

Breaking barriers

How to overcome adversity in a male-dominated industry

Recent market research findings suggest that women globally fill less than 20 percent of executive-level positions within the transportation and logistics industry.

However, as more and more women enter into logistics careers, they are increasingly challenging the prevailing gender imbalances historically seen in the industry.

“Every industry has its own individual idiosyncrasies, and I have found logistics to be an extremely male-dominated field,” said Sheri Wozniak, director of accounting services for AIT Worldwide Logistics, Inc. “While bridging the gender gap to challenge those existing attitudes is still a significant concern for women working in this industry, I also believe that it has served as one of the catalysts to their career success.”

Smart Business spoke with Wozniak about how women can become leaders in logistics.



Sheri Wozniak
Director of accounting services
AIT Worldwide Logistics, Inc.

What motivates you to overcome adversity in the logistics industry?

As a woman, you have to work extremely hard to earn respect and recognition in order to break down many of the barriers with which women contend in today's logistics business environment. From the moment you walk through the door, your strength of character and convictions are put to the ultimate test. While these barriers could absolutely be considered a detriment, I consider them an advantage, particularly from a motivational standpoint.

In the face of the so-called boys' club aspect of this business, women take many arrows and face countless roadblocks in their personal quest for success. It is a constant daily challenge to maintain the respect you've worked so hard to earn while continuing to ensure your ideas and opinions are heard, honored and valued.

Dodging those business hurdles and challenging the adversity quickly becomes the driving force behind your success — they ignite the fire within you to deliver results, prove the naysayers wrong and elevate your career to new heights.

What are some of the unique characteristics displayed by women who have gone into logistics?

It's incredibly important for women in the logistics field to be forward-thinking,

visionary, driven, tenacious, assertive and goal-oriented. They should have an insatiable appetite for challenges and focus on the big picture rather than getting caught up in the day-to-day minutia.

Above all else, women in logistics must be self-motivating. Rather than looking for outside validation, glowing accolades and the proverbial pat on the back from their peers, colleagues and male counterparts, they should focus on finding job fulfillment within themselves.

You learn very quickly in this business that in order to find true career contentment, you opt to be your own advocate — instead of basing your career accomplishments solely on external forces, identify what motivates you internally and then make it happen. Don't lose sight of the fact that it's entirely up to you to make every day count — this responsibility is yours and yours alone.

Unfortunately, the glass-ceiling concept has not vanished from our business. Women still struggle in trying to land leadership positions within the highest ranks of logistics organizations, where the disparity between men and women is most often seen. However, more and more women are employing and asserting these attributes, and recent years

have definitely seen signs of progress in making the logistics field more gender equitable.

This industry offers a variety of careers that are tremendously rewarding for women — there is no reason why they should be discouraged from pursuing their ambitions in logistics professions.

Discuss striking a balance between maintaining a career and raising a family.

It is extremely important to keep life in perspective in trying to strike and maintain a balance between work mode and family mode. When you are wearing multiple hats and taking on various roles — working professional, wife and mother — you cannot forget to take a deep breath, relax and embrace each day as a new challenge.

Work can absolutely be an obsession and a passion, but when the doors close behind you at the end of the day and as you race to get dinner on the table or drive your daughter to gymnastics, it's crucial to redirect your energy and enthusiasm to the needs of your family.

No matter what the challenge, at home or at work, it's important to take things head-on while keeping the issues in proper perspective.

Let's face it, none of us is superhuman — we can't manage the dual responsibilities without a support system, both at home and in the workplace. Establishing a healthy balance between your home life and work life is a juggling act that indeed takes sacrifices — but not ones that mean giving up either life entirely.

As a woman, you sometimes feel as though you have to make a choice between the two. The reality is that the issue isn't so black and white — women in the logistics industry can balance their work and home lives and still flourish in their jobs. It is successfully being done by millions of women each and every day. <<

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