

Gendered Innovations

[Kathryn Clouse](#)

Sr. Staff Engineer

Kohler Co.

Resources:

- What happens when customer orientation isn't there?
 - Apple example from: [Gendered Innovations Video](#)
 - Addyi story:
 - [Yale School of Medicine](#)
 - [Addyi Website](#)
 - Automotive Crash Testing example: [From Stanford's Gendered Innovations Case Studies](#), citing:
 - Bose, D., & Segui-Gomez, M. (2011). Vulnerability of female drivers involved in motor vehicle crashes: an analysis of US population at risk. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101 (12), 2368–2373.
 - Weiss, H., Songer, T., & Fabio, A. (2001). Fetal Deaths Related to Maternal Injury. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 286 (15), 1863-1868.
 - Eurostat. (2011). Fertility, Figure 1: Number of Live Births, EU-27, Legally Induced Abortions by Year, Country, and Mother's Age, EU-27.
http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_fabort&lang=en
- Increased market growth in the health industry
 - [Rise of Direct to Consumer Precision Health](#)
 - Levanon, G., Anderson, B., Cheng, B., Steemers, F., (2018). The Impact of Demographic Trends on US Consumer Spending (Report No. 1644). Retrieved from The Conference Board website: <https://www.conference-board.org/topics/demographic-trends-consumption>
- Differences in health conditions between men and women:
 - [Depression](#)
 - [Alcohol effects on the body](#)
 - [Heart attack](#)
 - [Coronavirus study](#)
 - [Aging](#)
- [Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men](#)
- Female representation makes a difference:
 - [In Government](#)
 - [In STEM](#)
- [Women Patent Inventors Vs. Women in Science and Engineering Occupations](#)
- [Gendered Innovations – Stanford](#)
- [Kohler Business Resource Groups](#)
- [Kohler Careers](#)

Session Questions and My Answers:

1. How do you deal with when men are sexist at work? Do you call them out or ignore it?

You are your own first line of defense when it comes to this. When it comes to personal safety, if you feel you are physically or mentally threatened, Human Resources really does exist for that reason. Remember that human resources is there to protect the company and they are invested in making sure harassing individuals don't cause harm.

With that said, most of the offending behavior I've experienced in my career has largely been from a place of ignorance, not intention. This is an important differentiator. In situations where someone has said something that has offended you, it is usually best to have a conversation with that person in a one-on-one setting. Stick to the facts and be specific. This is what they did. This is how it made you feel. Most people aren't inherently bad, and so it's important to give them the opportunity to change their behavior.

2. What would you tell a female engineering student entering into college today that you wish you knew when you were here?

I wish I would have known that it is normal for females in the profession to feel like they aren't good enough to be there. I also wish I would have been equipped with tips on how to navigate and feel included and involved:

- Connect with other women in the profession
- Have faith and confidence that you are smart enough/good enough to be an engineer
- Understand that most women leave the field because they subconsciously feel as though they don't belong – not because they don't like the work

Knowledge is power when it comes to these things.

3. How has being a woman in engineering been an advantage and disadvantage?

I realize reading this question that I interpreted it incorrectly when I answered it during the session. I think being a woman in engineering has an advantage because I've grown up in the female culture which focuses on community vs the individual. This is important when having to work on cross-functional teams and gives a leg up in knowing how to be an inspirational leader. I also think bringing the female perspective to a consumer product industry is important because women make between 70-80% of the purchasing decisions in the US and influence up to 90%.

The disadvantage of being a woman in a male dominated field is that you must work twice as hard to receive the same recognition. In the United States, people believe in the concept that choosing the people who get the power/opportunity is done based on their ability (meritocracy). Read any literature on the topic of women in leadership and you will see this is not the case. It's not fair, but it is reality.

4. How can men best support women in engineering fields? As husbands, colleagues, or supervisors

I love this question. Allies are so important for any under-represented group of people. As husbands, know that your wives aren't crazy. What they are experiencing is not in their head. You can't fix their problem for them, but you can give them the listening ear and advice they may need. As colleagues, remember not to default to suggesting the woman in the room is the note-taker. Echo ideas for women in meetings if they make a good suggestion – giving them credit to start (ex: "Barbara, that was a great idea and I'd like to build on it...") If you have a female peer that impresses you, tell people around you. Be their advocate. For leaders – be sure that you are giving women the coaching they need to reach the levels they want. Men often times want to soften their feedback to women – consciously or not. I like to call it "chivalry syndrome". Here's a [great article](#) to talk about this phenomenon and ways to work around it. For those having to get feedback from bosses who are less than great at it, take a look at [this linked in article](#) I wrote on my advice for that. Also, leaders – be your employees' sponsor. Make sure they are getting the stretch opportunity they need to grow. Talk positively about them with your peers. Help build their brand and reputation.

