

Can Women Solve the American Manufacturing Skilled Workforce Shortage?

Women are a huge driving force in the workplace. Surveys of women entering the job market indicate that they rarely consider manufacturing as a career.

AUSTIN, TEXAS, USA, July 10, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [American manufacturing](#) is on the upswing. But a looming skills shortage threatens. What can be done? Recruiting more women to make a career in manufacturing can help the industry solve the talent shortage while becoming more innovative and productive at the same time.



Image by WVXU – Women training for skilled manufacturing jobs

Women are a major driving force in the workplace.

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Catalyst Research

If you consider that women earned more than half of the associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees in the US – and the fact that women also hold more than half of all managerial, professional positions in this country – you could be forgiven for thinking that all industries are benefiting from this critical source of worker talent equally.

But that's not the case. The manufacturing sector lags far behind in its efforts to attract women to join its ranks.

How far behind?

According to a study by Catalyst Research, women represent nearly half (46.6%) of employees in the U.S. labor force. However, far fewer women than men work in the manufacturing sector – only 24.8% of workers employed in manufacturing durable goods are women.

From a purely economic point of view, these numbers just don't add up.

As jobs at manufacturing companies become more high-tech, employers are facing a shortage of applicants to fill these positions.

According to a study by The Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte, the automotive industry, energy and resources, aerospace and defense and industrial products have been especially hard hit by the skills gap in US manufacturing – with the most serious shortages for skilled production workers, engineers,

and scientists.

These are not low-paying jobs – according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), it's quite the opposite. In 2011, the average annual compensation for manufacturing workers was \$77,060 (including benefits) which was about \$17k higher than salaries averaged across all industries.

So if the manufacturing industry has an increasing number of openings for high-tech jobs that pay well above average, why do women still represent such a small percentage of the manufacturing workforce?

One possible explanation is that gender bias is still alive and well.

Surveys of young women entering the job market indicate that they rarely consider manufacturing as a career on their own. (This can change if they have personal experience in the manufacturing industry, more on that later.)

Gender bias works both ways. According to a recent New York Times article, a significant number of unemployed men looking for work are not pursuing careers in the growing healthcare field, such as caregivers for the elderly, because they perceive these roles as 'pink-collar' jobs better suited to women.

Employers striving to improve their diversity and inclusion (D&I) hiring have found that even subtle shifts in the language used for open job positions can have an effect on the relative number of men and women job applicants.

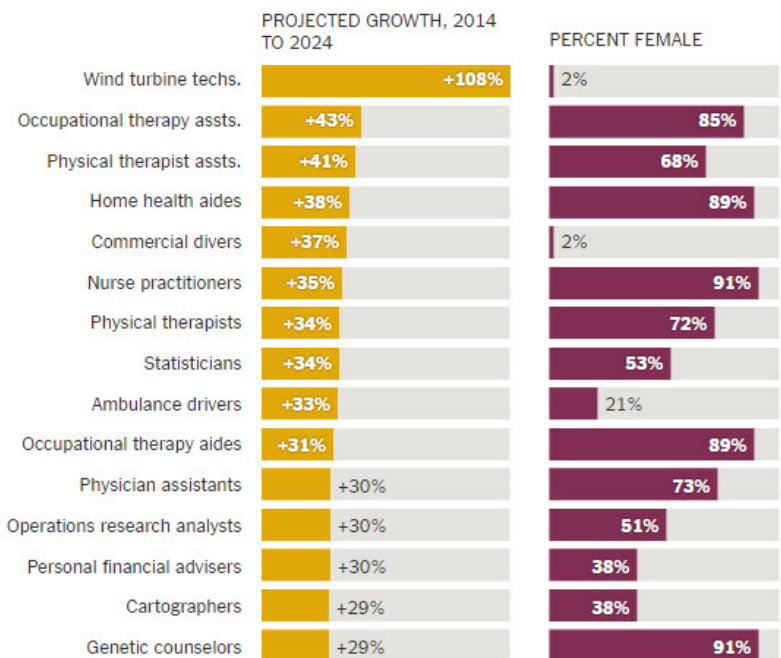
Job-search company, Textio, found that job descriptions for home health aide positions tended to use 'feminine' keywords like 'sympathetic' and 'empathy' while jobs for cartographers used 'masculine' terms like 'forces,' 'exceptional,' and 'superior.'

