

SHAPING TOMORROW'S HISTORY — TODAY



IN CONVERSATION WITH JONNA GERKEN

President, SWE



For more than six decades, SWE has given women engineers a unique place and voice within the engineering industry. It is an organization centered around a passion for members' success and continues to evolve with the challenges and opportunities reflected in today's exciting engineering and technology specialties.

Jonna Gerken is the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) FY18 President. In this capacity, she leads a 40,000-member international organization which encourages more women to enter and stay in engineering fields. She is also the manager for the Program Chief Manufacturing Engineering (PCME) team at Pratt & Whitney, a division of United Technologies Corporation (UTC). Her team ensures all engine components meet manufacturing readiness levels appropriate to their life-cycle stage.

Jonna will be the Manufacturing Stream Chair at our upcoming 2018 American Aerospace & Defense Summit taking place December 12-13, 2018 in Glendale, AZ.

OVERVIEW

- How significant is it to participate in organizations such as the Society of Women Engineers?
- How did you become President of SWE and what lead to this role?
- How do you balance being President of SWE and your role as a Manager for Program Chief Manufacturing Engineering at Pratt & Whitney?
- Why does a diverse workforce make for a better workforce?
- What advice do you have for women in engineering?

How significant is it to participate in organizations such as the Society of Women Engineers?

An organization like SWE provides a built in network of women who are likely going through the same issues as you, or already have and can provide great advice and support. It's also a great way for women to stay engaged even if out of the workforce for a bit or to assist in re-entering it.

How did you become President of SWE and what lead to this role?

About 10 years ago, a SWE colleague asked me if I ever thought I'd be President of the organization and I said emphatically, "No!" because that seemed to be a daunting position from my perspective at the time. After reconsidering and thinking about why she asked (and what she saw in me), I decided it wasn't such a bad idea. I worked my way through various Society leadership positions before earning a spot on the board of Directors, served two terms as Director of Membership Initiatives and finally ran for President-elect in FY17.



Jonna and her family at the Quinnipiac University School of Engineering commencement.

How do you balance being President of SWE and your role as a Manager for Program Chief Manufacturing Engineering at Pratt & Whitney?

I'm very fortunate to work for a company that supports SWE from the top. And it's been part of my life for so long (I've been a member since college at RPI) that it's part of who I am and what makes me a productive

employee. I have a great boss and a fantastic team that know what needs to get done and can work independently. I set the group strategy and overall priorities and they take it from there. They have been very accommodating with my travel schedule the last year and I make sure to say 'thank you' a lot.



Jonna with other RPI alumni who are members of SWE.

Why does a diverse workforce make for a better workforce?

Diversity of thought is what makes problem solving work, especially when you are solving problems for complex engineered products. The more different perspectives you can get working on a problem, the more likely you'll come up with a robust solution that works for many different customers or situations.

What advice do you have for women in engineering?

My advice is to not give up, it's not as hard as the Professors make it out to be. Find a great support network (like SWE), some good study partners, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Nothing we do professionally is in a vacuum, alone, so get used to working with a team and utilizing the strengths of each participant.



Jonna with Lorraine Bolsinger, Vice President of the Accelerated Leadership Program (XLP) at General Electric during a Keynote at WE17.



Jonna with SWE/NSBE honorees Valerie Thomas & Mary McWilliams.



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