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SPECIAL ISSUE

Women in the lubricants industry



Women in the lubricants industry 2024

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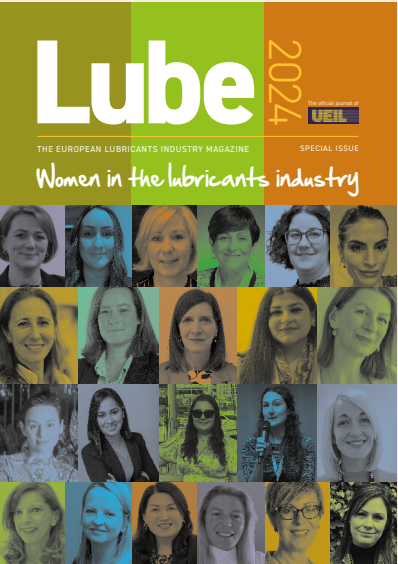
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Women have long been underrepresented in various industries, including the lubricants industry. However, in recent years, significant strides have been made towards gender equality and female empowerment in the workplace. It is vital to recognise and address the challenges women face in male-dominated industries, and advocate for equal opportunities and respect for all professionals, regardless of gender. However, much work still lies ahead.



According to the latest *Women in the Workplace* report¹ from McKinsey, in partnership with LeanIn.Org.; “Women are more ambitious than ever, and workplace flexibility is fuelling them. Yet despite some hard-fought gains, women’s representation is not keeping pace.”

This is the ninth year of the Women in the Workplace report, which is the largest study of women in corporate America and Canada. This year, they collected information from 276 participating organisations employing more than ten million people. At these organisations, they surveyed more than 27,000 employees and 270 senior HR leaders, who shared insights on their policies and practices. Their report provides an intersectional look at the specific biases and barriers faced by Asian, Black, Latina, and LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities.

The survey debunks four myths about women’s workplace experiences and career advancement. A few of these myths cover old ground, but given the notable lack of progress, they warrant repeating. These include women’s career ambitions, the greatest barrier to their ascent to senior leadership, the effect and extent of microaggressions in the workplace, and women’s appetite for flexible work. We hope highlighting these myths will help companies find a path forward that casts aside outdated thinking once and for all and accelerates progress for women.

Women have a vital role to play in the lubricants industry and beyond, bringing unique perspectives, skills, and talents to the workplace, which can greatly benefit industries like lubricant production and distribution. Prioritising and creating a culture that celebrates gender equality not only drives success and growth but also create a more equitable and just society for all. By embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity, companies in our sector can foster

innovation, improve decision-making processes, and enhance overall performance.

Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment for women in the lubricants industry is therefore essential for attracting and retaining top talent. Policies that promote gender diversity, offer equal pay for equal work, and provide opportunities for mentorship and career development can help break down barriers and empower women to excel in their careers.

Supporting female professionals, and breaking down barriers to entry and advancement, creates a more inclusive, diverse, and successful workplace for all.

In 2020 we held our Women in the Lubricants Industry Conference in London, and these subjects are never far from the table or conference circuit. We wanted to take this one step further as part of our STEM Programme and continued support of WITLI, in order showcase some of the leading people in our industry.

We are delighted to share the stories of 22 pioneering women in our industry. With a veritable plethora of experience, knowledge and their own personal insights to share with you regarding their careers, how they manage work-life balance and share their advice for new talent coming into our industry. Please enjoy this very special one-off issue of Lube Magazine 2024 – Women in the Lubricants Industry.

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¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>, Excerpted from “Women in the Workplace 2023”, October 2023, McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org, www.womenintheworkplace.com. Copyright (c) 2024 McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

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Abigail Waller

Global Key
Accounts Manager,
Vickers Oils



A sales professional with 25 years' experience, Abigail enjoys the collaboration of working in a team and finding creative ways to reach the end goal. She enjoys the challenges and variety sales brings, with no two days being the same. Abigail is also a proud wife, step-mum, amateur gardener, theatre lover and craft beer drinker.

What was your route into the industry?

Having worked in chemical distribution sales for 6 years I was approached for the sales executive position at Nynas and my lubricants journey began. Whilst their products are sold into several end applications, lubricants is a significant sector. The main appeal was working for a producer with a smaller product portfolio where you can really get to know the products rather than in distribution where the product list is like a telephone directory.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

After university my career started in Quality Control, I moved into tech service and was asked to try sales; selling pigments and dyes into the coatings and plastics industries. The prospect of talking prices horrified me and I still remember the nerves of my first customer visit in 1998. Over the next 12 months this became a full-time role, the nerves wore off and I enjoyed the variety sales brings. After four years I moved into chemical distribution sales and then onto Nynas, where I spent nearly nine years as sales executive and six as GM for UK and I with overall P&L responsibility whilst still looking after some strategic and global customers. Like any industry, people are sceptical of new entrants, and it takes a while to earn their respect and trust. From experience, an unconscious bias towards females was especially true, but gladly, times and attitudes have changed and it's great to see a balance of genders across the industry and the average age decreasing.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I recently joined Vickers Oils in October 2023 at a very exciting time in the company's development with the opening of the dedicated food production plant. My immediate focus is making a difference here and realising the growth plans in the run up to our 200th anniversary in 2028.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I might have been lucky but I don't think the challenges were simply because I'm female. I think they are the same for anyone new to the industry and on a steep learning curve. There are significantly more females in the industry than there were 15 years ago, many of whom are in senior positions which is great to see. I've definitely seen a change in perception in that time.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Whilst I go into the office a couple of days a week and have the flexibility to choose which days, I also work from home some days so I can take the dog out and get away from the screen for a while. Our private health care provider also has lots of incentives to keep you fit and active, and our wellbeing team regularly set internal challenges.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

If you're interested then go for it! The roles are wide and varied, with lots of opportunity for development. If you get the chance to try something new, give it a go. Sales was never on my radar but I'm really glad I said yes when that first opportunity came along. It's led to an interesting, challenging and rewarding career. The industry invests in its young people, with training like UKLA's Certificate of Lubricants Competence course which I'm proud to be involved with.

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Ann Ball

Regulatory Affairs Manager, QualiChem

Ann is the Regulatory Affairs Manager for QualiChem Inc. Ann's career in the metalworking industry began in 1988 with Milacron, Cimcool Consumable Products in the Research & Development Laboratory. Over the course of her career she has worked on projects or held positions in the areas of regulatory compliance, health, safety, environment, testing and technical service for metalworking fluids and related industrial products. She has been in her current role at QualiChem since August 2022. Ann is the ILMA (Independent Lubricant Manufacturers) Immediate Past President serving as a member of the Executive Committee and ILMA Board of Directors. She also is a member of the STLE Education & Training Committee. Ann holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science/ Agricultural Business from The Ohio State University.



Route into the industry

My path into the industry was not intentional, I just happened into it, which seems to be the case for many. A friend recommended me for a position at Cincinnati Milacron / Cimcool, I was hired, and the rest is history, as they say. When I was hired, I knew the company Cincinnati Milacron as a corporate entity, but I knew little about the metalworking fluid industry, and the products they manufactured.

How has career mapping led to where you are now?

Soon after I was hired there were some important health, safety, and regulatory developments impacting the lubricants & metalworking industry that required collaborative attention. This opened opportunities with projects, committees, papers, and presentations for the company as well as with industry organisations. This set me on my career path. Accomplishments I've had can be credited to support from my company, along with the mentors, both woman and men, that have provided me guidance and direction.

What obstacles have you faced (if any)?

I'm sure many would say that just being a woman was an obstacle. The biggest obstacle as a woman for me was proving my credibility as a knowledgeable resource to the "old school" individuals that at first pass wanted to speak to a man because they thought a woman would not be capable of answering questions about fluids, applications or be able to assist them in troubleshooting issues. When this happened, I pushed, bargaining with them to give me a chance, letting them know if they didn't get the information they needed I would find them a different resource. Most, if not all, took the bargain, allowing me to share my knowledge with them. The greatest satisfaction in those cases after we finished the conversation was when more than once I was told I was more knowledgeable than many men they had spoken to about the same things. I knew after these situations that the next time they encountered a woman in the industry that their reception would be different, I helped open a door and change a mindset.

What challenges do women face in the industry?

The challenges for women in the industry still exist but the industry and the world has evolved. The need to prove credibility just because you are a woman is not as prevalent. Today you see many more women in all aspects of the industry than you did 30 plus years ago. Women are hired and given opportunities in all areas of the industry, and they are well received and welcomed. To succeed and grow we must remember it is often necessary to step away from that easy, comfortable place and take on the challenges presented.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Flexibility in my schedule and the ability to work in a hybrid environment, being remote much of the time, are definite benefits that help in work-life balance. QualiChem is a family-oriented company that believes in providing a good work-life balance to all its employees.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry

The metalworking fluid/lubricant industry is a great industry. It offers many opportunities, if you are willing to learn, step out of your comfort zone and become involved. For women not currently in the industry I suggest researching opportunities within the industry to see what is available. There are positions in all disciplines sales, marketing, IT, engineering, finance, manufacturing among others. Seek out woman that are already working within the industry to aid in finding a position. They will also be able to provide insight and guidance when you join a company within the industry. Relationship building is important to your learning and success. Women currently working in the industry can achieve their dreams and fulfill their potential by being diligent in your work efforts and having engagement with the industry. The sky is the limit. This really is the key no matter what career path you take.

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Aysun Akik

*Vice President,
New Business Development and
Global Key Accounts, Shell Lubricants*

As Vice President of Global Key Accounts and New Business Development, with an extensive background of over 25 years of leading business in different parts of the industry, Aysun is responsible for the strategic development, and growth of all global customers of Shell Lubricants in different sectors such as off-highway, trucks, autos, industry, mining as well as emerging sectors.

What was your route into the industry?

Coming from a background with ten years' experience in operational leadership roles across production, supply chain, and commercial sales, my first role in lubricants was between 2014-2017, when I took on the role of Global Marketing and Business Development for B2B in Shell Lubricants. In that role, my team set the global strategy for growth of the business for direct and indirect channels, with focus on BRICS countries and Germany.

After my first role in lubricants, I led the global procurement of logistics across Shell's Downstream businesses, where I had the opportunity to negotiate large contracts, introduce sustainability as criteria for all our deals, and develop Enterprise Accounts.

