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Cover Story:

Women Lead the Way

Melissa Monster-van Golverdingen,
Petra Schweitzer and Cindy Crouse receive
2019 IADD Cutting Edge Award

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Women Lead the Way

Melissa Monster-van Golverdingen, Petra Schweitzer and Cindy Crouse Receive the 2019 IADD Cutting Edge Award

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Whenever the industry gathers together at networking events—whether it be at IADD's Odyssey Expo, the ESU Technology Forum, drupa or one of several suppliers' open houses—women find themselves looking around the venue to see if other women are in attendance.

This need to find opportunities to meet with other business women in leading posi-

tions sparked an idea for Melissa Monster-van Golverdingen, Managing Director of PolyMX BV in Netherlands and Petra Schweitzer of Sperrholzwerk Schweitzer GmbH in Austria. They wanted to encourage others to hear and share stories of issues impacting women in our industry.

When they reached out to Cindy Crouse, CEO of the International Association for Diecutting and Diemaking in the US, little did they know that for years she had been looking for ways to help encourage female management, entrepreneurship and participation in our industry. The three shared their ideas, and within a few months the foundation for WomenConnect was laid.

WomenConnect is a networking chapter for women from around the globe. There are no dues or fees to join. WomenConnect maintains an online presence (through a special invite-only LinkedIn Group at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12225152/>) and a physical presence by co-locating in-person meetings with major industry events).

Vision and goals

WomenConnect is designed to advance and expand the role of women in the converting and finishing industry worldwide. We strive to:



Monster-van Golverdingen (3rd from left) with her PolyMX crew

- Provide personal and professional development opportunities.
- Facilitate networking and help women make meaningful connections with peers through special programs, events and partnerships with like-minded organizations.
- Provide programs designed to improve leadership, communications and professional skills.
- Share information that helps women and their companies improve, succeed and achieve.
- Facilitate women as an answer to the anticipated workforce labor shortages and manufacturing skills gap.
- Specifically provide more opportunities for the development and participation of young females within our industry.

As a result of their efforts, almost 1,000 women have been identified and contacted to join WomenConnect. Two successful in-person meetings were held in 2019, one in the US in May and one in Europe in September. More are in the process of being planned. Although it is still in its infancy, the WomenConnect: Global Business Network for Women in Diecutting, Diemaking, Converting & Finishing LinkedIn Group has attracted over 85 women who are beginning to develop needed conversations.

Cutting Edge Award

At the IADD Annual Meeting in October, then-President Shaun Larson from Jonco Die Co. Inc. presented the founding trio with IADD's Cutting Edge Award, one of the association's highest honors. The award focuses on the person or team of people who have made the most positive impact on our industry, preferably within the last 24 months. In his remarks Larson noted that WomenConnect stood out as a unique, meaningful and emerging contribution to the diecutting/diemaking industry.

Developing a global network which spans various countries, time zones, cultures and languages necessitates the creative use of

technology, so it was fitting that Monster-van Golverdingen and Schweitzer accepted the award via a pre-recorded video while Crouse added remarks on site. In-person presentations will also be made to the two women during drupa in 2021.

The Cutting Edge magazine was fortunate to have an opportunity to learn more about Monster-van Golverdingen and Schweitzer.

Briefly describe your company and your role/responsibilities.

MM: PolyMX BV is specialized in the design and production of polyurethane products. For the packaging industry, PolyMX developed and supplies Polytop MX® high performance ejection material.

I started at PolyMX when I was around the age of 18 as a side job during my studies. Since 2018, I have been the Managing Director and since 2019 also co-owner of the company. PolyMX is located in Raamsdonksveer, the Netherlands.

PS: Sperrholzwerk Schweitzer GmbH is a family business founded in mid-1970 by my parents. Production of veneer-based products is our core business. We start right from the logs to the finished products which we sell directly to our customers. ROTAPLUS® rotary dieboard is one of our most important products which we deliver to four continents.

Since 1998, I've worked full-time at Sperrholzwerk Schweitzer GmbH and for more than 15 years I am managing director. Together with my brother Oliver, we lead the company. He is responsible for technical equipment; my responsibilities are sales and marketing. In production we combine customers' requests and technical capabilities.



