

Speaker 1 00:00:05 Welcome to the Clear Impact Podcast brought to you by PGTI University. Thanks for joining us today. My name is Sherri Connor, and I am your host.

Speaker 2 00:00:18 Yeah. You know, sometimes it can be a little challenging when you're a confident woman. People misunderstand that and think that, you know, maybe you're arrogant or aggressive. And, you know, they don't take that confidence as you're confident because you know what you're talking about...

Speaker 1 00:00:34 Being a female in a male dominated environment can be tricky. Debbie Lapinska joins us today. As we discuss how to overcome doubts that our male counterparts may have when dealing with women in the workplace. We also talk about the importance of having mentors who help guide us down the path less traveled. Leading ladies, a collaborative platform here at PGTI also gets a shout out as we strive to level the playing field for women in manufacturing and in leadership.

Good morning, we are here on the Clear Impact Podcast and we are chatting with Debbie Lapinska, our Chief Human Resource Officer. Welcome Debbie.

Speaker 2 00:01:09 Thank you, Sherri. I'm glad to be here.

Speaker 1 00:01:10 I'm glad to have you. So we're going to dive into a topic that may not be for everyone, but I think it's an important topic and that is breaking the glass ceiling. And Debbie, you hold a pretty high position here in this organization, which is on track to do a billion dollars in sales this year. And I just want to talk about the fact that we're in a manufacturing environment, which is largely male dominated and you're on the C level, which is also male dominated. And so it seems like a natural fit to have this conversation with you. So I wanted to ask, and you've been here for 30 years,

Speaker 2 00:01:46 30 years this month.

Speaker 1 00:01:48 Wow. That's amazing. I hope it doesn't take everyone that long. Oh, it shouldn't.

Speaker 2 00:01:53 And my goal is that it shouldn't. Right, right.

Speaker 1 00:01:56 So what are some of the pros and cons of being a female in a male dominated field?

Speaker 2 00:02:02 Well, it's an interesting, I don't experience it as much now because I feel very thankful and blessed that, you know, I work with a CEO and I work with, you know, my peers who really respect you for what you bring to the table, right? So your knowledge, your experience than just, you know, your values. But I would say when, you know, I was starting my career, um, being in, uh, building products, you know, tied to construction, it was not, and still is probably not very female oriented. We're seeing some changes. I'm really excited about the number of female sales representatives and sales leaders that we have in our organization. But back when I started, that wasn't the case. I was the first, um, I think for our company to be a vice-president of sales and marketing and be a female. So what I had to overcome a lot of times in dealing with some of our customers, which our customers were predominantly, you know, male owners, male clients was, "Well, you're a female.

Speaker 2 00:02:56 You can't possibly know the technology I'm talking about. I mean, this is construction, right?" And so I learned very quickly that the only way I was going to win that war was to be smarter than them because it is, you know, highly technical from a code perspective, you know, the

products, it's just a lot of information to know. I had to make sure that when they called and asked a question, I knew the answer. Or if I didn't know the answer, I knew where to get the answer and get it very quickly. So, you know, over time, I just demonstrated that I was credible and that I knew what I was talking about. And so it didn't matter whether I was male or female, that I was just somebody that actually knew my product, knew our company very well. What then led to, when you step into a leadership role and you have to make those tough decisions where you might have to tell someone, no, the response was, well, let me talk to your boss.

Speaker 2 00:03:42 Well, I am the boss. Ah, so you are talking to the boss and the answer is no because of this. Right. And have to walk people through. And again, credible, factual, knowledgeable, overcomes, whether you're male or female. Right? And so that I think is the advice I'd give to anybody is, you know, forget about the whole male female thing. Think about how important it is for you to earn and gain the trust and respect of whoever you're dealing with. And the way you do that is know what you're talking about. Don't guess, don't assume, be factual, be empathetic and compassionate, because that's what women do bring to the dynamics of our society, but then follow through on your commitments. And over time, you really see the transition that you make, and people, and how much they respect you, and then view you as a credible source, regardless of whether you're male or female.