Before returning to lubricants in my current role, I led Business Mobility (the B2B part of Shell Global Mobility) across CEE, Turkey, and South Africa, and then EUAF, with responsibility for the Sales, Marketing and Business Development of fleet and leasing.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

Having started as an engineer in operations, I built my career to have an end-to-end commercial overview, with B2B being the common thread. My technical and operational experience, and solution-focused mindset, gave me credibility in B2B customer relations.

In terms of obstacles, in my early career, there were very few females in technical and operational positions. However, the female leaders and colleagues that I did have helped me to make the choices that were right for me as a leader, mother, and as an individual.

What is the next step for you in your career?

My purpose in life is to help people grow, which will ultimately help the society grow, enabling me to make the world a better place. From where I am now, the next step would need to align with my life purpose and involve a move to a position where I can make a bigger impact at Shell, in the industry, as well as my local community. Impact for me is not only about business results, but about the growth of the individuals in my team and groups that I can inspire.

As a working mother, I know that my professional position inspires my children and I want to continue to do that as I develop my career further.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

In my view, women face a lot of challenges in different parts of their career and life. This can be at the start of their career or later, especially when they choose to become a mother and then return to work, with the challenges of balancing career ambitions with home life and making the right decisions along the way.

Many challenges can be related to an individual not being clear of their life purpose, or not being brave enough to say out aloud what is the most important thing to them. Once you make your mind up on what is important in life, choices and decisions should flow from your life purpose, including in your working life. And yes, there might be consequences, but it is important to be able to see the bigger picture and be content with it.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

In my experience, the further you go up the career ladder, the easier it becomes gets to manage your own agenda, enabling you to make sure you can focus on the most important things. Being a leader is about supporting your team in delivering business results, but also about developing your team members' personal and collective growth. It is about creating the right environment to foster high-performing teams, inspiring all parts of the organisation by being a role model, and enabling your team to move forward without being asked.

Personally, as a single mother of two children, and with a global job that requires me to travel very frequently, I must be extremely strict about the days I can and cannot travel, and I let this be known to my team. I also have my morning ritual that helps me connect with myself. Finally, as a triathlete, I must train regularly. There are always exceptions when plans go wrong, but if you can keep a cool head and remind yourself of the choices you are making, you can focus the most important things in your life. That connects you to your life purpose.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

Be clear on your life purpose. Do not shy out about making choices which reflect your life purpose. Share these, so that people understand why you do what you do. Keep a positive mindset in everything you do. Do not compare yourself to others – you are unique, with all the competencies you bring – focus on those and make them stronger. Be grateful. Also, remember that you are a role model, so be aware of your own impact, and yes you can make a difference. Connect with other like-minded leaders. And finally, as Gandhi said, 'be the change you want to see in the world'.

Link: www.shell.com

Bead Oliver

Administration Director

SIP - Speciality Oils and Fluids

Bead manages the day to day running of the business and has overall responsibility for the sales and technical teams. She is also in charge of the company's marketing strategy, HR, ISO 9001 and H&S.

Bead has lived in Australia, South Africa, and the USA. She has two grown up children and now lives in rural East Sussex

What was your route into the industry?

I left school after O-Levels with no idea of a career path other than dreaming of joining the mounted police. My stepfather Michael Hind, (co-founder of SIP) was working for Total Oil at the time so I rather fell into the industry. I was employed in their post room – no horses for me!

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

After many years of travelling, I worked for several SMEs in the industry and then at SIP in the Operations Department as a logistics coordinator. I was one of the first in the industry to become involved in ISO 9001 securing the accreditation for SIP. This was back in the days of telex and fax machines! I continued to work here following the birth of my first child but when number two came along, the long hours, long commute and costs of commuting and childcare made it pretty impossible to continue. I worked odd jobs around my children.

Following a career redirection (and with my kids now being more independent), I returned to the industry and SIP, as Sales Coordinator, followed by Office Manager and then Administration Director.

The main obstacle I (and my female colleagues) faced was the stereotyping of women in this industry. Back in the 80s and 90s it was thought that women were best suited to admin / supporting roles. Balancing a career and being a mother was a rarity and not easily achievable when there was no flexible working.

Most managerial positions were held by men which was common in this industry. We have come far in redressing the balance but there is still a way to go. How wonderful it is to see so many female participants at conferences and expos not only attending but speaking.

Industry dinners which used to be dominated by black ties are no longer!

What is the next step for you in your career?

I don't feel I have too many 'steps' left in my career, but I am passionate about continuing the success and reputation of SIP, which my stepfather, Mike Hind, started with Carlton Colcord, and exploring new areas in the industry where we can grow.

I will continue to promote women in this industry and the workplace in general and support the early careers of all aspiring newcomers. I take pride in my role in ensuring that SIP continues to be an innovative, supporting and nurturing company to work for.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

As mentioned earlier, women in the past, have tended to be given supporting roles in this industry, which is still male dominated – a challenge in itself to get past. I do see more opportunities now for women and it is encouraging to see them in the higher end roles. Companies are keen to promote themselves in promoting women, but this must be done for the right reasons – not just because it looks good to the market and ticks a box. Women in this industry have

to work hard and work smart so companies are wise to invest in and retain them as they will reap the benefits in the long term. Giving working mothers flexibility and trust to do their jobs without being micromanaged is repaid with loyalty and commitment so a win-win for both employer and employee.

One big challenge is educating the industry that women have a big role to play in its future.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

We have a hybrid working week (3 days office and 2 days working from home). Being a commuter with an hour train journey each way, this has been a big change for me. Although when I am not commuting, I do find I work longer hours at home – as do many home workers, but not having the journey allows me to have the energy to go out on a school night!

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

If this is going to be your career, then firstly understand that this is not a glamorous or trendy industry. It is an essential and exciting industry, and you need to be invested and have an interest in understanding how the industry works and what it is trying to achieve and the difficulties that the industry is facing in trying to achieve this. Do your research into companies who are recruiting and see what their policies are. Ask about their reputation – check them out on LinkedIn and see what, if any post they put on their company page.

This is not a career to take up on a whim.

To those women already in the industry, I would say think big and push the boundaries. This is an industry that will be looked at with more scrutiny than ever before and there are opportunities for those individuals who are prepared to have a voice and make a difference. Make some noise!

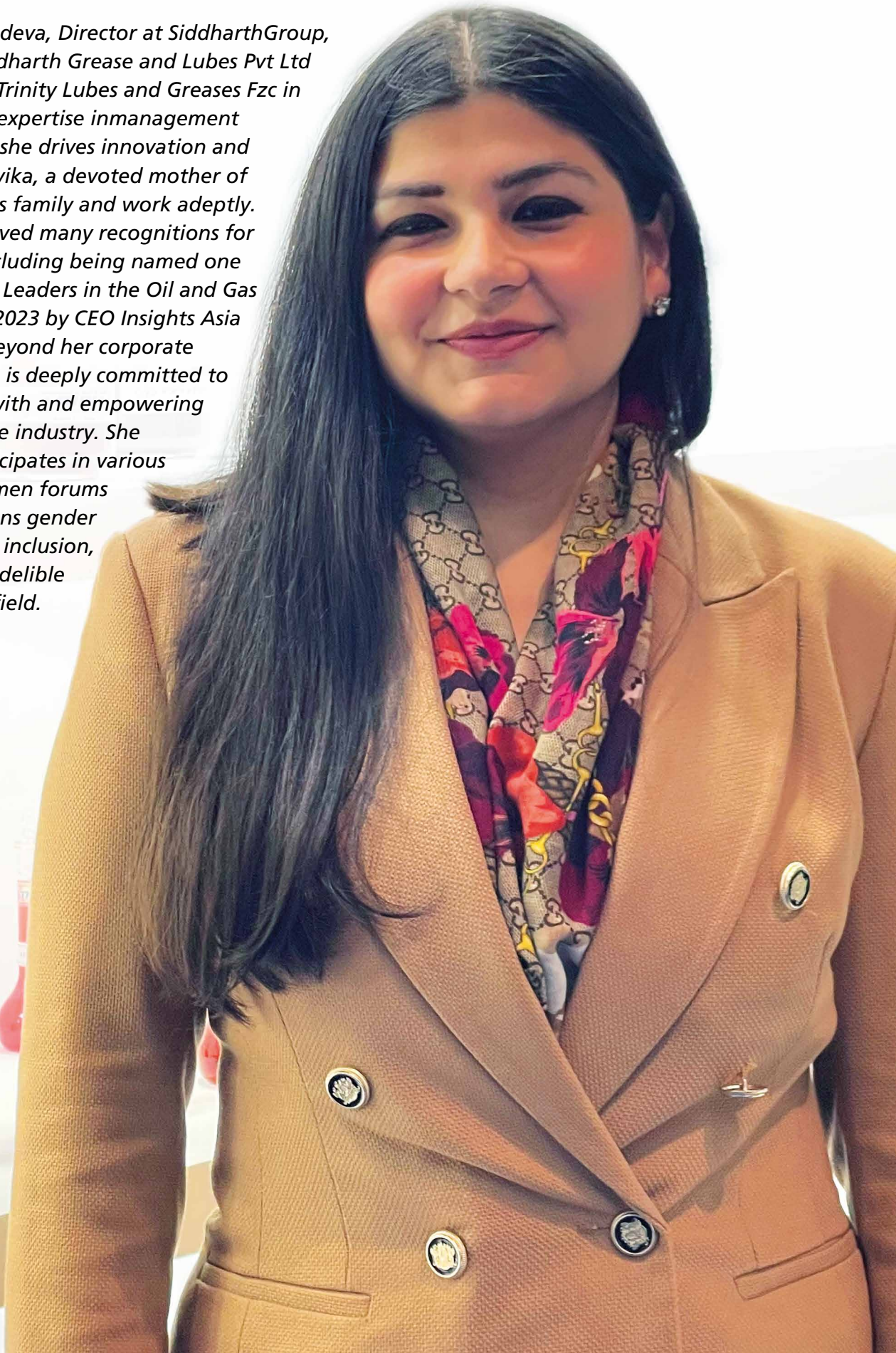
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Bhavika Sachdeva

Director, Trinity Lubes and Greases Fzc, Siddharth Group

Bhavika Sachdeva, Director at SiddharthGroup, manages Siddharth Grease and Lubes Pvt Ltd in India and Trinity Lubes and Greases Fzc in Dubai. With expertise in management and finance, she drives innovation and growth. Bhavika, a devoted mother of two, balances family and work adeptly. She has received many recognitions for her work, including being named one of the Top10 Leaders in the Oil and Gas Industry for 2023 by CEO Insights Asia Magazine. Beyond her corporate role, Bhavika is deeply committed to connecting with and empowering women in the industry. She actively participates in various working women forums and champions gender diversity and inclusion, leaving an indelible mark in her field.



