

The female point of view

Women in Logistics survey results

By Deborah Aarts

Listen up, logistics professionals: the ladies have spoken.

Earlier this year, the Women in Logistics (WIL) initiative took to life as a workforce development strategy with a series of launch events across the country. The purpose of WIL is to raise the profile of women working in the industry through training, networking and heightened awareness. At each event, attendees—some 600 in total—participated in facilitated feedback sessions to discuss the top issues affecting women working in the sector in Canada.

The results—corroborated and released in the summer—present a snapshot of the challenges, opportunities and experiences of women in the biz. Verbatim comments gathered in the process differ greatly—from “I love working with suppliers and making things happen” to “Females are passed over for management positions” to “[There is a] lack of female role models”—but certain responses arose time and again.

The right skills, know-how, competencies and training are key to a flourishing career. But of the tools needed to succeed in their jobs, the respondents listed leadership, communication, organizational, business and change management skills ahead of more traditional technical capabilities.

Ruth Snowden, a leader on the WIL task force, sat down with *MM&D* to analyse the common threads. “To me, this says that women are looking for soft skills and leadership skills,” Snowden says. “We seem to have the technical competency to perform our functional responsibilities. This is about how we get to the next level.”

Job engagement was also addressed in the surveys. According to the responses, the main factors keeping women excited about their jobs were the challenge, change, diversity and future career opportunities in the logistics workplace. “When you look at the motivators, we’re looking for the excitement of the challenge, something to keep us inter-

ested,” she says. “We don’t like boring repetition.”

When it comes to the on-the-job issues that keep them up nights, worries about workload, staff and career advancements topped the list. But one commonly referred-to fret—the fear of making mistakes on the job—stands out to Snowden. “That can be a real barrier to progression,” she explains. “It has to do with risk-taking, and the kinds of fears that we have that preclude us from breaking through the glass ceiling.”

Another question asked about the enablers to a healthy career in logistics. Good colleagues, determination, education and support for ideas were each high on the list, but the topper was mentor support and guidance. Mentorship programs, Snowden says, are something the WIL hopes to investigate and perhaps facilitate.

“It takes a lot of resources, a lot of dedication. But we have really excellent senior women [on the task force] who would be great at mentoring.”

On the flipside, respondents listed a number of barriers to career success they’ve faced. Gender discrimination, the work/life balance and poor managers came through above all else. The first two came as no surprise to Snowden, but she is especially concerned that bad management was such a problem for so many—especially with mentorship being so prized.

So what’s next? WIL is using the feedback from the launch events to help craft its future initiatives. This fall, it is hosting motivational seminars known as the “W! Power Series”. It recently named Heather Cartwright of Logixsource Consulting Ltd as its new chair. Down the line, Snowden says it aims to be both a program facilitator and a resource centre. While things are changing for females in the industry—just this summer, for example, a new US-based organization called Women in Trucking topped 500 members after just six months in existence—men still make up the bulk of the workforce. With this fact, Snowden says, the WIL’s work is coming not a moment too soon.