5. How do you successfully balance work life and family life?

In truth, I haven't always done this successfully. At the end of the day, I rely on my strong support network including my husband, family, close friends and close peers at work to keep me honest in this regard. I found that when I surround myself with people who aren't afraid to be open with me, it is the best way for me to be reminded about the things that are important in life. I am a person who pours myself into my work. I usually have one setting and that is "go 110%". There have been times when I had to make a change in my work or in the extra-curriculars I was doing to bring me back into balance.

After having my first child I was diagnosed with anxiety and learned about the importance of self-care in a hard way. To date, I make sure that I am eating healthy, exercising, meditating and going to counseling to actively manage my anxiety and maintain a healthy lifestyle. My family are the most important things in my life and I need to make sure that I continue to be the best possible version of myself for them (and for me). If I can't be that, I'm not enabled to bring my full self to work and kick butt.

6. How do you recommend learning more about the topics that you discussed today?

I hope you found the resources I included above to be helpful in your pursuit of knowledge on the topic. You could also come work with me at Kohler and we could do great things together. 😊

7. How did your MBA shape your engineering prowess? For whom would you recommend the program?

I believe being a business-oriented engineer is important when you aren't going to develop deep into your science. Understanding how engineering plays into the overall strategy of the business helps you make knowledgeable and balanced decisions that impact timeline and budget. If the business isn't making money, you don't have a job. As an engineer, you work in a complex machine with many moving parts. It can be useful to understand the other parts of the machine so when your gear gets jammed – you know what the repercussions are. I don't believe I would have been considered for the Diversity & Inclusion role if I didn't

have my MBA and my business acumen continues to get me invited into more strategic conversations above and beyond what my current position would typically afford. If that's something that sounds interesting to you, I would consider furthering your education in business to some extent.

8. As a female engineering student I often face snarky comments from other male students (ex: "you only got that scholarship/internship cause you're a woman..etc). How do you deal with this?

I once heard a keynote speaker talk about this concept of taking your seat at the table. She was talking about how a women's committee was being put together at her company and this committee would get focused leadership development and executive sponsorship. Women felt awkward about getting the opportunity because "they were women." Here is my interpretation of the message that followed – meritocracy is a myth. Many of the people who hold positions of power today have that power because they started out in life with a head start. It doesn't mean they aren't capable/competent human beings. It just means they got to start a little further down the race track than others. If you want to see a great example of this, [watch this video](#).

As women – we are naturally not starting out with this same head start. Pile on to that if you also aren't straight or white. Take your seat at the table and don't feel bad about it. You being a woman may get you at the table, but it's up to you to make sure you do the work that needs to be done to be worthy of the honor.

9. Is it hard to move up in a company to an executive position as a woman?

This depends on the company. But in general, I would say it takes more effort for a woman to achieve executive ranks than a man. It's a really complex topic, but [this report](#) from Mercer does a good job of diving into the nitty gritty of insights.

One of the challenges that women still face is that their natural strengths of community-oriented nature and making themselves small do not naturally lend themselves well to the stereotypical strengths that we might describe when talking about what it means to be a leader. In fact, it is their social sensibilities that lay the groundwork to give them a leg-up in this approach.

10. How do ideas, initiatives, or issues come out of the Kohler Resource Groups and reach departments or people who could do something with/about them?

It depends on the ideas that we are talking about. But it's all about connecting the groups and supporting them in the right way. Every group has an executive sponsor that is a major influencer within the organization. The executive sponsor for Women@Work within Kitchen and Bath is our President of the company. He represents our initiatives to his superiors up to and including the owners of the company. We also have an avid executive sponsor for diversity, in general, in Laura Kohler who heads Human Resources, Stewardship and Sustainability for Kohler Co.

Then it is up to the members to take the initiative to do the work. They are supported by the business to do it. They connect concepts and ideas with the right people. As an example, the next steps for our gendered innovations work will be to filter through all of the concepts that came out of our workshop, bucket them into the appropriate product categories and

work with the business owners of each of those categories to understand which concepts will fit into our new product schedule.

11. As a female engineer, what actions should I take to improve the diversity and change the toxic culture towards women and minority groups?

In this topic, I find that knowledge is power. I would first start by gaining an understanding of what the challenges are and why they are that way. Network with others who share your perspective to form resource groups (if they don't already exist). Identify areas of improvement within your business or school and work with the appropriate people (sometimes leadership, sometimes human resources, sometimes other employees) to start building programs to start changing the culture.

Change management is an important concept to follow. The first step of change management is to build awareness. Help others understand what the issue is with specific examples and data to back it up. Example – if there is a toxic culture, collect survey responses from other women in the organization to understand what their experience is. When you have that information, bring awareness to it. You have to create the desire to change by gaining leadership buy-in on the topic so that leaders may start incentivizing employees to behave in the way that is expected.