What was your route into the industry?

My journey commenced in 2011 when I joined Siddharth Grease and Lubes Pvt Limited in India at 21, being my husband's Family Business. Despite the scarcity of women in industry gatherings, I remained steadfast in my commitment to impact the Lubricants sector. Over the years, I've undertaken diverse roles, from financial management to overseeing marketing campaigns, and contributed to the company's international expansion. Presently, in Dubai, I lead Trinity Lubes and Greases, a new venture under the Siddharth Group.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My career at Siddharth Group wasn't conventional. Starting in 2011, I delved into various technical and non-technical aspects of the lubricants industry, guided by my father-in-law. From financial management to marketing and international expansion, I embraced diverse roles, enhancing my skills. Despite fulfilling, my journey wasn't devoid of challenges. Balancing career demands with motherhood tested my resilience. Additionally, the absence of female networking opportunities prompted me to initiate a LinkedIn group to connect women in the industry.

What is the next step for you in your career?

Leading Trinity Lubes & Greases, a fully automated Grease and Lubricant plant in the Middle East, marks a new chapter. Focusing on sustainable solutions and technological innovation, I aim to expand our product portfolio and geographical presence. Beyond business goals, I'm passionate about fostering inclusivity and spearheading CSR initiatives, striving to make a positive impact.

Challenges Faced:

While my career journey has been fulfilling, it hasn't been without its challenges. Balancing the demands of a demanding career with the responsibilities of being a mother to two young daughters has required exceptional time management and prioritisation skills. The constant juggling act of work deadlines, childcare duties, and household responsibilities has tested my resilience, but it has also been a significant source of personal and professional growth. Furthermore, the lack of networking opportunities with women in leadership positions presented another hurdle. This limited access to mentors and role models who could share their experiences and guidance was something I actively sought to overcome. In response, I took the initiative to create a group on LinkedIn specifically aimed at

connecting women in the industry, fostering support and access to one another. While I look forward to the development of more formal mentorship programs in the future, this self-driven initiative has helped bridge the gap and address this critical need.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

The lubricants industry, like many male-dominated fields, poses unique challenges for women. Limited representation in leadership roles, unconscious bias, and a lack of female networks hinder women's progress. Moreover, balancing work and personal life amidst demanding schedules can be daunting. Adapting workplace cultures to accommodate diverse needs is essential for women to thrive.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

My approach to work-life balance isn't traditional. Flexible arrangements and a supportive network enable me to manage both personal and professional responsibilities effectively. Constant evaluation and adaptation help maintain a healthy balance, ensuring success in both spheres.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

As someone who's young, a mom, and working in a field mostly dominated by men, what I'd advise women who want to join or are already in this industry is: Firstly, be bold in your ideas and how you solve problems. Don't hold back from thinking differently or trying new approaches. Trust yourself and your instincts. Even if others doubt you, believe in what you bring to the table. Secondly, when things get tough, keep going. Stay positive, learn from mistakes, and don't give up on your goals. Thirdly, remember to take care of yourself. It's okay to ask for help when you need it and don't forget to make time for things outside of work that bring you joy. Lastly, don't forget the power of community. Surround yourself with supportive people who lift you up and advocate for diversity and inclusion in your workplace. Together, we can make positive changes happen.

My advice for up-and-coming leaders is to be brave, confident, and strong while staying true to who you are, stick to these principles, you'll play a vital role in shaping the industry's future and setting the stage for the next wave of leaders.

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Chloe Tite

Customer Sales
Assistant, Shell UK



Chloe Tite is a Territory Manger for Shell UK Direct Lubricants, supporting customers within the Automotive sector. Chloe is based in Preston, Lancashire. When not working, she enjoys spending time with her Shire horse Penelope, working on her extensive book collection and socialising with friends. Her biggest drive has to be her motivation, with a love of learning and developing new skills, allowing her to share her knowledge with others.

What was your route into the industry?

My family have been my biggest inspiration and introduction into the industry. I am very proud to have a mother who is also working within the oil sector as an operations Director, she has achieved so much throughout her career, and I can only hope to achieve half as much as she has.

My journey into the industry began back in 2021, working as a Lubricant customer service advisor. It was from this role that I developed a passion for the industry. During my time as a customer service advisor, I began taking on extra responsibilities within my role and logging on before and after work to do some oil technical training sessions with one of the account managers. Now 3 years on I am Territory manager for Shell Lubricants UK.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

Since starting in the industry in 2021, my biggest highlight would be the UKLA Young Employee of the Year Special Commendation Award 2022, I have since gone on to achieve a distinction in the UKLA Lubricant Competence course and earned my BINDT Category 1 qualification in lubricant analysis. I have been fortunate to have met some wonderful people along the way who have shared their knowledge and help aid in my progression.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I am still very new to being a Territory Manager, so at the moment I am just focusing on growing within my role, I am fortunate to be apart of an amazing team, and hope that I can continue to learn and grow within the company. I have always been interested in the technical side and will continue to build on this within my role.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I'm not sure I would call it a challenge; the lubricants industry has always tended to be more male dominated, but I feel this is rapidly changing. I have been supported by some great women over the last 3 years, who have been instrumental to my development. I am now proud to work alongside many talented and experienced women within my team.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

At shell, we have a heavy focus on workplace culture. We are empowered to fit our role around our lifestyle. The best part of working remotely is that we are fully supported to manage our own schedules and are focused on output / efficiency instead of time at desk. We also fully supported in taking time back if we have had a busy spell so that one offsets the other.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

I would say to be confident in your ability, and don't be afraid to ask others for help, this industry is forever evolving, we are always looking for new ways to improve sustainability if you believe in your ability and keep forging forward, success will come.

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Emma Guthrie

Marketing and Digital Transformation Director,
Lubricants & Energy, IMCD Group

Emma Guthrie is a skilled professional who combines a PhD in Organic Chemistry with over 20 years' experience working in commercial, business development and marketing roles in the chemical, clean transport, and industrial gas sectors. In her current position, Emma uses her passion and experience in communications and marketing to support the growth and performance of IMCD's Global Lubricants & Energy Business.

Emma lives in London with her husband and two daughters and in her spare time enjoys running, reading, and volunteering in her local park.



What was your route into the industry?

I am a chemist by background, with a degree and PhD in chemistry, awarded many years ago. Since completing my research degree, I've had the privilege to work in commercial and marketing roles in the chemical and engineering world.

I spent the first years of my working life in the industrial gas industry, in a variety of market application areas including food freezing with liquid nitrogen and vehicle fuelling using hydrogen. More recently, I switched to working in chemical distribution and this led to my current role as marketing director for IMCD's Lubricants & Energy Business.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

I've always been open to new and interesting opportunities and have found these in the organisations where I have worked. These are global companies where I've had the chance to work in different roles, engaging with teams across the world. These experiences have proved to be very fulfilling. I don't feel that I have faced any insurmountable obstacles. In large organisations you can face changes of direction and strategy and having the flexibility to adapt to these can help.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I'm currently working as marketing director for IMCD's Lubricants & Energy business, and I see many developments that will keep my current role fresh and interesting for the near term.

The Lubricants business of IMCD is active globally and I'm inspired to engage with colleagues around the world. I observe changes in the world of marketing that impacts my role. IMCD, as with many organisations, is on a digitalisation journey. This impacts how we communicate in the digital space, targeting our messages to meet different customer needs. Sustainability is another topic where IMCD is active and working hard to support future customer needs. I'm excited to understand how these topics impact our business on a regional basis and how to roll out in line with the local market needs.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

In an industry that is male dominated, one challenge is in making it seem welcoming and attractive to

all potential talent, regardless of gender. We are all aware of the need to attract young people to join our industry and we need women to be part of any solutions developed here.

By embracing topics that I have mentioned previously, such as digitalisation and sustainability, we can demonstrate to the next generation that our industry is ready to face future challenges. Having role models visible in the sector, such as at industry conferences and publications can help to inspire others. I believe in the idea that 'you can be what you can see.'

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

IMCD provides options around hybrid working, which are hugely beneficial. Not all roles can be effectively conducted from home – but for where it makes sense – it can be a great support for balancing home and work commitments. This can be particularly important for women where they are the primary care provider for their children, but these work-life benefits apply to anyone with or without additional family commitments. The main challenge with working primarily from home is to ensure you carve out opportunities for in-person interactions with colleagues, as this can be missed over time. Also ensuring you take the time to get up from your desk and move around during the working day – I'm very conscious of taking the time to do this.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

Our industry faces numerous challenges and needs creative solutions to address issues around vehicle electrification and developing sustainable solutions for lubricants that do not compromise on performance. There is a space for those who want to be part of the solution for helping to keep our world moving in an effective and sustainable way. I am happy to recommend this industry as one where you can build a network with friendly and talented men and women and where you can make your mark. Finally, IMCD runs a Women in Leadership Programme – which provides great developmental opportunities within the organisation.

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Gabriella Twining

Global Editor, Base Oils, Argus Media

Gabriella is the global editor of Argus' Base Oils publication, leading the global editorial team and publishing the weekly report. She previously worked as a reporter in IHS Markit's Maritime & Trade department covering all areas of shipping. And prior to that worked for several years at a ship management company in the Safety Security and Environment department.

What was your route into the industry?

I took a rather roundabout way to get into the base oils and lubricants world. I dabbled in a few different sectors after university, which included working for a think tank and an investment advisory start-up. I started off what I consider my proper career in ship management at the container shipping company CMA CGM. This move really helped prepare me for my current role and drove my ambition to become a subject matter expert of a niche market. Base oils and lubricants are in everything, which many people do not know, quite like the fact that 90% of everything that is moved is shipped. There is so much going on behind the scenes which is why this industry is so fascinating. Working in industry also taught me the importance of attention to detail, technical specifications and of diligent reporting.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

Career mapping is extremely important and will help make the road ahead a lot easier if you are ambitious and want to rise through the ranks. It is also a good way to ascertain what goals you want to achieve and is a way to provide a clear plan for the future.

Firstly, it is key to know and identify where exactly it is you want to head, ask yourself, what is the position you are aiming for?



Secondly, find an example of the job description for the role that you are trying to secure, HR or colleagues should be able to help you with this. Then highlight the key skills or competences you need to show to get the role.

