



Americold employees attending the Advancing Women in Leadership Conference, held at Emory University in Atlanta, October 2015. (Photo courtesy of Americold.)

WOMEN IN THE COLD

A diverse workforce leads to evolution and growth.

By Alexandra Walsh

The topic of recruiting and retaining the next generation of workers is a hot button issue for the cold chain industry. But in an industry whose management ranks are dominated by middle-aged, white males, is it doing all it can to attract the talented human capital it needs?

“Unemployment is at an all-time low, and in some markets, almost no one is looking for a job. If you’re in the cold storage business and you’re only attracting one gender, you need to take a look at your company culture, your environment, your job description, your interview process, and what you’re offering,” says Diaya Mills, Strategic Account Sales Manager for Employeebridge, a full service staffing agency working with industries ranging from logistics to manufacturing.

“From my perspective, women and the diverse viewpoint they bring to the workforce make the organization better and create more effective leadership, retention

and engagement,” says Kathryn Mullen, Senior Director of Leadership and Organizational Development at Americold.

“Every industry should want to make its workforce fair and balanced, and it’s good to diversify that workforce in every capacity – by age, by nationality and by gender,” states Mills. “If you limit the diversity of your workforce, you limit the opportunity for companies to grow and evolve and industry will stagnate.”

Acquisition and Recruitment

Bringing awareness to the importance of the cold chain industry and the infrastruc-

ture it provides is essential to attracting and recruiting talented women, especially younger ones, suggests Paula Lafferty, Vice President of Finance at SnoTemp Cold Storage.

“Young women, and young men, want to be working towards something larger than themselves, something they are passionate about and that makes them feel good about what they’re doing,” says Lafferty. “Our industry is providing safe, fresh, healthy food across the world, often to places that can’t grow their own. You have to tie that message to our industry and that’s how you will draw talented young women.”

“In recruiting, we try to have as diverse a slate of candidates as possible,” points out Mullen. “Ultimately, we will hire the right person for the job, and we’ll pull from a very diverse pool of applicants giving many different types of people the opportunity to compete for that job.”

Mullen adds that at career and job fairs at universities and other locations, they make

sure they have diverse representation from the company. “This way women job seekers look at who’s representing the company and understand that there are many people like them working at Americold.”

“You have to make sure you’re getting it right from the start and that the written job description is open and not gender biased,” explains Mills. “You also have to ensure that the hiring managers are trained in interviewing and asking the right questions that allow them to be open to a diversified workforce.”

Retaining Your Talent

“Once we hire, we want to ensure our female employees feel included in the organization and find their place here,” acknowledges Mullen.

She says one effort towards that end is the Women in the Supply Chain (WISC) group Americold started in 2014. A highlight for the group was when a number of members attended a Women in Leadership conference at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. “The goal of these activities is to foster relationships between women in leadership positions,” says Mullen. “And, executive sponsorship is critical to our company’s diversity efforts. As an example, at this year’s WISC conference, our Executive Team hosted an offsite dinner with all of the Americold conference attendees.”

Mullen also points to the mentoring program that Americold recently launched. “We pair women in senior positions with more junior members of our leadership teams to talk about challenges they encounter and their future career path.” She adds that these activities are also great recruiting tools. “To say we have these activities will help female candidates make the decision to come to Americold instead of another company.”

Mills points out that while she’s noticing more women in management and leadership positions in the cold chain, they’re not always heard. “They might have a seat at the table, but they don’t always have a voice at the table.”

Mills recommends internal focus groups to make sure those voices are heard. “Women want to know what part they play in the mission of their company. In turn, the company should provide them with feedback, show them what their career path looks like and understand their desires on that career path.”



Paula Lafferty and her cousin Caroline Lafferty wearing #freezergirl shirts in SnoTemp’s -25°F ice cream freezer. The shirts were created by Ashley Albers and Marissa Brandt from NorAm Cold Storage, with proceeds going to supporting a scholarship for women in the industry. (Photo courtesy of Paula Lafferty.)



Paula Lafferty and her brother Jason Lafferty, SnoTemp CEO. (Photo courtesy of Paula Lafferty.)

Providing education, training, and certification also helps greatly with retention, as does employee engagement, adds Mills. “Your female employees should feel that regardless of their role at the company, they have the opportunity to engage with upper management.”

But, says Mills, perhaps the most important part of retaining women employees is fair pay. “If you’re not paying competitively, if you’re below market, if you’re paying administrative staff less than warehouse staff, all the other benefits and great things about your company won’t matter – you’ll lose them.”

Lafferty points out that SnoTemp has created a wage philosophy that ensures equal pay regardless of gender. “To break down gender bias, it is equally important to encourage men to cross through traditional roles, at work and at home. At SnoTemp our cross training program is taking momentum and we have men from the warehouse spending time in administrative positions as well as women training on the warehouse floor. This brings about not just a more equitable, but a more collaborative work environment.”

Reflecting on whether she would want a daughter of hers to go into the family business, Lafferty says she would encourage any of her future children if they were interested, wanted to put in the work, and were willing to develop a passion for the job.

“While I have always been on an administrative trajectory, I would have appreciated being encouraged to gain a deeper understanding of our refrigeration systems, warehousing, and spend more time driving a forklift when I started working at SnoTemp,” admits Lafferty. “I would urge my daughter to spend time in all roles within the company to develop a well rounded understanding of the industry and find her passion. I’d tell her she doesn’t have to be in maintenance or on a forklift forever, but the knowledge she would gain about the company and industry will be invaluable.”

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