



Women in Steel:

Progress & Perspectives



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Where did your education and career start?

When I first went to college, it was hard to know what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The one thing I did know is that I had a strong desire to serve others. I changed my major five times before settling on criminal justice. I served as a police officer for five years, before I recognized a personal hunger for something more. I found that something more in 2002 when I joined Nucor at our sheet mill in Decatur, Ala., USA. The Nucor culture resonated with my values, and I felt certain it was a place where I could make a career. That was just over 21 years ago. I was hired as an overhead crane operator, and over time, I advanced through a variety of leadership roles.

Why did you choose the steel industry?

Initially, although a bit hard to admit now, I started in the steel industry for the pay. As a single mom at the time, I needed a job that was safe and paid well. Today that doesn't remotely represent my sentiment. What I found when I chose Nucor was something more akin to discovering a hidden treasure. I was fascinated to see how steel is made, and the team was so eager to teach me, to explain the process and entertain all my questions. The team seemed to genuinely care about each other's success, and most importantly, about each other's safety and well-being. That's all still true today.

Can you talk about the support you've received to advance your career?

My first supporter before I even set foot inside a steel mill was my sister. When I was hired at Nucor, she followed me to Decatur and was instrumental in helping me care for my son during the early days of shift work when he was young. I could not have done it without her help, and I will forever be grateful for her.

From a work perspective, I have been surrounded by selfless individuals at Nucor — people who genuinely care about each other's success. At our core, integrity, honesty and teamwork define how we treat one another. The teammates I have worked with throughout the years have played a tremendous role in how I have grown as a person and as a leader. Whether it's swapping workdays for family events or recognizing that we all have "off" days, I have always felt humbled by the willingness of the team to lean in and help.

I have also benefited from great leaders that have invested their time and shared their knowledge, challenging my thinking and pushing me beyond my comfort zone. Through courageous conversations, special projects to lead, or sometimes even

a kick in the pants, I can think of countless times when someone was pulling me in or pushing me forward.

It is a two-way street though; you have to be open about your needs and aspirations. I have found that most leaders rise to the occasion and want to see their team succeed, but you can't wait for someone to read your mind. Be intentional in the interactions with your team and your leaders.

Having no prior steel industry experience and no engineering background, I relied on curiosity and a can-do attitude. Confidence, even in the face of the unknown, can be a powerful asset. I remember one of my general managers telling me that one of the traits he loved most about me was that I didn't know what I didn't know, and that it didn't slow me down or get in my way. He recognized my passion for the team and my intuition, felt it was an asset, and challenged me to never let anyone try to change that. His comments made me recognize that you don't have to fit a mold to be successful. Quite to the contrary, you need to capitalize on the differences.

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The list of influencers, mentors, and amazing teammates is long, and even experiences I would rather forget have helped me grow. It is all about perspective. Sometimes you learn the type of leader you want to be and, at other times, the leader you do not want to be. I choose to always pay forward the love and generosity that I have received, to lift up and advocate for others.

From day one at Nucor, I was told the sky was the limit and that the only limiting factor would be me. It is so true and one of the things I love most about Nucor.

Tell us how you have advanced in your career.

My leadership style is guided by serving the team. Doing what's right, even when it's not the easiest choice, has been a major part of my success, and I am grateful that I have always felt I was able to do the right thing.

Putting the team first when it comes to decision-making, though not always the simpler path, is a recipe for success. I am unafraid to admit I don't know something, and I believe that when you engage with a team and show that you care, you can unlock anyone's potential. Being an inclusive leader has created an atmosphere where everyone's voice is heard, valued and respected. Most people want to work in an environment where they see the results of the ideas they bring forward.

I attribute so much of my success to an optimistic mental model. I believe in helping each other be right, not wrong. I look for ways to make things work, not for reasons they won't. I take pride in the victories of others and

celebrating wins. I strive to show initiative and courage, smile, and be enthusiastic. I like to lean in and support others and let others support me. I will always be a student, learning every day. Love everyone.

Consider your legacy and how you want to be remembered; let that drive your actions. You can't change yesterday but you have full control over today and what you choose to do with it.

What has been the best thing about being a woman in this industry?

It is hard to single out the “best” thing about being a woman in this industry, but one of the most significant aspects is the chance to pave the way for those who don't fit the traditional “steelworker” stereotype. Breaking down prior paradigms is an opportunity to highlight the value that diversity brings to essential conversations for any company to be successful. When it comes to making decisions or developing systems and processes, a broad perspective ensures the best possible outcome, and I hope to see the female perspective continue to grow in this industry.

How has the steel industry become more inclusive?

The inclusive transformation in the steel industry is unmistakable. At Nucor, you can see the evidence walking through our facilities. The diversity among teammates today contrasts significantly with what it was a decade ago. This progress can be credited to intentional efforts to encourage, support and develop our teammates, including the establishment of groups like AIST Women in Steel and Nucor's Women of Nucor. While it's easy to see areas for improvement, consistent growth is not just about the present; it's about building a stable foundation for future opportunities and greater inclusivity.

Do you have any professional development book recommendations that you'd like to share?

One book that always comes to mind when I consider any type of development is *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* by Joseph Grenny. It seems today that so many of the conversations occurring have very high stakes and it is imperative that we understand why we must have these conversations and how to have them effectively.

I am currently reading *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* by Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann and Linda Gioja. It brings experienced-based insight to the parallels between nature and business, the constant evolution necessary of both. It is a must read regarding organizational change, challenging the practice of maintaining status quo to the necessity of innovation and recognizing the complexities of creating an “adaptive” system. This book is fresh and unorthodox, with concepts that will help any organization become more agile. ♦