Finally, once these have been identified, you can plan and set out how you will be able to clearly show that you are fulfilling those expectations and prepare your case for promotion.

Regarding obstacles that you may face, as trite as it might sound you cannot lose hope and have to remain resolute. And I have been made redundant twice! It is all about attitude, you will get knocks, not be offered that promotion despite working so hard, whatever it may be. But you cannot let these setbacks or obstacles fester and define you. Mourn and then move on, use them to drive you forward as opposed to hold you back.

What is the next step for you in your career?

The next step for me is to continue to establish myself in the industry and have more of a presence on the international stage. In order to succeed I need to continue to listen to the market and keep up to date with new developments. Further, I want to spend more time mentoring and help build those up around me by sharing my in-depth knowledge and wide varied experience. I am a big believer in skill sharing and so I volunteer to carry out in-house training for new recruits at our company, which I think is indispensable. It is not just about building your own career but also about bringing up those around you. Your team is only as strong as your weakest link, so you need to re-enforce them all.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

One of the main challenges I would say that is specifically relevant to women is being taken seriously. This is not just limited to the base oils and lubricants sector, but I would say this is also true of other male dominated industries. It is such a technical and niche industry, you have to have a grasp of a mixture of economics, chemistry, refinery dynamics, supply-demand fundamentals and geopolitical events. When facing others who have been in the industry for 10-plus years you do need to prove yourself and show you know what you are talking about. But I also feel this makes you better at your own role and prepares

you for any challenges. I think also think, because it is such a niche industry, it is probably not attracting as many skilled women as it could. I think it's also up to us, who are in the industry to promote it and how fascinating it is to other women and get more involved in recruitment processes. Overall, in general, I feel that the majority of people and character who work in the industry are pretty open and friendly. But respect needs to be earned.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

The industry is definitely full on and time consuming. To get up to date there is a lot of learning and extra reading and research that needs to be done. I've often found myself in bed with a cup of coffee and a biscuit reading papers on the evolution of Base Oils Technology. Or manuals on additives and articles on new engine formulations. There are many events and meetings across the globe that it can be all consuming. You just have to be very disciplined and know when to switch off and stick to it! Switch the phone off, put on the out of office and know that work will be waiting for you when you get back. But I would say that the conferences are mostly in lovely locations, and it is enjoyable to tag on an extended weekend, which is definitely a benefit. You can invite your partners and families and enjoy and discover a new city altogether and truly relax after a few intensive days of presenting and networking.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

The best advice I can give to other women is to not be afraid to get stuck in. Like I said, the industry is very friendly and welcoming once you have proven yourself. I would also say, do what you can to build up your network at all these industry events, contact generation is extremely important and may even help you to build your knowledge base and career. Say yes to every opportunity that presents itself, which is a great way to build up your profile, and don't be afraid to put yourself out there.

But above all, I would say the best thing you can do is learn your stuff!

Link: www.argusmedia.com

Dr Gemma Stephenson

Business Development Manager, Cargill

Gemma is a Business Development Manager for Cargill Bioindustrial's Energy Technologies sector. She obtained a PhD in Materials Chemistry in 2012 from The University of Manchester, before joining Croda Lubricants in 2012. Here her main focus was on tribology as well as additive and base oil development. She then moved over into a commercial role, where she now focusses on sustainability initiatives within Energy Technologies.

In her spare time, Gemma enjoys being outdoors with her family, cycling and marathon / ultramarathon running!



What was your route into the industry?

I studied for an MChem in Chemistry at University, and the third year of this was spent on placement at Infineum UK working with engine oil components. I absolutely loved every minute of it. I then went on to do a PhD in Physical Chemistry then joined Croda Lubricants in 2012. You then instantly become hooked and never want to do anything else. That's the trouble; people in the outside world don't know anything about what the lubricants industry do, but when you find out just how much of a vital role it plays, how fast-moving and exciting it is and just how many key industry challenges we have to solve, you realise that it's a magnificent place to be.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My student placement at Infineum was a great eye-opener into the industry and was a great way of showing me that chemistry goes beyond the laboratory and into real life – the cars we drive for example. It made everything I had been learning in university lectures, tangible. I found the work experience really helped me when it came to applying for positions further down the line. I gained lots of technical experience within Croda Lubricants, but then moved over into a marketing role in 2019, where I gained an Advanced Diploma in Professional Marketing.

My most recent and current position is within a business development role, focussing on understanding market needs with respect to sustainability, seeking new areas of collaboration and building and maintaining connections within our industry. I genuinely just love talking to people, especially about science and sustainability!

What is the next step for you in your career?

I'm still trying to immerse myself more and more in the industry, and to learn as much as I can from my amazing manager, John Eastwood. I am looking forward to becoming more involved in organisations such as the ATC Sustainability Sub Committee and the UEIL Sustainability Committee (on behalf of the UKLA), working together with a large number of other key stakeholders to engage on and respond to the changing sustainability environment. So much has been achieved so far by these groups and I am so excited to now be a part of this.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I don't necessarily think there are challenges faced now, more so that it has been so male dominated for such a very long time. I think it has been difficult to attract young women and girls into the industry as a whole, as they may struggle to see their place. I know it's also a challenge to encourage females to even to study chemistry and engineering at a university level. But I do feel this is changing now.

I think lots is being done to empower women and celebrate their successes, but we can always improve, right?! You can see the numbers of female attendees increasing more and more now at conferences and events. I always do that "glance around" and do a quick scan and the number of women present is steadily going up.

There have been some great events organised recently with a focus on women. UKLA did a great Women in the Lubricants Industry event, and similarly the Women in Focus awards by the ACI are great at bringing the issue to the surface. Women are now chairing panel sessions, taking part in the debate; Valentina Serra-Holm and Jacquie Berryman are chairing huge, international industry groups and really flying the flag and inspiring others!

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

As a mum to two younger children, balancing the school run, full-time job, making the Christmas Carol Concert and international travel can be incredibly tricky! Luckily I have a very supportive manager and work for a brilliant company who have policies in place around flexible working arrangements. I'm so fortunate I never get to miss out on watching my children in their school concerts, whilst simultaneously being challenged and given opportunities in the workplace.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

We need you! We need you to bring your unique ideas, insights and personal experiences to enhance what is a fast moving, dynamic and exciting industry. The industry really does recognise the need to diversify and attract and retain an innovative talent pool which is critical for its future growth and success.

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Katie Richardson

Senior Manager for Engine Oils Customer Technical Service (CTS) for Europe, Middle East, Africa and India (EMEAI), Afton Chemical

Katie Richardson has a masters degree in chemistry from Durham University, and holds a masters degree in business administration from the Open University. She is currently the senior manager for engine oils customer technical service in Europe Middle East and Africa at Afton Chemical, Bracknell, UK.

What was your route into the industry?

After leaving university with a master's degree in Chemistry, I was interested in pursuing a career within the chemical industry. I had not considered the fuels and lubricant additive industry prior to my application, but was successful in applying for a graduate role in Customer Technical Services with Afton – working initially within our Industrial product area. I spent 13 years in Industrial, and it's a very diverse and broad area, but having now spent the past 7 years in Engine Oils leading the Customer Technical Service team – the pace of development is a step-change due to the changes in the macro environment, especially with eMobility. In my 20 years at Afton, there has never been a dull day. I've also realised the culture of an organisation is also really important, and I enjoy an open and collaborative approach as it has a strong fit with my own values.



How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

On joining Afton, I had some excellent mentors who supported me with upskilling my technical knowledge, commercial acumen and personal development – plus some challenging work assignments which stretched my abilities even more. I really learnt a lot just from travelling around the region to meet customers, watching others from Afton in how they presented, conducted meetings and shared their expertise. Looking back, I will never underestimate how much I picked up from those opportunities - but at the same time, it always felt like a supportive environment where it was ok to sink or swim. I am a firm believer in owning and driving your own career, so having established myself from a technical perspective, I took the chance to do a management training course to pursue my aspiration to become a manager in the future – which wasn't part of the day job at the time. Afton also supported me to study towards a diploma in management and later an MBA – all of which allowed me to move into technical management.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I enjoy my current role as it includes developing others and bringing people along a similar journey I have been on. Afton is quite a small company, so you never know what opportunities will present themselves - but I have leading the EMEAI CTS team in my future aspirations.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

The fuels and lubricant additive industry is a very traditional industry compared to others, so challenges may arise because of that. However I have not experienced a traditional approach in my career – I work for a company where they really focus on valuing employees for their capability, industry knowledge and business skill set to do their role. Past and present, Afton have many examples of women in senior positions, which is really refreshing

and assuring for women looking at our industry as a career option. From a personal perspective, I also think having hobbies and interests outside of work can help you to develop skills that can be transferred to and from the workplace. For example, I have always done Girlguiding, which helped my confidence and leadership skills. The same can be said for undertaking my MBA – which has clearly contributed to supporting my career development – but it also helped me with my most recent role as a school governor, especially with strategic planning to help set the direction of the school.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

I enjoy working in the office and the collaboration this allows, and for me, it provides a clear separation between work and home life. Since having my children, I work a 90% week, allowing me to be there for my family whilst also maintaining a professional career. The whole site can finish early on a Friday, work permitting, giving me the opportunity for school pick-up at the end of the week. It's the little things like this which make a difference.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

I have found a fulfilling career at Afton and in an industry I had not initially considered, but one where every day is different and offers new challenges. Afton and other players in the industry may not be household names, but they create a vast range of exciting career opportunities to help the world in creating products that reduce emissions, make vehicles more efficient and machines last longer. My second piece of advice is to take responsibility in managing your own career path. You may not take the exact route you initially plan - but knowing where you want to go, as well as looking for opportunities to develop skills on the way – is a great start to set you up for the future.

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Katty Hoste

Business Development Manager - Europe, Chevron

Katty joined Chevron in 2003 after obtaining a PhD in Polymer Chemistry at the University of Gent, Belgium. Her first role in Chevron was as a Product Development Chemist specialising in industrial applications. Later she moved on to the role of TeamLeader Technical Support for Lubricants in EAME.

In 2008 she joined Chevron Base Oils as Marketing Specialist for Europe supporting the group II base oil business development in Europe. In 2018 Katty moved to the role of Business Development Manager Europe for Chevron Base Oils.

What was your route into the industry?

I applied with Chevron for a job in Coolants. At that time, it was not so easy to find a job, but people I knew from university were working at Chevron and shared it was a good place to work, so I decided to apply. I was not selected for the Coolants job, but I did get an invitation to instead interview in the Lubricants department at Chevron.

