

Women of Industry

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Women are running Fortune 500 companies. They're writing Supreme Court decisions. And some are your biggest competitors. Despite the increased role of women in the business world — and the door industry — we talked to six female garage-door industry professionals who say they still face setbacks when it comes to being treated equally. It seems that while people may recognize the value of women as a consumer group, many have yet to accept the power of women as their supervisors and colleagues.

For the members of our panel, it's not just about getting a foot in the door, it's also about proving they deserve to be here — especially in an industry often referred to as a "good ole boys club." These leaders — from both the dealership and manufacturer side of the business — have earned the respect of an industry flooded with men through their hard work, good humor, patience and creativity — little by little, every day.

Without Further Ado, The PDD Women's Panel

Cathy Wempe, Vice President of Sales and Marketing AE Door and Window Sales Inc., Cincinnati

Wempe celebrates her 20th year in the industry and with AE Door this year. She started there as a receptionist and worked her way through many positions, learning all aspects of the business from phones to billing. Wempe excelled as scheduling manager, where she was in charge of 40 trucks and more than 50 installers. Her hard work earned her a promotion to vice president of sales and marketing in 2007. She now reports to and works directly with the company's owner.

Women make up approximately 25 percent of the employee pool at AE Door.

Kriste LaMay, President Brotten Garage Door & Gate, Pompano Beach, Fla.

LaMay boasts 23 consecutive years in the industry. In 1976, she began working at Brotten under her parents, who owned the company at the time. After two years, LaMay chose to leave the family business to gain more knowledge and experience, but in 1985 she felt it was time to return.

LaMay was the first female to sit on the Clopay Dealer Advisory Board, serving there from 2002-2005. She also served on Clopay's Windcode Advisory Board and is one of only a handful of women who have achieved IDEA accreditation.

Women make up approximately 20 percent of the employee pool at Brotten.

Allison Mancuso, Vice President Penn Central Spring Corp., Middletown, Pa.

After 13 years managing a restaurant owned by Barry Pagliaro Sr., a founding partner in Penn Central, Mancuso was unexpectedly thrust into the door industry, when Pagliaro chose to sell the restaurant and work full-time at Penn Central. He offered Mancuso the position of vice president, and in February 2004, she began her education in the industry. Throwing out the old accounting ledger book and typewriter, Mancuso helped computerize the filing system, bought new manufacturing equipment, started an advertising campaign and moved the company to a much larger facility.

Women make up approximately 25 percent of the employee pool at Penn Central Spring.

Jana Boswell, President Overhead Door Co. of Bowling Green, Bowling Green, Ky.

Boswell began working in the building-supply industry selling windows, doors and millwork at the age of 17. By 19, she was purchasing stock in the company for which she worked, and by the time she was 21, she had purchased Overhead Door Co. Boswell is in her 27th year in the industry.

Women make up approximately 12 percent of the employee pool at Overhead Door Co. of Bowling Green.

Pat Lohse, Vice President of Dealer Residential Marketing Clopay Building Products Co., Mason, Ohio

Lohse joined Clopay in 1986 as a commercial product manager. Before that, she spent six years as a product manager for Nalco Chemical Co., a manufacturer of raw and waste-water treatment chemicals. Her time at Nalco taught her the importance of understanding the issues and challenges in any industry and providing innovative, profitable solutions to address market needs — a talent she's used extensively during her 22 years at Clopay.

Women make up approximately 40 percent of the employee pool at Clopay.

Flossie Mohler, Director of Market Development Miller Edge, Tempe, Ariz.

Mohler was "born into the business" as it was her father whom founded Miller Edge. She officially joined the company a few years after graduating from college. As a typical 20-something, Mohler says she decided the company didn't know anything about marketing or computer systems and decided to "fix it all." After 20 years, she is still there. Mohler took a four-year sabbatical from the family business to open and run a microbrewery restaurant, but later returned to Miller Edge to learn more about the dealer side of the business.

Women make up approximately 33 percent of the employee pool at Miller Edge.

"Yes, I Work ... Seriously"

Working in an industry brimming with male clients and co-workers means facing stereotypes everyday.

"Until a customer knows your track record, it is often hard to be taken seriously," says Boswell. "It takes a new client a while to look past gender and on to the fact you know what you are doing and to realize that you must be effective at it or else you wouldn't be in the league that you are."

That's a common predicament, says Anne Houlihan, president of Satori Seal and business consultant. Houlihan has consulted many businesswomen in male-dominated industries such as her own. "The biggest challenge women face today is proving that they are capable of handling their positions," she notes. "A common misconception is that women are not as adept at problem-solving or that they're not as good at influencing others — especially in comparison to men."

Mancuso is all too familiar with that stereotype. "Old habits die hard, and if a client is used to talking to a male about a technical question, it's hard to accept the same answer from a female," she says.

One way around this generalization? Know your stuff, Lohse advises, "That's the easiest way to gain respect from both co-workers and customers." For her, gender has actually been an advantage as her company jumped on the nesting trend that emerged in the late '90s and went to work transforming garage-door design.

The biggest test in patience for these women may be at trade shows and networking events. Female leaders in the industry are so atypical that they're often mistaken as the wives of dealers and salesmen. "After participating as a speaker at an industry event, I had a gentlemen come up to me and say, 'I have to apologize to you. I had no idea you really knew anything about the business. I just assumed you were somebody's arm candy,'" LaMay recalls. "I took that as a compliment."

