



Celebrating Women Leading the Way in Supply Chain

Earlier this month, we sat down with four remarkable women in supply chain and logistics, to talk about opportunities and challenges in the supply chain space and hear how they've paved their path to success in a male-dominated industry. Hear how they are working to make the future of supply chain more equitable for future generations.

In 2021, women comprised 41% of the supply chain workforce. Still, their presence in leadership tells a different story. In 2020, women accounted for 17% of executive roles, [according to a Gartner Survey](#)¹. In 2021, that number dropped to 15%. Additionally, the survey revealed supply chain companies struggled to retain mid-career women who commonly left their roles due to a lack of career development opportunities. There is clearly more work to do to attract and retain female leaders in supply chain. Fortunately, several women are working hard to build a fair and inclusive workplace for all. Let's hear from some of them...

J-Ann Tio, on opportunities for women with passion and confidence



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Do you think the supply chain space is equitable for female leaders?

A: While the supply chain is still a largely male-dominated industry, there has been notable growth in female talent and leadership over the last decade. As technology and data have taken on bigger roles within the industry, we've seen more opportunities and career paths open that attract female talent. I'm incredibly excited to see more female leadership as technology begins to take on an even more integral role in the space.

What do you think are the biggest challenges and/or opportunities for women in this space?

A: While the industry being male dominated is often thought of as a challenge, I see it as an opportunity. Here's my take: Be bold and take a chance—who better to bet on than yourself? Remember you're adding value every day simply by widening your counterparts' perspective, so be confident in your own abilities and experience. People want to hear what you think.

¹Source: http://www.supplychain247.com/article/gartner_survey_finds_women_comprise_41_of_the_supply_chain_workforce/gartner

What's your advice for females just entering the supply chain space?

A: I was once told that if you work hard in this industry, you'll be recognized. That remains true not only in my own career but from what I've witnessed in others who were able to climb or are still climbing. My main advice for anyone who enters into the supply chain space is to take accountability and ownership of your current role. It's the only way others will see the same future you're dreaming of for yourself.

What can female supply chain leaders do to attract more young female talent in this space?

A: Be authentic and accessible. There have been so many careers that are rooted in having the right mentor. Even if you don't see yourself as a mentor, you are. Someone is looking up to you and your role as you once did (or currently do), so encourage and foster the talent that surrounds you.

Padmini Ranganathan, on creating a more equitable and sustainable industry for all



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Do you consider yourself a success in this industry?

A: Yes, I do, especially considering the challenges I've navigated, being the only female on the shop floor in my early career, and later using every opportunity to build strong teams with empathy. I have consistently raised my voice for last-mile workers in the supply chain who are critical yet the most undervalued. I believe we have the opportunity to set a new foundation for the future of supply chain, bringing a systems change to procurement and responsible sourcing, equitable margins, and transparent technologies that promote accountability.

What do you love about your career path?

A: The biggest challenges for women are the same across professions that come with a heavy financial P&L accountability. Both men and women need to be savvy in engineering and sciences, as well as economics, negotiations, and stakeholder engagement. Networking and keeping an eye

on the markets are also equally important. However, supply chain networking events are not well attended by women, which is an opportunity missed.

Why do you love this industry? What lights you up about your role?

A: I have been fortunate to come from a background in cost accounting and factory administration, with a degree in Commerce. This has allowed me to lead and contribute to digitizing many aspects of the physical supply chain over the last 25 years.

Laurie Knape, on the value of learning and mentorship



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What are the biggest challenges and/or opportunities for women in this space?

A: Breaking the bias that women don't understand the mechanisms behind how things work in supply chain is our biggest challenge and opportunity. To elevate our status, we need to sharpen our skills and knowledge of the product within our supply chain network. We need to be able to speak with authority about the valuable work we're doing. With our expertise and superior soft leadership skills, we can successfully develop and manage large supply chain teams.

What lights you up about your role?

A: I love mentoring people. This includes men and women just entering the workforce or those new to the supply chain industry. I believe every leader should share their experiences and lessons—not to influence people's decisions but to give them different perspectives. My mentoring is not limited to co-workers. I also enjoy supporting customers and helping them find solutions.

What's your advice for females just entering the supply chain space?

A: Continue learning, even after you graduate. School is a great starting point, but academic environments don't mimic real-world work environments. So, join professional organizations to continue your education and contribute to your field. Subscribe to publications, industry or regulatory, to stay ahead of the latest trends.

Additionally, seek out a mentor. Mentors can be within your own company or outside your organization. Mentors within your company can guide internal processes, while outside mentors can offer different perspectives. Both are valuable.

What can female supply chain leaders do to attract more young female talent in this space?

A: Women leaders need to promote more opportunities within supply chain. Supply chain is not limited to procurement and prospective contracts, but most women don't realize that. So influential women in this space should work with high schools, colleges, communities, and industry associations to educate people about the vast career development options.

Rachel Escalante, on being a success in a male-dominated industry



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Do you think the supply chain space is equitable for female leaders?

A: In an overwhelmingly male-denominated field, I have been met with reservations at times until people understand my knowledge and skills. That said, I believe the industry is well on its way toward being more equitable as it makes strides to close the gender gap. For example, companies are providing new and innovative initiatives to develop all staff members. As a result, I believe women have the opportunity to tip the scales by taking advantage of professional development opportunities and leading their peers.

Women are not good leaders—they are excellent leaders, and as more and more take on active roles in supply chain, the industry will naturally become more equitable.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for women in this space?

A: Women face challenges in all industries, not just supply chain or logistics. For over a century, American women have fought for equal rights while breaking boundaries on equal pay and advancement opportunities. Still, a key challenge women continue to face is being seen as equal leaders, not simply part of the support team. Attaining leadership roles is both the biggest challenge and opportunity for women.

What can female supply chain leaders do to attract more young female talent in this space?

A: Women have innate skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, negotiation, groupthink, and creativity. These are important when managing multiple teams or suppliers. Women should cultivate and lean into these strengths. Women leaders should mentor, network, and sponsor newcomers to show them the abundant opportunities and unique processes within supply chain.

The Bottom Line

Historically, the female-to-male ratio has not been equitable in supply chain and logistics. Still, that fact has no bearing on success for these pioneering women. Through their leadership, they will continue inspiring women of all professional backgrounds to join this ever-changing, rapidly-growing field. Supply chain transformation now includes redesigning for the circular economy, shared logistics, process innovation, and so much more, and leaves the door open for endless opportunities for women to help shape the future of the industry.