I had no experience with lubricants but decided to accept the invitation. I learnt that the job would be challenging but it was an opportunity to build an external network by providing customer technical support and an internal network by working in a global product development team. That made me accept the job offer.

Soon after I started as a Lubricant Product Developer.



How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

I never really had a clear path in my mind, but I was looking for opportunities along the way. The longer you work for a company, the better you understand the different roles and the skills that are required. I applied for job opportunities within Chevron that were of interest, where the common factor seemed to be customer focus and technical, but also because I had the opportunity to lead a team for example. I also moved into different roles as a result of reorganisations within the company. Those roles were not necessarily the ones I would have thought about, but made me see that I have other interests as well, like marketing.

I find the term "obstacles" too negative. In the course of a career, there are always challenges. You get more responsibilities, varied projects to manage, different styles of people to work with, a different environment to work in, and different supervisors.

There have been moments that I found it tough, but since I am very perseverant and an optimist, giving up was never an option.

Some challenges really put me outside my comfort zone. For a project I had to lead discussions about base oils with national authorities. I had no clue how to manage those relationships, what processes I had to adhere to, how to explain the lubricants and base oil market to those authorities. It was very tough. Looking back now, trying to overcome those challenges, have been the best learning experiences. They also lead to achievements that I am the most proud of.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I don't have a particular position in focus, but I like working in a global organisation and having interaction with customers. If a job would combine those two elements and there is room to grow, it would get my interest.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I think getting credibility, especially in a technical role. Also, even in the 21st century, women still struggle with the work/life balance, not only in our industry. The care for children is often still very much the role of the mother. The mindset is only slowly changing. Women do have a role to play in changing that mindset.

I think women should start by being role models in their own family. Raise the children with the idea that there are no dedicated roles for women and men at home. Girls and boys should both learn household activities.

It is also important to encourage children to study what is of interest to them. We need to make them aware there are not gender specific jobs.

We also need to learn to speak up. I was sometimes criticised by my son's teachers for travelling so much for work. I always found that insulting to my husband, since their criticism implied that he was not capable of taking care of my son when I was away.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

At Chevron, there is a big focus on wellbeing and there is a support system in place. We have a flexible work regime and we are encouraged to take our vacation. We frequently receive tips and tricks to make work easier and to increase productivity, mental and physical wellbeing.

There are also internal and external resources available for people who are looking for support related to wellbeing.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

Be yourself. Don't try to be a different version of yourself to fit in.

Seek support and help (at home and work) if you struggle with your work/life balance. This should not hold you from making a career.

Look after yourself and don't be too hard on yourself if things don't always go the way they should.

But these are exciting times. The energy transition means we are deeply engaged in finding tomorrow's answers for combustible fuels, but also for lubricants. We need a diversity of people to succeed in the face of those challenges. The lubricants industry is a good one to join since it is really one big family and you get to know people quite well over time.

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Kerry Larkin

Former Director Sales,
Petro-Canada Lubricants



Born and raised on the Wirral, Kerry graduated from Nottingham University with a BSc in Chemistry and holds an MBA from Henley Business School. She has held a number of commercial roles in the Chemical and Lubricants Industry during her 30-year career, including commercial board directorships and has represented her Industry in the field of diversity and inclusion. Kerry now lives in the Cotswolds with her husband Matt and their two children Holly and James.

What was your route into the industry?

Whilst studying for a Chemistry degree at Nottingham University, I took a eight week marketing placement as part of the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP), which confirmed my desire to pursue a commercial rather than a technical career path, but still in Industry. I joined the White Sea & Baltic company, an Oleochemical distributor, as a graduate trainee working as a Chemical sales executive and 3 years later, I joined Fuchs Lubricants UK Ltd and have been in the Industry ever since!

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My career really developed whilst I was with SIP Ltd, where the board recognised and encouraged my career aspirations and need to be challenged, with a variety of commercial roles and promotions, moving from product manager through to Marketing Manager and eventually Commercial Director. I was fortunate to have such a supportive employer who invested in me, funding my MBA and supporting me through both of my maternity leave's and despite being the first female board director, I never felt treated differently to any of my male colleagues. The same has been true with all of my industry colleagues and I have always felt valued because of my capability to do the job. I have been fortunate to have faced very few obstacles in my career to date, the most has probably been the ability to influence in a larger corporate environment compared to an SME.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I am working towards a general management role where I can bring together my people and influencing skills with my ability to see the bigger picture, to lead the organisation to meet its strategic goals. Having experienced the benefits of being supported by an executive coach in recent times, I am also considering this in the longer-term to share my experience and mentor and support others on their journey.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I think the pressures on women in Industry have increased now it's a belief that women can have it all, which can lead to trying to prove that you can do it all. With a greater focus on gender bias, positive discrimination and quota's, it also highlights the focus on women vs. men, rather than the right candidate for the role, regardless of gender. Rather than challenges, it is good to focus on the benefits women specifically bring to the industry, where our differing perspectives and approach brings diversity that can greatly benefit decision making and organisational success.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Maternity leave is great for realising you are not irreplaceable! That was a real learning for me earlier in my career. In the always-on era, its hard to strike a good work-life balance, but its about understanding when its time to listen to your body or family & friends and take the time needed to rebalance in whatever way works for you.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

Be true to who you are and don't think of yourself as a woman in the industry. Just a professional in the industry. Take gender out of the equation and focus on achieving your goals through building a supportive and collaborative network. There are so many great people willing to support you and help you succeed!

Since our interview, Kerry has left the industry as of the end of April for a career in the industrial gas sector. We wish her all the best for her future endeavours.

Laura Carter

Joint Managing Director, Slicker Recycling

Laura Carter is the joint managing director of Slicker Recycling, a waste management specialist in the collection and re-refining of used oil and hazardous workshop waste.

Laura joined Slicker back in 2008 and was appointed joint managing director in 2022. In addition to guiding strategy and overseeing its execution, she holds significant accountability for commercial affairs, customer relations, marketing initiatives, and team leadership. More recently, she has also taken a more active participation within the company's logistics and service delivery teams.

What was your route into the industry?

My background is customer service and account management. I was working in retail management but wanted out of the sector as I worked most weekends and had two young children. Looking for that better work-life balance, I applied for an Account Manager role at OSS (now Slicker) at the age of 26, and two years after joining I was promoted to Commercial Contracts Manager and then in 2012 to Commercial Director.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

One very big obstacle for me as a single parent was trying to juggle work and kids and never feeling like I was giving enough to either. Additionally, prior to completing my Master's Degree, I didn't feel adequately certified to validate my role as Commercial Director, despite my proficiency in the subject matter, I still believed that having that formal credential was necessary for validation. I have learnt many lessons from this and now understand how important it is to celebrate my successes and remind myself how far I've come. I have learned to embrace authenticity and to simply be myself.

What is the next step for you in your career?

There are a number of things I hope to achieve, the first being to contribute more towards giving back, as I believe there's a significant opportunity we're overlooking by not engaging with schools, providing education, and increasing our visibility. It's crucial to explore enhanced educational and pathway initiatives, but these efforts must be deeply integrated into businesses and led by entities such as central Government and regulators. This is a cause close to my heart and I'm actively considering how I can contribute more to it.

I would also like to enhance awareness of the wider industry as lubricants play such a vital role in numerous aspects of our lives, of which many are unaware of, from footwear, timepieces, automobiles, electronics, plastics and various machinery - they contribute to making our daily routines smoother and more efficient. I really believe there's a need for greater efforts to shift mindsets, emphasising the significance of lubricants across various sectors.

And finally, one of my enduring goals revolves around addressing the challenging issue of 'greenwashing'. Regrettably, some entities within the re-refining industry claim to be green when they are not. The key question to be asking is not what they say they recover or recycle, but what happens to them afterwards, what's their next life cycle, where does it go or end up? Therefore, I am committed to advocating for a message centred on integrity, urging for genuine actions aligned with responsible practices and environmental awareness.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

As a male-dominated industry we need to be attracting more women. To achieve that we must focus and raise more awareness on the impact their input and skills can bring, and getting them involved in backing good causes which affect us all, such as sustainability.

Women possess immense potential in our industry. However, many are deterred by the significant childcare responsibilities they often shoulder, which can hinder their consideration of careers in waste management or lubricants. To address this, we should prioritise offering flexible or hybrid working arrangements to accommodate their needs and enable them to contribute their valuable skills.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Well, I am not sure I have the perfect answer for you on this and still trying to figure it out, but if I am honest taking the lessons I have learnt, and as a single mum of two now older children, I would say you need to try and separate the two which is easier said than done when you are trying to please everyone. If we don't have time to recharge then all the plates fall anyway, but to keep them spinning it's important to take time out, look after our own wellbeing, and when you are in the office remember you are only human and we all have limits.

What does the industry need to do to encourage and make it easier for women to enter the industry?

It's about being more up front about potential career pathways and opportunities they could achieve over a period of time. I've already talked about schools, but there's also a big role for women already in the industry to start sharing their successes more. I think those of us who hold senior positions within the industry need to use our platforms more to create awareness and share our stories of how rewarding it is if you work hard and don't let anything hold you back.

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Leyla Alieva

CEO and Co-founder, NEOL Copper Technologies

Leyla Alieva is the CEO and co-founder of NEOL Copper Technologies, a hard-science company dedicated to developing and manufacturing innovative technical lubricants, based in the UK.

What was your route into the industry?

My journey was anything but straightforward and anticipated. I am a newcomer, with just three years in the industry, coming from the opposite side – the realm of innovation. After obtaining my degree in Financial Management, I spent over 12 years in investment banking, private equity, and alternative fund management. Following this, I transitioned to top-level business development and executive management roles in the area of innovation support infrastructure. Before co-founding NEOL, I served as the CEO of CUPPER Group, gaining two years of valuable experience in the development and manufacturing of innovative lubricants and greases.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My career mapping was clear through years in finance and investment, followed by a transition to business development and executive management. I wouldn't say I faced particular obstacles. The twist happened when I decided to take up an active role in CUPPER Group. Juggling full-time motherhood and stepping into the CEO role presented challenges. However, it led to the co-founding of NEOL Copper Technologies, aligning my skills in project initiation, team building, finance, and strategy. The main success factor was my "tabula rasa" state in the lubricants' world, freeing me from numerous limitations.

What is the next step for you in your career?