Speaker 1 00:04:34 That's great. So that kind of ties in with the question I was going to ask you, which is what advice would you have for women working in a male dominated field? Just know your stuff. Yeah. Yeah. So we're not going to play the game. I'm going to bat my eyelashes and you're gonna, you know, be swept away by my charm and looks, but we're going to do business together because I know what I'm talking about. And you need someone who knows what they're talking about.

Speaker 2 00:04:56 Yeah. You know, sometimes it can be a little challenging when you're a confident woman, people misunderstand that, and think that, you know, maybe you're arrogant or aggressive. And you know, don't take that confidence as you're confident because you know what you're talking about. And you're also going to speak up about what you feel and you think is right. Or you disagree with. And sometimes some people struggle with that. And so, you know, you shouldn't back down. The other advice I'd give is you really, as a good communicator, really need to know your audience. And so you may talk to one person this way, but the next person, same message, same information, same issue, different message. Because you got to understand the type of communication style that that individual has. So for someone who's very action-oriented and needs things done quickly, you have to respond that way when you come back to them, right.

Speaker 2 00:05:44 Somebody who needs more detail and facts before they can make a decision? So if you're in sales and you're trying to get someone to buy your product, well, the customer that's very action oriented, you just gotta give them everything right up front and tell them, okay, and you'll have it tomorrow, whatever it is, right. The other customer, who's a little bit more factual, you might have to say, okay, well this is the data, here's the market information, here's how our product portfolio lines up. And you've got to walk them through the decision-making process. So again, it's so important to understand your audience and be able to shift your style, to meet the needs of the person you're communicating with.

Speaker 1 00:06:18 So that kind of lines up nicely with the women's intuition, because generally speaking, not, not all women, but most of the time, women are a little bit more sensitive to that. And we can kind of pick up on that more so than a typical man. I don't want to stereotype, but it's kind of hard

not to when we're having a conversation around these topics. So yeah, I think just being aware of communication styles, and knowing what people need and being able to read them and using that intuition to leverage that a little bit. Exactly, it gives us an upper hand. That's right. That's right.

So here's a fun topic, because I know we do have a few women owned dealerships. And so what advice would you have for a man who reports to a woman? I mean, let's face it, most of the guys that are married kind of report to a woman, which is their wife, but in a work situation, that's not always very commonplace. And so what advice would you have for a man who is reporting to a female?

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Speaker 1 00:07:29 And so what advice would you have for a man who is reporting to a female?

Speaker 2 00:07:33 Well, I think, you know, again, any relationship, the best thing you can do is really seek to understand the person you're trying to develop a relationship with. And, you know, again, not to stereotype, it does seem to be a little bit more challenging for our male counterparts. Because sometimes they can be a little impatient, so they just want everything to happen, fast and relationships and how you interact with people takes time. You know, listen very carefully, pay attention to body language and different signals and cues. I mean, you can read people just by changes in their facial expression, right. Or the way they shift in their seat. And so I think for a male, since that's not sometimes their strength, that's what they really need to focus on. It's that emotional intelligence that doesn't maybe come naturally and there's plenty of great books and, um, different articles that you can read to help gain more of that insight. But I would say that that's probably the one area that I think our male counterparts could learn from.

Speaker 1 00:08:30 That's great advice. And I know there are a lot of societies that are more female oriented and female leaderships, and I'm, I'm very impressed with how it's spread out amongst the organization. That there's just as many women on the production line as there are guys, and we might be limited in our physical capacities, but we're trying to alleviate some of that heavy labor, heavy lifting anyway. So, you know, the playing field should be equal and you know, why not?

Speaker 2 00:08:54 Absolutely. It should be based on what your knowledge and skill is.

Speaker 1 00:08:57 That's it. I love that we have an organization here called Leading Ladies. Tell us a little bit about that. What is leading ladies here at PGT?

