

Darlene Miller – May 15, 2013 – Joint Economic Committee

Thank you Congressman Brady and Senator Klobuchar for inviting me here today and for giving me the opportunity to present my own views on manufacturing to include the importance of encouraging more women into this field.

My personal experience comes from owning a precision machining job shop since 1993/94. I left the corporate world in 1992 based on a handshake from the then current owner of Permac Industries to take the position of outside sales. Was I scared - yes - but ready for a new opportunity especially given the fact the current owner where I had been employed for thirteen years had stated “women” do not need to earn as much as men... What I didn’t know at the time was Permac Industries was in serious financial trouble with their bank. When this was brought to my attention – I truly believed I could turn the company around and therefore purchased 45% within nine months and the balance less than nine months later.

I got great advice from my new bank – the president chose to mentor me which was so helpful! He told me – “always surround yourself with smarter than average people” and “pay them a little more than the norm.” Truly I believe without having this man as a mentor, I might not have been nearly as successful. He helped me to believe - *I could*. It didn’t matter to him I was a woman in a male dominated field – it wasn’t about that – it was all about skill and talent and passion to learn. He also helped me continuously to grow beyond my comfort zone. At his retirement party, I found out I was one of many he helped. This support and mentorship – be it from a man or a woman – I believe is truly needed to help women become successful especially in male dominated fields.

Manufacturing has been very rewarding and exciting for me. We at Permac make very cool and difficult parts. These components go into airplanes, medical devices, submarines, robots, food and beverage items, and yes even on motorcycles – just to name a few industries we serve!

My company started with 7 people, 7000 square feet, \$700,000 in sales and today we are 34 people, 34,000 square feet and close to 5 million in sales. We continue to innovate and practice lean and stretch beyond our original core skills by hiring women and men in positions such as assemblers, clean room specialists, machinists, purchasing managers, quality technicians and managers, human resource managers, accounting managers, and inside and outside sales persons! We believe a good mix of women and men in our company utilizes everyone’s skill sets to the maximum plus we not want to leave any talent source untapped.

I have hired those “smart” women and men the bank president suggested and together we have won numerous awards together such as the SBA Small Business Person of the year Award for the State of Minnesota, 2008 US Chamber Small Business of the Year for the entire US along with many others! We are always “pushing” ourselves to be the best and my employees deserve the credit and recognition for going above and beyond every single day!

Due to these recognitions, I was chosen to serve on the Presidents Council for Jobs and Competitiveness in 2011-2012. We at Permac had difficulty filling CNC machinist’s positions for the last 20 years and in fact had actually searched for a CNC Swiss machinist for over two years before

finding a skilled candidate to fill the position. Unfortunately, skilled positions in our company and in many of my colleagues companies remain unfilled for months which adversely affect our ability to grow and manufacture more products. I now had the opportunity to help create a change. Having the honor of Co-chairing the High Tech Education sub-committee, I created a program properly named *Right Skills Now* by partnering with NAM, NIMS, ACT, PMPA and two colleges in Minnesota. RSN is a 24 week - fast track - stackable credentialed program with 16 weeks classroom/lab and 8 weeks internship to train men and woman to become CNC Machinists. I am proud to say this program is constantly expanding - now in 8 states and approximately 15 schools and continues to grow weekly! Our success rate in Minnesota is 99% for continued employment after the 24 weeks and nationally it is 91% for job placement and/or continuing education! Permac employs three of these students and will continue to hire them as they graduate RSN and encourage continued education. A *Get Skills to Work* program was developed based on RSN for returning veterans and their families with plans to roll out in 10 cities in 2013. Amazing to think by working in partnership with our trade associations such as PMPA and our colleges, we can make such a huge difference in manufacturing as these men and women in many cases had no concept of what a manufacturing job was all about - other than the fact 600,000 jobs openings exist today.

As a woman leader in Manufacturing, I have a passion to encourage others into the manufacturing field. Recently I spoke at an event where high school seniors from several schools attended to learn about manufacturing. I left them with this message. We females actually have an advantage in our industry. We think differently. Critically. Our asking why leads to improvements and efficiencies in our processes. Our attention to detail helps minimize mistakes and our passion helps keep everyone motivated and working towards the same goal. I also explained how manufacturing is not dark - dirty and dangerous and how we all need to change the perception that being an engineer or in manufacturing is for girls too. It's exciting that we now have more women graduating colleges than our male counterparts but we need to start earlier with the introduction of these career paths. I also told the story of when I took ownership of my company, our Quality Director decided to leave the company as he stated "a woman could never make it in this business." Well I guess I proved him wrong. I encouraged these young women to also prove they could!

I feel it is critical that I help mentor women and girls to help them realize they can excel in any career they choose and try to drive away the stereotypical thoughts that some of the jobs are only for men! I personally became involved in a mentoring program named Hope for Tomorrow for 8th and 9th grade girls in 1998 and after a couple years mentoring, determined we needed to expand into more schools to help make a difference in additional girls' lives. Under my year as Board Chair, we grew to 13 schools, obtained our 501C3 status and created a defined curriculum and toolbox to help expand their horizons and to help them to understand - their journey is what they make of it and they are capable of any career. We explain our roles and careers and expose them to many career choices they didn't even know exist. We encourage them to believe they are more capable than they ever thought they were and in encouraging and mentoring them - so they flourish! One young woman I personally mentored had decided early in our sessions, she would not go on to higher education of any sort as her culture typically dictates getting married right after high school. We were coming back from a field trip after a college visit and she said staring straight ahead and very positively - "I can do this - I can go to college - I can be what I want to be and I am going to!"

The feeling of knowing I had changed one person's life to a better path is experienced by many of our mentors every year but every time it happens it feels more wonderful than the last! This mentorship continues throughout high school and the mentees come back to mentor others. Really it is simply exposing girls to all opportunities to include manufacturing!

I will close with a quote I truly believe in by Margaret Mead - "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." It only takes one person to make a difference in a person's life and I will always try to make that difference!