In my role as Co-founder and CEO of NEOL Copper Technologies, the goal is to introduce our sustainable lubricant technology globally, contributing to a cleaner and better world. We aim to elevate our company's reputation by expanding market presence, forming strategic partnerships, and exploring potential entry into new markets or industries. Our primary focus is on establishing NEOL Copper Technologies as a key player in high-performance sustainable lubrication globally.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

Being a newcomer, I haven't experienced challenges specific to women. I won't assume that women often face challenges related to gender stereotypes and biases. We all have the task of breaking through our own perception of gender norms and stereotypes. It's crucial for women to embrace their unique skill sets and learning curves leading to excellence.

The main challenge is balancing professional excellence with remaining true to oneself as a woman.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Juggling my roles as a CEO and a mom of three requires careful planning. One big help is that I can adjust my work hours because my schedule is flexible. Also, I can join meetings and talk to people through video calls from anywhere. This means I don't always have to be in one place. These two things – a flexible schedule and the ability to use video calls – really help me balance my work and family life. It lets me handle my CEO duties while still being there for my family when they need me. This flexibility makes a big difference. Another benefit is the absence of peer pressure.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

Embrace your unique journey and skills, appreciate your individuality, and never stop learning. Understand and stay focused on your goals, be open to input and creative ideas, and don't let setbacks affect your confidence. Stay true to yourself, your vision, and your values. And remember to find excitement in your daily work.

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Lydia Moi

International Trade Adviser, Department for Business and Trade



Lydia originally graduated as a linguist and has a 20+ years background in export and international trade. Having worked in both the UK and Italy for manufacturers and distributors in business development and export sales roles, she then specialised in export documentation and trade procedures for the Chamber of Commerce's international department, before joining the Department for Business and Trade as an International Trade Adviser 7 years ago.

What was your route into the industry?

I was already working as an International Trade Adviser for the UK Government's Department for Business and Trade and in 2018 I began to focus on supporting businesses who operate specifically in the chemical sector to internationalise. From there I started to get an understanding of the specific challenges these businesses faced, whether they were selling lubricants to Vietnam or coatings to South Africa.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

I don't have a chemical background, so it was not an obvious step if I'm honest. But it has given me the opportunity to learn about the sector and develop networks in the industry both in the UK and internationally, which has been really interesting! There haven't really been any obstacles as such, just lots of helpful and friendly people in the industry who were willing to help me along the way!

What is the next step for you in your career?

For the moment just continuing to support new and experienced exporters to grow through providing access to international markets, knowledge and networks, while at the same time continuing to champion the UK chemical sector generally.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I guess there is still a wider (mis)perception that the industry is male-dominated and that it is not a career which appeals to girls/women. We have to change this right from the early stages of life, in society and through education. Helping young people, and particularly young females, to feel there is a place for them in the industry and that they can make a difference, should be a priority.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Taking time to look after ourselves, our family, our health and our interests is really important so that we have the energy, focus and motivation to strive in all areas of our life, including our work. In our constantly connected world, it is easy to not switch off from work, so we have to make that decision consciously. Looking after our wellbeing will always pay off in the long run!

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

I would say just maximise every opportunity to develop your own path and career, while at the same time joining the wider mission to promote the chemical industry more positively among society.

Link: www.great.gov.uk

Michelle Haslam

Global Marketing Director,
Lubrizol Additives



Michelle is the Global Marketing Director for Lubrizol Additives, a division of the Lubrizol Corporation, a Berkshire Hathaway Company. Michelle has global responsibility for all marketing communications activities and accountable for leading the regional teams to strengthen the Lubrizol brand, promote products and capabilities, advance customer experience and deliver compelling communications that engage stakeholders. Michelle is a Chartered Marketer with over 18 years' experience in marketing, public relations and sales plus 4 years of experience working in international trade.

What was your route into the industry?

In 2011, I became part of the Lubrizol team after working in the construction industry. Residing near the Lubrizol site in Derbyshire, I had always heard glowing reviews about what an exceptional workplace it was. When the opportunity for a Marketing Manager role arose, I had to apply. Luckily, I succeeded in the interview, and from that moment on, there was no turning back—it turned out to be the most rewarding career decision I've ever made.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

It's crucial to envision where you see yourself in a decade and outline the steps along the way. This strategic approach makes it easier to pinpoint the essential skills for success in those roles.

This method enabled me to concentrate on key areas and acquire the necessary skills. For instance, I sought sales experience to enhance my business understanding and grasp customer needs. Supported by my manager and the sales director, I integrated into this role alongside my marketing responsibilities, creating an ideal scenario for skill development while maintaining my enjoyable marketing role.

Despite the challenges of a demanding dual role and the struggle to balance work and life, the benefits outweighed the challenges. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity, as it significantly contributed to my learning and eventually played a crucial role in securing my position as marketing director.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I have only recently been appointed into my new role as Global Marketing Director, therefore my next steps are to embrace this new opportunity and ensure I provide the mentoring and leadership for my team. There are so many opportunities within Lubrizol, I am excited to see where the next steps take me.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I've observed shifts in the challenges faced by women across various industries in recent years, with some biases gradually diminishing. Despite this progress, many of us still feel the need to demonstrate our capabilities with a can-do attitude. I've always held the belief that roles should be awarded based on merit. I aspire for others to adopt this same approach over time.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

Since the onset of the pandemic, many companies have embraced a more flexible approach to work, incorporating elements such as hybrid models and flexible hours. This shift has been particularly beneficial for individuals striving to strike a balance between their professional and personal lives. Personally, I've always emphasised the importance of fulfilling responsibilities and contributing as and when needed, regardless of the specific hours spent in the office. It's essential to recognise that some individuals may begin their workday early or continue working late from home to connect with colleagues across the globe.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

The industry is an exciting field to be a part of, with constant advancements and changes to hardware and technology. Every day presents a new opportunity to learn and grow, keeping your mind active and engaged. For women seeking to join the industry or transition to a new company, I encourage you to do your research and explore the organisation's current employees, their career progression, and tenure. It's truly inspiring to see how long some of my colleagues have been with Lubrizol and the passion and dedication they bring to their work every day.

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Michelle Jou

CEO, Castrol

Michelle Jou is CEO at Castrol, a 125-year-old global lubricant brand (part of bp Group). She is a champion of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and is committed to building high-performing teams. Born in Taiwan, Michelle started her career with Elf Atochem and later joined Bayer Material Science (now Covestro). She has held various country, regional and global management positions across a variety of functions. She holds a Master of Management degree and is a food, wine, hiking and travel enthusiast.

What was your route into the industry?

I have 25 years' experience across sales, marketing, supply chain and administrative roles in the chemical industry, in markets across Asia and Europe. In 2022, I joined Castrol from Covestro (former Bayer Material Science). Prior to that, I was with Elf Atochem.

Having worked with multinational organisations in both developed and developing markets, I was drawn to Castrol (part of bp Group) as it's a world class premium lubricant brand with advanced technology, innovative products, strong brand equity, high customer loyalty and a truly global reach. And I was keen to take my experience to the next level as Castrol's first female CEO. 2024 is a milestone year for us, as Castrol is celebrating its 125th anniversary and I feel very privileged to lead our 125-year iconic brand forward with our very passionate team.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My idea of career development was very fluid at the beginning. But I was always interested in customer-facing roles and I knew I wanted to be a generalist rather a specialist. So, I built my career consciously and gradually before taking over full profit and loss (P&L) responsibilities.

Being a woman in an industry where gender balance didn't exist earlier was not always easy. I owe my career journey to my humble background. I was

born in Taiwan, a small island with limited resources, and

I believe this made me outward looking, never afraid to seek new opportunities and find resources and mentors to support me.



I have never let my gender or cultural differences come in the way of my career. I believe self-confidence is very important for women in the workplace and accepting that we are different does not mean it is a weakness. I have been fortunate to work in global companies that place a strong emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion and in return, I have always championed women's empowerment and career development in workplaces.

What is the next step for you in your career?

Having joined Castrol relatively recently, my current focus is to drive even more profitable growth for the business through our new Onward, Upward, Forward strategy and lay a strong foundation for our iconic brand ready for future success.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

The energy sector and our business has traditionally had a gender imbalance and still does. This is something we've been working hard to address. At bp, we set ourselves a goal to have 40% women group leaders and 35% women senior level leaders by 2025. We're not there yet, but we're making good progress and have much more to do to achieve this.

Some of the key challenges women face are unconscious bias, inadequate female representation at senior leadership levels, and a lack of women role models. To attract and retain more female employees, we have implemented "Hiring Inclusively"; a set of globally consistent recruiting principles that support greater diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our recruitment process.

Externally we have several initiatives and partnerships, which aim to dispel misconceptions about careers in our industry. Female mechanics, car drivers and female racers/bikers also face unconscious bias – we also work with our partners to roll out initiatives and trainings to tackle this.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

We have formal arrangements such as part-time working, job shared roles, flexible time management or flexible work location available across our company. This allows us to define modern and inclusive arrangements, allowing our people to perform at their best.

We also have employee-led Business Resource Groups aimed at creating better engagement and making sure that our people feel seen, included, connected, and supported. One such group is our Women's International Network (WIN) that focuses on supporting female employees with career development and progression. We also have a global "Women in Sales Network" at Castrol that serves as a support and learning group. Our female sales colleagues absolutely love being in the network and are proud of the work they do.

Our 'Working Families' resource group supports all employees who have caring responsibilities and works to encourage and support those who become carers, building an inclusive environment for all employees in that position.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

This is an exciting time for women planning to join the energy sector. With so many technological advancements and challenges to solve as we transition, and with companies prioritising diversity, equity & inclusion, there are several opportunities to create an impact.

My advice would be – be courageous, positive, open-minded, and curious – challenge the status quo! Ask questions and do not be afraid to voice your opinion or share your unique perspective. Take risks and go after opportunities that come your way. Find mentors and people who are willing to sponsor your career progression or just be sounding boards. And don't get discouraged if your career progression isn't linear or as quick as you imagined it.

In our fast-changing world, it's critical that we all continually sharpen our skillsets to stay relevant. Keep on top of the trends and technology in your industry/field of work and beyond. Most importantly find a work-life balance that works for you and your family and prioritise your wellbeing. A successful career is a marathon and not a sprint. So, having a long term view would benefit women immensely.