Schweitzer at the family business, Sperrholzwerk Schweitzer GmbH

Set your bar high –
and go higher.

Both of you joined your family businesses and worked for your fathers. What is it like to be the daughter of a highly successful businessman?

MM: Unfortunately, my father passed away in February 2019. Working with him was a combination of everything! One word was enough to understand each other. We could have fun, but also very profound discussions. Of course, I miss him as a dad, but business-wise I wasn't yet finished learning from him. What I always appreciated about him was his creative mind to find a solution for everything. Sometimes, when I couldn't find the answer myself and I was too proud to ask him directly, he could give me a totally unexpected solution within a split second. Nowadays, when I have to make a difficult decision, I always try to imagine what he would say, but I'm sure I can't come up with the right answer myself.

PS: As it is quite normal for family business, both of our parents were involved in company work – so my sister and I grew up more or less in the factory. Focus was always on company and so for us it was and still it is working the most important part of life. My parents were successful to start from zero to build up a plywood mill.

Of what career achievement are you most proud?

MM: I think, career wise, I am the most proud of when I was asked to become the Marketing Manager of a big ICT-company at the age of 24.

But I can tell you that today, in a totally different role, I'm not proud of myself. I am incredibly proud of my (young) team and the products we develop and produce at a still growing quality level.

PS: My decision 23 years ago to join my parents' company when they struggled because of extreme, aggressive competition. Together with my parents we succeeded to become a respected company manufacturing products for which we are known as quality leader.

Define a great leader – what are some traits you think great leaders possess?

MM: For me a great leader is someone who is able to let their employees shine. This can only happen when a leader is not selfish and trusts their gut feeling. Besides, I think it is important that a leader also is a visionary. You need to have a plan and you have to stand for it. When you involve your people while making the plan, and you are direct and honest during the journey, I'm convinced that you can reach everything you want to go for.

PS: To have the big picture! To have good communication capabilities. To get the right collaborators who share the company spirit and to give people the space to develop both professionally and personally.

What's one leadership lesson you've learned in your career?

MM: I learned so much over the last years, but I think the most important one is to trust my gut feeling and to let go of things I can't control. I'm someone who can be emotionally involved and this is not always easy in a business world. Sometimes it is wise to take some distance or sleep one night before you react on something. But, in the end, when I stay true to myself, it will always work out the best for me.

PS: Many...!! One very important one is: don't do everything by yourself.

What advice do you have for women aiming for leadership positions?

MM: In Dutch we have a saying, "Don't blab on, just clean!" I hear a lot of women saying that they want another position or that they want to work at their career, etc. For me, this is something which has never been a motive, and I never spoke about it.

I always gave 100% for my job. And yes, sometimes this means you work harder or more than you get paid for, or you do things that don't fit in your job description. Surprise your management with new (executable) ideas or deliver a performance that goes beyond expectations. Take your responsibility and just go for it!

PS:

- You were hired for your skills. Use them.
- Find your voice. Use it.
- Be you. Don't try to be the picture that has been painted for you.
- Set your bar high – and go higher.

What are some strategies that can help all women achieve a more prominent role in their companies?

MM: Give more opportunities for men to have a four-day work week. If I look to the women that I know and talk with, the 'problem' for growing into a management function is when the children are at a young age.

Men with a four-day work week are still rare, so most of the time the women decide to go for a part-time job. If it would be more standard that both men and women work four days, a management role would be easier to fulfill.

I think it is important that women have more faith in their own strengths. And that managers must show their trust in women by concrete actions, because I think women need more encouragement than men! This is just how it is, and when we all know this, everything will be just fine.

What is the biggest misconception about being a woman in our industry?

MM: I have no experience with misconceptions in our industry. I have never experienced any restraint or aversion towards me as a woman. At least, not as far as I know. The only thing where I can laugh about is that when people meet Andrew (Technical Sales Manager at PolyMX) and me, they always assume that he is my manager/boss. Then they start talking to him and when they find out, it is vice versa they are shocked. Maybe it is because of my age, or maybe because I'm a woman? Next time, I'll ask and let you know.