And according to Houlihan, LaMay has the right attitude. "Women just need to remain confident, and they need to show that they have the expertise and experience."

That's exactly how Mancuso handled a doubtful booth visitor recently at the 2008 IDA Expo. When a potential customer approached her, but then asked her male colleague a technical question, Mancuso's counterpart set the man straight. "He listened to the question then proceeded to direct the gentleman back in my direction by saying, 'I am sorry, sir, but the person you need to speak to is standing directly behind you,'" she remembers. The shock was evident on the man's face, but Mancuso answered him with a big smile. "My co-workers said they were waiting for the other shoe to drop, but I took it all in stride."

There's Work, Then There's Paid Work

Having it all never meant having to do so much. Creating a healthy work-life balance can be a daunting task for any woman, and the women in PDD's panel (all of whom have children) are no different. So, how *do* they do it, anyway?

Boswell, who has two children aged 10 and 14, says her family puts God first — and that helps her achieve balance.

Mancuso, who has three children who range in age from 3 to 13, says she feels lucky to have a supportive husband and a caring supervisor. "As far as balance, I am blessed with a very hands-on husband, who also works full time; a boss whom I have adopted as family; and the ability to prioritize."

LaMay also says her family helps her with the struggles of doing it all. "I have two children, ages 16 and 12, and it has always been a challenge to balance work and family life," she notes. "I have a very supportive family, and between my husband and parents I have had the help I needed to find balance."

Survive and Thrive

These women do more than survive in this industry — they thrive in it. And that takes stepping outside of themselves to see the bigger, asexual picture.

“Nothing is personal — it’s just business,” Wempe says. “Once you realize that, it’s not so tough.”

LaMay agrees: “I don’t let the fact that I’m a female make a difference to me,” she says. “I believe in myself, my gifts, talents and my abilities.”

“I am fiercely competitive by nature and feel that the best person for the job will succeed, regardless of gender,” says Boswell. “You just have to be strong and confident; never intimidated by being a woman.”

The key to survival can also mean admitting when you need help and keeping a good sense of humor, Mancuso adds. “Being able to admit you don’t know the answer is a good survival tool; but you must also be proactive by contacting people who *do*,” she explains. “In contrast, if you do know the answer, have enough faith in yourself to pass on the knowledge.”

Houlihan recommends staying confident, no matter what. “Women innovate, challenge, create, integrate and raise standards — and can ultimately change lives,” she says. “But much of their success depends on their own level of confidence.”

Mancuso admits it’s been a measured process, but she’s moving forward nonetheless. “I am making progress and proving myself to be adept at the task at hand,” Mancuso says. “Some customers now refer to me as ‘The Wiz.’ Now that is an accomplishment!”

Why Do They Do It?

The unique challenges faced by the women in our panel beg the question, “Why do they do it?” In short, for the same reason as everyone else in the industry: It’s what they were meant to do.

“I love it,” Mancuso exclaims. “Every day is fresh and challenging, and I learn something every day that I can carry with me. I work with a great bunch of people, and there is a lot of laughter around the shop.”

Enjoying what you do is important to Lohse, too. “Personally, I enjoy what I do and approach it with a positive attitude,” she says. “Many aspects of my job are fun and when you view your customers as friends, whose best interest you take to heart, the long hours are more meaningful.”

According to Houlihan, women also have more support and peers in male-dominated industries than in the past to encourage them to push forward. “The opportunities for women to lead and influence now are greater than ever before.”

For Mohler, it’s also about making a difference. “I get great satisfaction from knowing that our products help save lives and help guarantee quality of life,” she says. “We never hear in the news about the accident that *didn’t* happen or the dealer that *didn’t* lose his business in a lawsuit because our product was installed, but I know it happens. I’ll always remember a phone call I received from a hangar-door manufacturer who said, ‘We saved the fuselage of a plane today!’”

As LaMay explains, it’s passion that keeps her in the door business. “I am extremely proud of our company, of all of those who work alongside me and of the reputation we have earned and continue to work hard every day to earn.”

Women of Industry Sidebar:

Role Models, Please

“Women tell me they often feel little support from other women and they want mentors,” says Nancy O’Reilly, a clinical psychologist with a background in corporate business. “It really helps to have support.” We asked our panelists to tell us about their role models.

LaMay: My mother and father have both been tremendous role models to me. They have given me much guidance and wisdom over the years, and their examples are with me always.

Wempe: Her name is Kriste LaMay from Broten Door out of Florida. I have learned a lot from her.

Mancuso: I try to surround myself with people I admire and would like to emulate: my boss for being self-made, a teacher, tough, detail-oriented and able to give praise along with criticism; my best friend for her strength, intelligence and tenacity; and my husband for saying exactly what is on his mind and being a great dad.

Lohse: I admire my parents for providing me with solid core-values, a sense of humor and the ability to balance life. Within the industry, I admired Tom Cordonnier, who passed away a number of years ago. When I was first hired, Tom took me under his wing and was a mentor to me and many in the industry. He was a very special person.

Mohler: My role model is my dad. He's taught me that no obstacle is too great to conquer and that education is a never-ending quest. Through him, I have also learned to always treat people equally. There are going to be times in life when we can claim to be the minority or the underdog, but those thoughts are really just counter-productive excuses.

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