I know those steps ~sound~ easy – but believe me. It can be hard to move past the awareness phase. That's how I would start.

Also – live and behave as an example of what “good” looks like.

12. Women usually have to take on all of the work of making the workplace inclusive. How do we extend this responsibility to everyone?

I'll refrain to my response for number 11. The burden does fall on women and minorities to spearhead these initiatives, but they don't make progress unless you get the buy-in from allies and people in power who can hold the organization accountable to new beliefs and way of behaving.

13. How does Kohler address intersectionality?

It's a great topic and very complex. We have business resource groups that focus on specific demographics of people and often find that those who have intersectionality belong to multiple BRGs. Because BRGs are so new to Kohler Co, there is still room to grow in this way. A great next step for the BRGs would be to collaborate on a higher level and come together a couple of times of the year for overall diversity events to spread awareness. From a recruiting standpoint, we truly value diversity and as such try to identify diverse candidates which is inclusive of those with intersectionality.

14. Any advice on burnout as a female in engineering?

Ugh I hear you there. Connect. Connect. Connect. Find a community to bolster you. For me, it's other women at work, but I also connect via groups on Facebook. Create outlets for you to find the oh-so-important community and support that you need. It's always important to be reminded that you are not alone. And you are not crazy. For me personally, I have found that meditation and deeper understanding of who I am as a person has helped me resolve some of this conflict within myself in the past.

15. What classes do you wish you had taken?

I wish I would have been more into software and computer science. I convinced myself I wasn't good at coding, and now I'm convinced it's because I thought I wasn't smart enough...which is a bit ridiculous. The future of science and engineering is going to be rooted in emerging technologies, software, machine learning and artificial intelligence. I don't feel equipped to stay up-to-speed on these currently and have even considered going back to school to learn more about some of these topics.

16. My work hours and productivity is at times compared with that of males with no kids or work life balance. What are your insights on how such women can own up to what they are?

I'm really sorry, but I don't fully understand the question. The way I am interpreting this is: You have children and are a woman which causes you to have unpaid work burden placed on you that your no-children, male peers don't experience. Your time spent in the office is compared to time spent in the office of these male peers. How can you compete with that?

This makes me think of a quote that Einstein once said: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

I know you aren't talking about being smart. But your reality is your reality. To try to compete with someone else with a different reality is a challenge, to be sure. But here's my take on it: You bring unique value that only YOU can bring to your job. I would challenge you to work smarter, not harder and take a quality over quantity approach. This may mean saying "no" to certain things so that you can focus and prioritize your time.

Honestly, becoming a mother made me much better at focusing at work because I just don't have time to waste during the day.

Don't try to be them. You do you. If your company can't see how you bring value equivalent to what your male peers are bringing, find a company that will. I promise they exist. I work in one right now.

17. What are the key qualities of a successful engineer in both industrial and academic environment?

This is a hard one for me to answer because the engineering fields and roles are so different and so broad. Rather I will take it up a level and talk about what I believe it means to be a successful professional:

- Build trust: Make and meet commitments, speak candidly and respectfully.
- Execute: Your services and skillsets are for hire. At the end of the day, you must be able to look at yourself and understand how you bring value to your organization. You are not your title, you are the contributions you bring the table.
- Be stubborn with your goals and flexible in your approach: there is no one-size fits all approach to getting to your end goal. You may have to take an unanticipated path to get there.
- People-first approach: Remember that humans are feeling machines that work, not working machines that feel.

18. Have you had to learn to say “no” in order to gain balance? Sometimes it can be hard to do this

Yes. Yes. Yes. And I’m not a person who likes to say “no.” It can be hard, but is made easier by understanding what you stand for and the value you that you want to bring to your family and your job. This is why self-knowledge is so important. If you are being asked to do something that doesn’t directly contribute to your success in either of those spaces, the answer should be “no” if you are feeling crunched for time. As women – it can be hard to go against this engrained behavior to say “yes”. Studies have shown that women commonly sacrifice their needs to benefit others. Don’t do that.

19. How do you bring up challenges specific to women in STEM that may make people/colleagues defensive?

Honestly, this is where being an engineer has served me on this topic. There are so many facts out there regarding the challenges that exist that you don’t have to make it about you at all. Use the facts. Use the data. Build the story in a compelling way and be specific in what you want to do about it and how. It’s difficult to be argumentative with facts. Granted, people still manage to do it...but take the emotion out of it. What will the company gain by improving its culture? What does will it gain by improving its diversity? You must build the business case.

20. Is Kohler hiring?

The human resources professional in my smiles at this question. Yes! We have several [open positions](#) in the Sheboygan area. Three of them are in Kitchen and Bath – two entry level engineering positions and one Sr. Project Engineer position. One of these positions is on the team that I work on. Come work with me. Let’s do great things together!