Recruiters are discovering that revising these phrases to be more gender neutral affects the relative percentage of men and women applying for jobs.

How can we encourage more women to enter the manufacturing sector?

Women Are Gaining Jobs; Men Are Losing Them

With a few exceptions, the fastest-growing jobs are predominantly female, while the fastest-declining ones are mostly male.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



Iris Wenger at OneLogin

Unfortunately, antagonism toward women working in manufacturing and high-tech industries is a reality.

If you need a reminder of that, think back a couple years to the case of Isis Wenger, a young female engineer working at OneLogin, who was featured in a recruiting advertisement. Her photo set off a firestorm in social media, where people questioned (presumably on appearances alone) whether she could be a real engineer or not.

A survey by Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute found that over half of the women surveyed think there is a perception that the manufacturing industry culture was biased toward men — and this is the primary reason women are underrepresented in manufacturing.

The survey found other barriers to women choosing a career in the manufacturing sector as well:

Many women are looking for flexible work practices which would allow them a better work/life balance.

The manufacturing industry has lagged in this area, but it needs to catch up.

Women want customized learning and development programs, (such as continuing education) to help improve their skills and help them advance in their career.

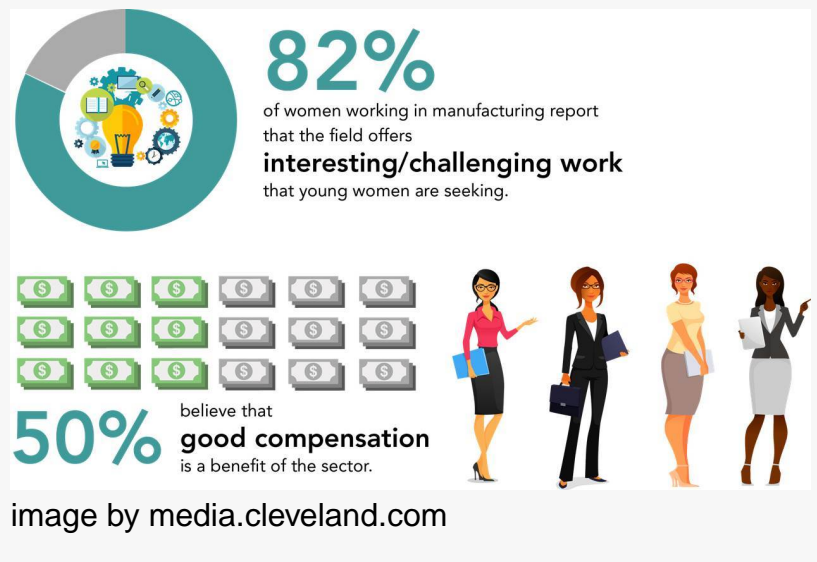
Unfortunately, the manufacturing industry overall does not have a good track record in promoting women to higher positions.

Women place a lot of value on the visibility of key leaders (e.g. are there women holding top positions) as well as the need for career guidance, such as mentorship and sponsorship programs when making career decisions.

As a result, manufacturing companies wanting to hire more women will need to step up their mentoring and sponsorship programs to compensate for the relative few number of women in the top ranks of manufacturing companies.



Mary T. Barra - CEO of General Motors - image by LinkedIn



What can be done to encourage more women to join the manufacturing workforce?

Read more ... https://formaspace.com/articles/industrial-furniture/women-in-manufacturing/?utm_source=einpresswire&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=article-013017

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