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Sabrina Panero

Delivery Consultant, ABN Resource

An Argentinian with an Italian background, Sabrina settled in the UK in 2004, choosing Yorkshire as her home after exploring. In 2016, she found my calling in recruitment, realising her passion for guiding others to their dream careers. Sabrina's skills flourished in both agency and in-house recruitment. When James Moorhouse of ABN Resource reached out and shared the company values of Service, Trust, Perseverance, and Delivery they deeply resonated with her. Joining their team, Sabrina eagerly embraced the challenge of the international lubricants and fuel market. Now, she takes pride in connecting global companies with top talent, guiding individuals toward fulfilling career paths.

What was your route into the industry?

I started working in the lubes sector in 2022. My desire to continually challenge myself and step outside my comfort zone led me to join ABN Resource and look after the European hires for our lube, additive and base oil customer portfolio. Before this, I spent six years in healthcare recruitment and whilst there has been plenty of new learning, the skills I got in healthcare sector transfer nicely to lubes sector particularly around customer focus and attention to detail.

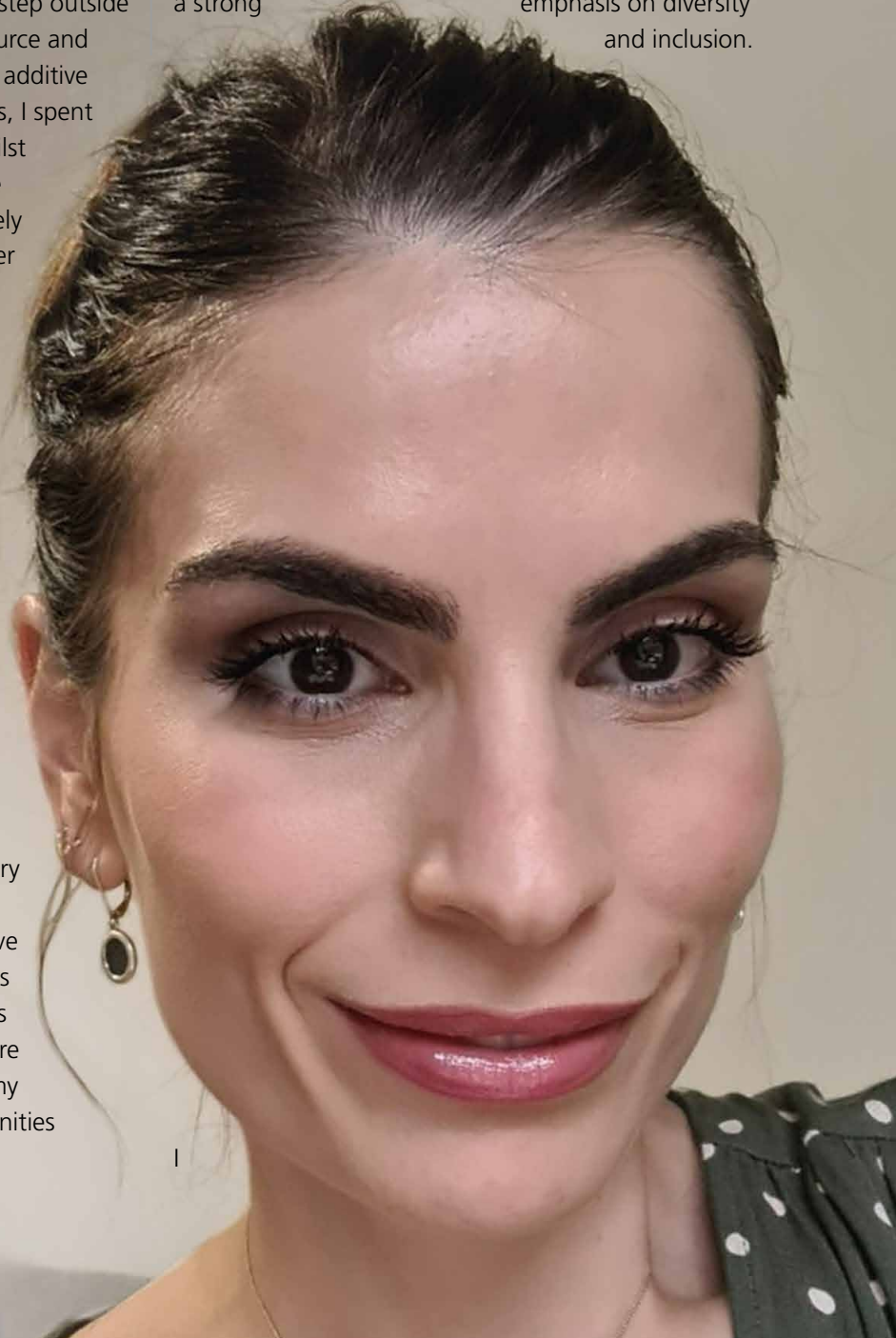
How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

My transition into the lubricants industry stemmed from a desire to specialise in a dynamic and globally significant sector.

Along the way, I've encountered challenges that have ultimately strengthened my skills and resilience. Adapting to the nuances of international recruitment, navigating diverse cultural landscapes, staying abreast of industry trends, and addressing the unique challenges faced as a woman in the industry have been integral aspects. The gender dynamics in the professional landscape have presented both obstacles and opportunities for growth. I've embraced these challenges as chances to contribute to fostering a more inclusive and diverse industry, leveraging my experiences to advocate for equal opportunities and drive positive change.

What is the next step for you in your career?

Continuous growth in talent acquisition while placing a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion.



am committed to fostering an inclusive workplace culture by ensuring diverse perspectives contribute to the success of the organisations I work with. In addition to honing my recruitment skills, I am actively seeking opportunities to contribute to and promote diversity initiatives within the industry. My goal is to play a key role in building high-performance teams that are diverse, dynamic, drive innovation and success in the ever-evolving global lubricant market.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

Navigating the lubricants industry as a woman brings both unique opportunities and challenges. Some of the challenges that women may encounter include gender bias and stereotypes, underrepresentation in leadership, workplace male-dominated culture and achieving work-life balance are some of them. Despite these challenges, we must remember women also bring unique perspectives, skills, and strengths to the industry.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

The flexibility to work remotely, providing me with the ability to operate from my home base in the UK, or trips to Argentina where I grew up to spend time with family, Infact any other location where my family and friends are residing, I get to go to. I had 3 weeks in the Italian mountains last summer, and as long as I had wifi and phone reception I could do my job with a great view from the holiday house. This not only enhances my professional productivity but also enables me to prioritise personal commitments and maintain a strong connection with my support network.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

My advice for women either in the industry or considering joining it would include the following...

Build a Strong Network: Connect with other women in the industry through professional networks, conferences, and online platforms. Seek mentorship from experienced professionals, both male and female, to gain insights and guidance.

Embrace Continuous Learning: Stay informed about industry trends, technological advancements, and market dynamics. Invest in your professional development through workshops, certifications, and training programs to stay competitive.

Confidence and Assertiveness: Trust your abilities and expertise. Confidence is key in any professional setting. Be assertive in expressing your ideas and contributing to discussions. Your perspectives are valuable.

Seek Opportunities for Leadership: Pursue leadership roles and take on challenging projects to showcase your skills. Advocate for yourself and express your career goals to supervisors, positioning yourself for advancement. **Create a Supportive Work Environment:** Foster a supportive work environment by building positive relationships with colleagues. Encourage diversity and inclusion within your workplace to create a more inclusive culture.

Balance Work and Personal Life: Establish a healthy work-life balance to avoid burnout and maintain overall well-being. Communicate your needs and boundaries clearly with colleagues and superiors.

Stay Resilient: The industry may present obstacles, but resilience is key to overcoming challenges. Learn from setbacks, adapt to changes, and use them as opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Advocate for Gender Equality: Actively support and promote gender equality initiatives within your organisation. Be a voice for inclusivity and fairness, and contribute to creating a more diverse industry.

Be Visible and Vocal: Share your accomplishments and contributions. Don't shy away from highlighting your successes. Participate in industry events, panels, and discussions to increase your visibility.

Encourage Others: Support and uplift fellow women in the industry. Create a network of encouragement and share experiences. Be a role model for those considering entering the field, inspiring them to pursue their goals.

Remember that each journey is unique, and finding what works best for you is essential. Embrace the challenges, celebrate successes, and continue to contribute your skills to the lubricants industry with confidence.

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Sanya Mathura

Head of Strategic Reliability Solutions Ltd

Sanya is the Founder of Strategic Reliability Solutions Ltd based in Trinidad & Tobago. She works with global affiliates in the areas of Reliability and Asset Management to bring these specialty niches to her clients. She has a strong engineering background and continues to push barriers by being the first female to achieve numerous certifications in the lubrication industry globally. Sanya sits on several international boards and has published 6 books to date. When not writing or managing the business, you can find her supporting projects to advocate for women in STEM.

What was your route into the industry? –

While I have my Bachelor's Degree in Electrical & Computer Engineering from the University of the West Indies (nothing to do with machinery lubrication!), I worked with Shell lubricants as their technical support for Trinidad & Tobago for approximately 5 years. Although I was the youngest and only female in the industry at the time, understanding the essential role of machinery lubricants and the pivotal role it plays in connecting everything, helped me to fall in love with reliability. I am very passionate about helping people solve machinery lubricated issues as these are the ones which can really add value to organisations.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

While doing my thesis for my Masters in Engineering Asset Management, I realised that I wasn't putting my best work forward. So, I quit my job (with no backup plan) and decided to work on my thesis, full time. During that time, I began reaching out to several people in the industry and they all knew someone who knew someone who had information. That's when I got the idea for forming my own company which would be geared towards Reliability Solutions, but of course it had to be Strategic! So, the company has global consultants in various fields of reliability who help customers in Trinidad & Tobago as well as various parts of the world to make their equipment more reliable while also empowering their staff with knowledge.

One of the major challenges I faced was simply being a female in the lubricant industry. In meetings with other engineers or even training sessions, I always had to prove that I was competent enough to answer their questions or

add some value. I even had someone stop me during a training session and say, "I need to know that you are technically competent to train me and not just some pretty face." (Yes, he got a mouthful about my background and had no other questions for the rest of the day!).

As women in the industry, we're often faced with the "prove it again" bias where we need to prove ourselves before being taken seriously. This is one area that I hope to change by constantly pushing the boundaries and raising the bar for more women to get into the field of machinery lubrication. I was the first person (and still only female) in the Caribbean to achieve the ICML MLE (International Council of Machinery Lubrication, Machinery Lubrication Engineer) certification and up until recently, the only female in the world to achieve the ICML varnish badges (I am very happy that other women are getting the certification!).



