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One doesn't need to be especially creative or innovative to come up with great new ideas, just smart enough to listen to creative people and collect ideas from experts.

In this spirit, the OWIC Executive Innovation Brief summarizes thinking from global innovation experts that we feel have application for forest industry companies.

In addition, each Brief includes insights from a group of advisors, listed below.

Executive Brief Advisors

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OWIC EXECUTIVE INNOVATION BRIEF

Enhancing Innovativeness Through Attracting More Women into Your Workforce

Untapped resource, how manufacturers can attract, retain, and advance talented women by C.A. Giffi and J. McNelly. A publication of Deloitte LLP and The Manufacturing Institute. 2013.

Summary by: Eric Hansen, Eric.Hansen@oregonstate.edu

Employment in US manufacturing, including companies in the forest sector, tends to be predominantly male. The innovation literature shows that gender diversity increases firm innovativeness and innovativeness positively impacts firm performance. Given the generational transition taking place in many forest industry companies, now is the time to proactively attract talented females into your workplaces (from the mill floor to the executive suite) and utilize that diversity in background and thinking in your innovation efforts.

Giffi and McNelly provide an overview of women in the US manufacturing workforce, describing how they are underrepresented. They argue that more women in the workforce can contribute to increased competitiveness and cite research showing companies with diverse leadership are more profitable. They present results of a study involving over 600 women in US manufacturing firms and provide a roadmap for how to increase the proportion of women in the workforce.

Women represent nearly half of the US workforce, yet make up only 25% of the manufacturing workforce. This translates to a large talent pool that is growing since women earn over half of the advanced degrees granted in the US. Why are women underrepresented in the manufacturing workforce? Over half of respondents suggest the main driver is perceptions of a male-favored culture. In contrast, the next factor contributing to underrepresentation of women was lack of opportunities/roles, but only 15% of respondents felt this was an issue. When asked whether they would recommend a career in manufacturing to a close relative, respondents were nearly 30% more likely to recommend manufacturing to a male relative than female.

Respondents in the study identified compensation, opportunities for challenging assignments, and the global nature of the industry as the three aspects that make a career in manufacturing most attractive. Over half of respondents indicated that if starting their career again, they would choose a job in manufacturing. The two most important issues when considering a job opportunity were work-life balance and compensation. Related to this, the authors asked respondents about talent initiatives offered by their employers. The initiatives identified as having the most impact were flexible work practices, customized learning and development programs, and providing role models.

Given the evidence, the authors suggest that the companies that proactively attract, retain, and advance women into positions of leadership, "may hold the key to recharging their company and their industry." Accordingly, they suggest six strategies for making this happen.

Start at the top: Cultures change based on the attitudes and actions of top leadership. Does your company have diversity and inclusion goals? Does your leadership promote these goals and regularly report to the organization on progress? When the entire employee base can see priorities from leadership, the culture will begin to evolve.

Address gender bias head-on: Research shows that unintended bias can be problematic even when intentions are progressive and positive. The authors encourage "targeted awareness training" to combat unintended and unconscious biases.

Create a more flexible work environment: The authors describe shifting from a presence-driven culture to a results-driven culture and developing customized career paths as mechanisms for increased flexibility.

Foster sponsorship: Sponsorship (mentorship) can be a powerful tool for advancing any employee into leadership positions. Consider a sponsorship program where the sponsor takes responsibility for advocating for the individual and helping them strategize how to most effectively climb the company ladder.

Promote personal development: The authors outline several mechanisms for enhancing personal development. Effectively communicating what the skills and expertise required for specific positions gives employees a target. Identify talent with the most potential and engage those people in self-assessments against requirements for next-level positions so they know where development is most needed.

Build a strong employer brand: The authors outline a number of efforts that can enhance your brand with potential employees. Improve your efforts to recruit women by involving current female employees in recruiting efforts. For example, when you send employees to the 2015 [OWIC Innovation Days](#), make sure you send one or more female employees.

Many of the principles outlined above are true for any employee in your company. However, if you want to enhance gender diversity and reap the potential innovation benefits, extra effort is needed. Respondents in the study found it difficult to describe ongoing efforts within their companies to attract women to the workforce. **Stop and ponder a bit asking yourself, what could my company gain by proactively engaging more women in workforce and how can we do it?**