellent” for the opportunity to work with high-tech products and in a high-tech environment.
- 74% of young women ranked manufacturing as “better than most – excellent” for the ability to design/produce high demand products.

4. But young women do not know about the opportunities available in manufacturing today.

- Less than 10% of young women selected manufacturing among the top five career fields they feel offers the most opportunity for young women.
- Less than half of young women surveyed outside the sector give a career in manufacturing high marks for interesting/challenging work.

5. Women in the industry think that employers could improve their efforts to address the retention and advancement of women.

- In assessing their own organizations' performance in addressing the retention and advancement of women, 38% of women in manufacturing were positive about the direction with 62% assessing it as “inconsistent” to “no movement at all.”
- Two-thirds of current female workers in manufacturing do not know of any programs in place for the retention and advancement of women.

More about the Survey Approach and Respondent Profile

The survey collected online responses from a total of 877 women from August 1 – 15, 2014. Responses collected break down as follows:

- 351 survey responses were received from women between the ages of 17-24
- 526 survey responses were received from women who are employed full-time and work in multiple sectors of manufacturing. The majority have worked in the manufacturing industry for 20-29 years and describe their role as management of a department, division or operation.

Selected Verbatim Comments from Survey Participants

"I think it's our responsibility (women) to show interest and express desire to have programs that promote careers in the manufacturing sector. From what I have experienced, I don't think it's that the work environment doesn't want women in the manufacturing sector, it's that most women don't choose to be in the manufacturing sector."

"Our company is focused on providing growth opportunities for women and has a strong drive for diversity and inclusion. We have women's resource groups throughout the world that meet regularly, and in North America, hold a two-day annual summit for several hundred employees to inform / discuss subjects including leadership skills, career advancement, and mentoring and coaching."

"There has been increasing availability of women in our technical industry to fill engineering, sales, and technology support roles. As our population of successfully performing females has increased, we have introduced flexible working hours and some ability to work from home when family needs dictate."