What is the next step for you in your career?

Right now, I'm on the path of empowering as many women as I can in the field of STEM (not just lubrication). I am the series editor for the "Empowering Women in STEM" books published by CRC Press Taylor & Francis and I get the opportunity to provide a platform for men and women to share their stories of how they got involved in STEM. Why is this important?

There is actual research which shows that women leave the engineering field (in particular) after about 5 years. They go into other non-related STEM fields or transition out of the industry completely. We are losing a lot of talented people simply because we're not providing a positive environment for them to prosper. Women bring a different energy to projects with creativity and the way in which our brain works. This helps to diversify the thought process and find different solutions which can lead to a greater impact on overall efficiency and value for our industry.

We need to retain our women in STEM and encourage others to join the workforce. Through these books, we get the platform to showcase that everybody has a different journey and most importantly, you are not alone. It provides an avenue to get questions answered about how to handle certain situations at work or overcome challenges both for men and women.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

Sometimes we are not taken seriously enough and ideas being brought to the table are easily discarded. If the same idea were given by a male colleague, it is taken up immediately (this is from several experiences that I've had over the years). We need to change that. Women provide unique solutions and these should be heard. Our male allies are our strongest support in helping these ideas reach where they need to be as we must all work together to ensure that we provide value to our industry.

This is something that I faced when I published my first book, "Lubrication Degradation Mechanisms – A Complete guide" by CRC Press Taylor & Francis. I wrote the entire book but held off on publishing it until I earned my ICML MLE badge. I knew the industry and also knew that I might not have been taken seriously unless I had some internationally recognised certification saying that I knew what I was talking about. After earning my badge and publishing

the book, I can safely say that lots of people use the book on a daily basis without questioning whether the information was valid or not. It's something we need to work on together, as a society.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

This is a tough one! As a female, you're always called upon to be at the top of your game, which means you put in twice or five times the amount of work as someone else in addition to trying to live a normal life. When you mix that in with running a business and dealing with clients in various time zones, it can be quite challenging!

One thing that has worked for me is time blocking. If I'm working on a particular task, I'm heads-down in it until I finish, or the allocated time is up. Afterwards, I move on to the next thing. This isn't just for work, it's for my personal life as well. If I have somethings to do, I am not working during that time. It helps to be present in the little moments because these are the ones which stay with you forever.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

In a heartbeat I would tell them to join the industry! It's exciting, constantly changing and there's always so much to learn. Yes, there may be a bit of a challenge at first (especially in terms of finding the right female PPE – do not compromise on this one and there are lots of providers now who have PPE for women). But our industry is a bit different from others, we support and care for each other. We've built a community and look out for each other. If you are unsure of something, ask a question. Don't assume that you know everything or let others assume that either. You are there to learn and others within the industry are usually always willing to pass along information.

Do not compromise your personality to fit into a box or stereotype. Some women try to fit into the "boys club" when entering this industry. You don't need to do that to fit in. Never compromise your values or who you are just to be a part of something. If you do that, you end up losing the best part of yourself. Stay true to your values, your nature and who you are, these are the qualities which will help you in the industry above all else.

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Sarah Hilton

Sales Account Manager, BASF

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Sarah Hilton is a Sales Account Manager at BASF. With nearly 30 years of experience spanning diverse industries, Sarah's absolute passion lies in putting the customer at the heart of everything BASF do. Her primary focus is always to exceed customer expectations with innovative products, unwavering technical support and sustainable solutions. Behind the scenes, Sarah is a Mum of two teenage boys, a keen runner (finishing two London Marathons) and her 'oh did I tell you...?' skill is that she can also drive a fork-lift truck.

What was your route into the industry?

I studied Business Management with French and then secured a graduate retail management position. I never imagined that I would stay in retail for 20 or so years, but it worked for my family, and especially so for childcare. However, when I turned 40 I decided it was time to do something completely different and move away from the Retail Sector.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

In terms of career development, I know when it's time to move on or to do something different. In terms of obstacles, I don't recall any, other than my own self-doubt at times.

What is the next step for you in your career?

BASF is constantly developing new products and technologies to meet the changing needs of its customers, so there's always something new for me to learn in my current role, despite me being in Sales for a number of years now.

That said, given the chance, I'd really enjoy working with customers from a larger geographical area as I imagine it would bring an exciting new challenge. Learning about their organisations and discovering solutions together; it would offer a fresh aspect to my work. I would see it as an opportunity to broaden my horizons, embrace diverse cultures, navigate unique market dynamics and a chance to showcase my collaboration skills.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

I think it depends on the work environment, I know I have never been overlooked for a role due to my gender, but I'm sure it happens. From a wider industry perspective, I think we all face (regardless of gender) an increasingly competitive environment with increasing regulation. So for these reasons, I think it's important for people to stay relevant and for companies to be ahead of the curve, whether that be through Sustainability or Innovation.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

At BASF plc there are a number of benefits that support a good work-life balance ranging from employee well-being sessions, flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies to digital tools and professional development support. For me personally, agile working arrangements have been a game changer and the well-being workshops have proved invaluable for both my physical and mental health.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

My key piece of advice would be to build a strong professional network. UKLA events are good for that! I would also say actively seek out experienced professionals who can provide guidance, support, and who can advocate for you and your career advancement. And I would absolutely say be confident and assertive but show your authentic self. Some of the best leaders I've ever worked with have embraced being a woman instead of hiding behind a charade of what they think a leader needs to act like. That brings me on to a subject close to my heart, I would encourage women to challenge stereotypes and biases and be an active advocate for diversity and inclusion within your organisation and our industry.

Finally I would reassure you that working in industry can be demanding and challenging but you will develop when you overcome setbacks, learn from failures, don't lose sight of your goals. Be resilient.

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Sharon Charnock

Operations Director, Utility Oils Ltd



Sharon Charnock is the Operations Director for Utility Oils Ltd based in Ashton in Makerfield Wigan. She has achieved a great deal in her life, but is happy to admit that her greatest achievement is her 2 children (Jordan, 27 years, and Chloe, 24 years) both of whom are exceling in their own career paths. Sharon is a qualified Lead auditor in 3 standards (ISO 9001 / 14001 / 45001) and qualified NEBOSH General certification and WAMITAB Level 4. Her hobbies include motorbikes and horses.

What was your route into the industry?

My family background has always been within the transport sector, and I have always enjoyed challenging myself and achieving new skills & knowledge.

My route into the industry had been purely a self-development move and initially I had been looking for a new challenge and to further my experience within the Transport industry. I had previously been senior account manager & ISO Lead auditor within the transport industry solely overseeing all UK, Ireland, Germany and Poland customers for a leading plastic injection moulding manufacturing company.

The opportunity to work with Utility Oils arose in January 2010, I believed it would be a great time within my career and continual self-development not to just challenge myself but to be a part of a growing company which, within the first year I had developed & implemented a management system that achieved ISO certification in all 3 standards (9001 / 14001 / 18001 no 45001).

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

There have not been any real obstacles as such, but as for career mapping then just hard work and a positive mental attitude & believing in yourself goes along way. Going above and beyond to ensure your customers' expectations are fulfilled and they receive excellent services.

What is the next step for you in your career?

As an Operations Director of Utility Oils, I am at the height of my career and will continue to be a part of a well-established family run business therefore, the only step I foresee is to continue to watch and be a part of Utility Oils as it continues to grow.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

At the beginning of my career within this industry, the first thing that was apparent to me was the fact that females were a minority and unfortunately was a male dominant industry. As time has passed, I have been privileged and proud to see more females especially in senior roles and my daughter who in her own right is in the lubricants industry and developing her career.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

I am fortunate to be a part of a family run business and work -life balance has always been well managed and the love of my job and even over the years building up not just customers but building friendships.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

My advice would be that the industry has evolved and is well balanced between men and women throughout all the job roles within the industry, so be positive and believe in yourself after all we are our own best critics.

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Valentina Serra-Holm

Vice President Engineering Fluids,
Perstorp Group



Valentina is Vice President Engineering Fluids at Perstorp, a leading specialty chemicals innovator. She has 25 years' experience in the oil and lubricant industry, boasting several senior technical and commercial roles at Nynas, Calumet, and Koras.

Valentina holds a MS degree in Chemical Engineering, a PhD degree in Chemical Plants from the Polytechnic of Turin (Italy) and a PhD degree in Chemical Reaction Engineering from Åbo Akademi (Finland). She is the author of numerous scientific and technical publications, patents, and international presentations in the field of specialty oils and lubricants.

What was your route into the industry?

After completing my second PhD, I wanted to have a career change and decided to leave my academic career. By chance, I found a job ad from a Swedish specialty oil company for which my profile seemed relevant. This happened 24 years ago and I never left the industry since.

How has career mapping led to where you are now and what obstacles have you faced (if any)?

I started in a technical role, focusing on product development, but I was soon offered the opportunity to move to a product management role, where I had more customer contacts. Building on my technical competence and commercial experience I took several managerial roles within strategic marketing and R&D. I wouldn't say I faced obstacles, but, as my roles required extensive international traveling, it was a bit tricky to combine professional and private life at times, especially in the beginning of my career, since I had two young children. But living in a country like Sweden has made my life a lot easier, since Sweden really supports working parents.

What is the next step for you in your career?

I don't actually know, to be honest. My main driver is to pursue roles where I am intellectually stimulated and where I create value, and every career move I made provided new challenges, which contributed to my personal and professional growth, so I will just have to see where this takes me next.

What challenges do you think women specifically face in the industry?

This is difficult to say. Instinctively, one would say that, even if the gender balance has improved in the last years, this is still a male-dominated industry, which per se could be perceived as challenging. However, I would say that our industry is very welcoming, and I haven't often encountered gender bias. I would almost say that our industry is better compared to other manufacturing sectors in this regard.

What benefits do you have that focus on work-life balance?

In Sweden many companies give a yearly health care allowance that can be used for instance at a gym. Moreover, I believe that the possibility of working remotely also enables a better work-life balance, even if it requires a certain level of discipline to avoid working too long.

What advice would you give to women either in the industry or considering joining the industry?

This is a fantastic industry, with competent and friendly people that are very happy to share their knowledge. So my advice would be to be curious, to engage in discussions with their peers to further build their competence and to really strive to grow in their role, without thinking that their gender would be a limitation or an obstacle, because it is not.

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Women in the lubricants industry

Lube

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