Do you follow a certain daily routine or schedule to maximize productivity and well-being?

MM: No, not really. Because I travel frequently, building routine in my life is not so

easy. I always try to combine work with sport and relaxation: work hard, play hard! I like running when I'm abroad, so I can discover the city and do some sport in one.

When I'm at home, I try to ride my horses as much as possible. This is the only moment of the day that I can really turn off my head. No phone, no email, just being outside in nature and focus on my horse. After this, I feel that I have new energy again and there is more space for creativity. This is the same feeling I get when I'm in the mountains. I love skiing, but also a hike or run in the mountains really makes me happy. In the end, I hope someday, I can buy a house in the mountains. Not only for myself, but also for my family and friends. Just to have more possibilities to spend time outside and have a lot of fun with the people I like!

PS: It depends if I am away for a business trip or if I am in production or in the office. I try to follow at least a weekly routine: to find time for my nephews, for friends, for some sports and for rotary club meetings.

Being a woman is hard – what do you do to relax at the end of the day?

MM: After a busy day at work, I'm really happy that my little son (three years old) runs to the door and I get a big hug from him. Spending time together with him puts a lot of things into perspective. Besides that and riding my horse, I'm very keen at my yoga lessons and I try to run at least twice a week. And, really important for me is that I go to bed on time! I need it.

What mantra do you live by?

MM: Today is my favorite day! For a long time, I have searched for happiness. But, nowadays happiness is no longer a goal. I just try to do things that give me energy as much as possible and then happiness just follows. So as long as you start up your day with the feeling that it can be your favorite day, cool things can happen, and you get surprised by the little things that cross your path.

PS: Carpe diem



IADD CEO Crouse accepts the 2019 Cutting Edge Award on behalf of the trio

What is the ultimate goal for WomenConnect?

MM: I hope that we can be a source of inspiration to women all around the world.

The thing I like about this network is that numbers or figures don't count. We create moments and places to find business opportunities, which is a very important motive for this network. I'm sure we can inspire each other, and we recognize things in our daily life. For example, I had a WhatsApp conversation with a German girl and she was stuck at the Italian airport. That feeling that it is late in the evening and you miss your connection or your flight is overbooked for the fifth time is so recognizable. I really believe that this is not the same for a man. You have to find a hotel, take a taxi late in the evening etc. This together with the happy feeling that you were almost home, is really bad. And then it is nice to share this with women who understand this.

Recently, I saw this quote on Instagram, "To be a working mom in this society ain't easy. You must be a mother as if you are not working and work as if you are not a mother."

Sometimes, I also feel like this. Especially, when today is the day that all children are allowed to bring their favorite book to school and my child is the only one without a book, because his mother didn't even read the

newsletter. But, it is how it is and getting the chance to show my son other parts of the world makes up for the forgotten book very quickly.

PS: Our ultimate goal is to have WomenConnect in the diemaking industry be replaced by PeopleConnect in diemaking industry...meaning that ultimately we should get to a point in our professional lives where there is no difference in the treatment between women and men. At that point we will have as many business cards and contacts from women as from men.

What are three words or phrases that best describe you?

MV: Progressive, family, vital.

PS: Focus-oriented, impatient, creative in finding solutions.

What is one interesting fact about you or your company that most people do not know?

MV: I used to have my own company in sports therapy for horses. I quit this company about two years ago when I started as Managing Director at PolyMX BV. With this business it was my goal to improve performance and prevent injuries of sports horses.

Now, it is my goal to improve the performance of cutting dies and to prevent downtime of machines. As long as I am challenged to make things better and have the possibility to create something, I'm happy.

PS: Year 2020 becomes a significant year for our company and for me. An important investment in a peeling machine—the heart of a plywood mill—will be finalized. With this investment we will give an extra plus to ROTAPLUS® rotary dieboards. We will become even more accurate in thickness and tolerances of our rotary dieboards. And we will be very proud to present ROTAPLUS® rotary dieboards—your plus for rotary dies—at the next Odyssey Expo in 2021. 📌

See past Cutting Edge Award recipients—and other IADD honorees—online at www.iadd.org/?awards.



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