Speaker 2 00:09:05 Sure. I'm glad you brought that up. It's um, something that I'm really passionate about, but again, this helps really, I guess, help others understand the importance of what Jeff's vision is for the organization, and why women in leadership, especially in manufacturing is so important to him. So, you know, Jeff came to me several years ago and we were talking about his daughters, and how important it was for him that his daughters have opportunity to do and be whoever they want to be regardless. Right. So he's always taught them that. And then he stepped back and he says, you know, as the CEO of this company, I should really be kind of putting my money where my mouth is, in saying, okay, how am I going to help with women in our organization have that same opportunity. And because of the success of my career, he was kind enough to ask me to lead that initiative, which I wholeheartedly jumped on.

Speaker 2 00:09:49 And it's providing women in our organization, the opportunity to network with other women, to be mentored and coached by other women, to grow in their careers. Um, and a lot of times people think that they want to head down one path, but somebody else can see this shining star in them, that help them lead them to a better or another career. So it's an opportunity to really develop the women in our organization while networking. So often I hear from some of the leading ladies, then when we're having our open discussions, they'll say, wow, I thought I was the only one dealing with the situation of, you know, my going to work and my kids are doing this, and I don't know how to balance all this. And then suddenly another leading lady would say, I have that same problem and they would collaborate. So what we want to build out next is the ability to set up some of these small groups, where if you're dealing with that same particular situation, you have a network of, of ladies that you can work through the situation with, or that you can help other ladies deal with that situation because you've all experienced it.

Speaker 2 00:10:48 So that's kind of our next chapter of building out Leading Ladies.

Speaker 1 00:10:51 Oh, that's awesome. So finding people that are in a similar stage of life, like whether they're newly married or maybe newly divorced or have little kids or kids going off to college and how you navigate those different life stages. Because we are people no matter what's happening at home, we still come to work, we're still that same person. And we all want to be able to perform at our best, but sometimes we do need, you know, a good network of people around us to help us navigate those spaces. So that's awesome. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:11:19 It's great. I'm so excited. You know, obviously with last year and COVID, we're not able to meet as regularly as we'd like, so we're, we just relaunched and are re-engaging with the Leading Ladies to get something back on the docket for us to start spreading our influence throughout the organization.

Speaker 1 00:11:35 So if someone is not connected to other women in their particular job, it would be worth it for them to try to find a network of people that they can collaborate with and commiserate with.

Speaker 2 00:11:46 Yeah. We have so many wonderful people in the organization and we have to find a way where we can connect with people and mentor people. Right? I mean, it doesn't, again, this doesn't matter whether you're male or female, you know, I can mentor young professionals that are, are male that are coming up through the organization, just as much as I can a mentor, a female. But it's really helping people talk through what it is that they're trying to achieve in their career. Right. And then put them on the right path. It can be overwhelming at times for some. Sure.

Speaker 1 00:12:17 Especially when you've got things like COVID and yeah.

Speaker 2 00:12:20 COVID has taught us a lot of lessons. Good and bad. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:12:24 Well that's how we learn. That's how we grow. That's right. Awesome. Well, this has been a great conversation, Debbie. I appreciate your time today. Thank you so much. And I'm sure we'll have you back to talk about more stuff another time.

Speaker 2 00:12:35 Thank you. Sherri. I always joy spending time with you. Thank you.

Speaker 1 00:12:38 PGTI University is the customer education team for an entire family of brands. We began with the original Eze-breeze porch enclosure line, then became PGT, America's leading brand of impact resistant windows and doors. We then added CGI, CGIC, WinDoor, Western Windows, New South Windows, and Eco Windows and Doors. We create products built to withstand major storms, keeping people safe, secure, and prepared. Our exceptional brands give you the protection you need without compromising design or functionality. PGTI University is here to educate you, our listener, so that you can be a more informed consumer of window and door products.