



Women in Leadership



Their voices, ideas and vision for the future of cheese and dairy.

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What leadership style do you feel has garnered a positive response throughout your career?

Different people respond better to different leadership styles; however, the two leadership styles that have provided the most positive response throughout my career so far are both coaching and supportive styles. As you would expect, newer engineers have responded well to more of a coaching leadership style. New engineers require this guidance, support and training. More experienced engineers have responded well to a supportive leadership style. With this style, encouragement and recognition are provided; concerns are listened to, and discussion promoted. As I grow as a manager, I am trying to understand when it is best to use each style and practice different styles as needed. My leadership style is something that I try to have an awareness of and continuously work on.

Who are some dairy industry leaders that inspire you? Have you had any mentors in the industry, and how have they helped you along your career journey?

There is a female engineering manager in our Tetra Pak Brazil office that inspires me. She is a great leader; she is outspoken and eloquent on the things that matter, and two-thirds of her 30-person team are female. In addition, her team is very vocal on diversity and inclusion. One of the great things about working for a global company is that you can have a role model that is in a similar position as you in another market to learn from.

In addition, I have had a mentor, however they work outside the dairy industry. Discussing challenges and goals with someone outside of the company you work for can give fresh insights and new ways of thinking about things than what you are typically exposed to. Having a mentor in general helps to keep a focus on the big picture and self-development.

Do you feel women in the dairy industry have equal opportunities for advancement relative to their male counterparts?

At Tetra Pak at this point in my career, I do not feel limited in my opportunities for advancement compared to my male counterparts. I know that this is not the case for every woman and that gender biases can exist for some roles more than others in the industry, for example, senior level management.

What is a strategy you've utilized to make sure you, and other women in your company, are heard?

Naturally I am not a very outspoken person. I do my research so that I can be confident on a topic in technical conversations and when representing my team.

I try to lead by example. On my team I have created an environment where speaking up and sharing is encouraged.

Do you see more acceptance of and positions filled by women leaders in the dairy industry now than when you first started? If so, to what do you attribute this?

As I look at the different projects that Tetra Pak is working on, I see more women in leadership positions both internally and externally with our customers in lead engineering and project management roles. Experienced women that are positioned to take these roles are also in a stage in life where they potentially have or are starting families. I attribute more females in these leadership roles, in part, due to growing parental leave programs and more flexible work arrangements which support families (both mothers and fathers) with young children. When I was a younger engineer, I remember a customer being concerned that I would not start a family due to my drive as an engineer. I believe the perception is changing that women alone do not need to choose between a family and career growth. There is still room to grow on normalizing parental leave and family schedules for both mothers and fathers, but there has been a large improvement since I started in the industry 11 years ago.

What do you think traditionally has been a barrier to women entering or advancing in the process engineering field? How have women worked to overcome these barriers and build more opportunities for new generations?

University engineering classes (depending on the specific degree) tend to be more dominated by men. This can be alienating for women and create the fear of being stereotyped. Women may also have added stress of feeling like they need to prove themselves compared to their male counterparts. Women have worked to support each other through these barriers with the founding of organizations such as the Society of Women Engineers (SWE), Females in Food and Women in Dairy. I was fortunate to have found a degree that I was passionate about where the class size was about 50% female. There are a few members of my process engineering team that have graduated from this program as well. We go back to campus to meet with these students to showcase how they can use their degree as a process engineer.

What can companies and organizations in the dairy industry do to further diversity, equity and inclusion in their hiring and career advancement practices?

Companies and organizations can put a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion through training, especially for hiring managers, and allowing time for reflection on improvement potential within each level of a company.

Relationships with student groups that have a focus on diversity and inclusion can support bringing in a more diverse talent group at the entry level. In addition, information about parental leave and flexible working arrangements in recruitment can show how work-life balance is valued at a company.

Companies can provide mentorship opportunities to provide perspective and awareness about equity and inclusion. Clear career advancement paths can ensure that managers and employees know requirements for advancement for fair evaluations of opportunities.

How can the industry motivate the next generation of women to pursue a career in dairy?

There are many things that motivate the next generation. Good work-life balance will be very important to the next generation of women to pursue a career in dairy. This can be achieved by more flexible work arrangements, support of parental leave programs, and a focus on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Attention should be paid to creating career paths within an organization, including training and mentorship opportunities.

In addition, the next generation appreciates being part of an organization that uses new technology and gives a sense of purpose. The use of process controls, artificial intelligence and new tools to make more efficient processes with a focus on the environment and nutritional impact are things that give a sense of purpose to many in the industry today.

What are some steps you would like to see organizations take at the high school/college level to encourage more women in leadership positions?

At the high school level, I would like to see the promotion of opportunities for female students to exercise their skills in a team environment in order to practice leading and working collectively as a team to solve problems. Destination Imagination is one program that provides such exposure.

Many colleges are focused now on diversity and inclusion. These programs put a focus on recruiting underrepresented groups, providing mentorship and opportunities for workshops and events to support diversity and inclusion. Some include ambassador programs which connect university students with high school students to increase awareness and engagement at the high school level to help ensure a more diverse incoming student population. Continuation and focus on these programs can help women students feel supported in their pursuit of STEM degrees.

In addition, organizations such as SWE, Females in Food and Women in Dairy having a university presence can foster mentoring and networking at a very important time to develop and encourage more women into leadership positions. CMN