

Shop talk: Conference addresses women in industry

by **Tonia Jurbin**

Approximately 250 delegates from across Canada, parts of the U.S. and Sweden attended the *New Frontiers, New Traditions* conference held in St. Johns, Nfld. in July. The conference was the eighth in the series of combined CCWEST (Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering Science and Technology) conferences.

CCWEST is a collection of organizations that share research and practical information on keeping girls in science, attracting young women into engineering professions, recruiting and retaining women in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions. The purpose of the conference was to explore issues affecting women in the workplace, discuss current projects that promote STEM professions, develop professional skills, and cultivate business and support networks. The diversity of the sessions and workshops were reflected by the diversity of the delegates. The majority of delegates were practicing engineers—like myself—and scientists from all disciplines.

Most women in the STEM professions work in isolation, rarely interacting with their peers. “We’re like raisins in a cookie,” one



Tonia Jurbin

of my colleagues says. “We know there are other raisins out there, we just can’t touch them.”

Some companies have had a lot of success in recruiting and retaining women, although none were bragging about their numbers of women executives. Some of the family friendly benefits that are being offered are job sharing, telecommuting, flexible hours, employee assistance plans, maternity leave top up pay, adoption assistance, on-site day care and gyms. Other companies have implemented dual hiring (hiring spouses), nursing rooms, paternal leave, and self funded sabbaticals. Family friendly policies are great, but are they enough? The difference, it seems, is in how the CEO’s and presidents promote diversity as a business strategy.

Some company executives—through memos, newsletters and e-mails—are explaining the importance of gender diversity to their business strategies and the tangible measures that will be taken to achieve it. Policies include setting quotas, planning successions, identifying women with advancement potential, creating specific development opportunities and tying a manager’s performance increase to their contributions to gender diversity.

Schlumberger, a U.S. oil and gas company operating in 100

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Ahead of the game

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countries with approximately 56,000 employees, has gone further than most in setting goals. "Schlumberger is a very goal orientated company. In the 1980's it committed to ethnic diversity, set goals and met them," explains Liese Borden, the company's Diversity & Dual Career manager. "I think the goals that we have set for women in various positions by 2005 are going to be very hard to meet."

Unlike Schlumberger, Chevron decided against setting quotes because of the negative reaction—Borden reports that one of her male colleagues had quit over the target setting policies at Schlumberger. Chevron's most successful strategy has been to tie increases to contributions to gender diversity.

"Succession planning is good. Quotas are bad," says Deb Provias of Chevron, a senior engineer who has been actively promoting gender diversity. "The fact is that the biggest barriers to gender diversity are also the hardest to overcome. Mobility is a fact of life in the oil and gas industry and promoting diversity against other critical business issues can be difficult."

During the Women in Senior Management workshop, Kathy Sendall, vice president of Engineering and Technology for Petro-Canada—the most senior woman in the gas and oil industry in Canada—offered her tips and observations: Find a good and powerful male mentor, you must accept that if there is a women in senior management it is because some man has opened the door for her to be there. Network externally, it will build your reputation internally. Learn how to be a powerful communicator including how to work a room, dress, speak, write a thank you note, conduct a business lunch, and bone up on your manners and etiquette. If you think your image is not what it should be than get help. Get a lot of operational experience in your early years and volunteer for high profile assignments—your goal is to be noticed by managers at least one or two levels above you.

"Stick to your principles and most importantly, keep your sense of humor," Leslie Gratten, Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection in Newfoundland added.

All of the women who I heard speak were

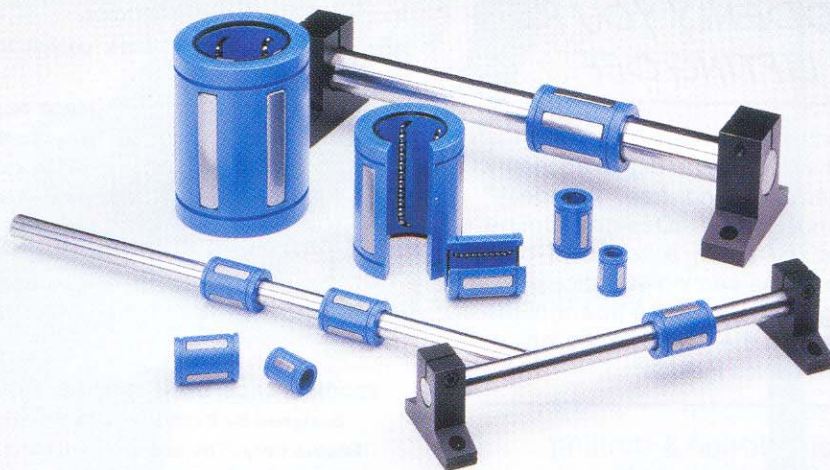
exceptional, dynamic, smart and sharp. Many of the executive level women spoke of the huge time commitments and how support in their personal lives allowed them to pursue fulfilling careers. On the floor I heard from many more women who knew that their families were holding them back.

It seems doubtful that I will become a senior manager in the near future because I want some of those long hours for myself. I have made peace with my compromise.

I don't believe you can have it all. I don't even want it all. What I do want is the choice. **16**

Jurbin is a geotechnical engineer living in Burnaby, B.C.

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