WOMEN IN MARITIME
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Background

Maritime and shipping has historically been viewed as a man’s world. Women began taking positions in maritime and transportation work in the mid-1800s with the advent of the industrial revolution but it wasn’t until World War II that women became more commonplace fixtures in shipyards across the U.S. With working men shipping out to serve overseas, women eagerly found work filling their roles in all facets of maritime including some of the most traditionally-male dominated skilled trade positions in shipbuilding such as welders, fitters and fabricators, as well as warehouse workers and truck drivers. In fact by 1943 women comprised 65% of the workforce at all Oregon shipyards. However when men returned to the workforce in the late 1940s and 50s most women left the industry or moved to non-skilled labor positions in typically administrative or secretarial roles.

Today women work in every level of occupation across all three primary sectors of the maritime and transportation industry - shipbuilding and repair, port operations and logistics, and vessel operations. However women still represent a very small fraction of the overall industry’s workforce. Combined, these three industry sectors generate enormous revenue for both our nation as a whole and individual states that have a large numbers of maritime industry employers. Overall the industry represents an annual economic impact of $92.5 billion to our country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generating $29 billion in wages and $10 billion in tax revenues annually. Nearly 500,000 Americans are employed in these industry sectors.

As maritime and transportation employers reach a critical point in workforce population change - with the wave of baby boomers retiring, particularly from skilled labor and leadership positions - increased attention is being paid to the roles women can and should play across every sector. Women represent a highly-educated, skilled, dedicated and team-oriented labor pool that can provide a wide array tangible benefits to employers.

Current Situation

There is a sustained effort by employers across every sector of the maritime and transportation industry to recruit, train, retain and promote women. The focus on boosting the number of women workers is attributable to a confluence of several events including:

- the rapidly accelerating pace of technology adoption and change,
- sustained growth in both domestic and international trade,
a surge in retiring workers across all industry sectors,
a low national unemployment rate, and
the skills gap facing employers searching for work-ready labor.

Each industry sector has unique opportunities to more meaningfully engage women and put them on a career pathway from entry-level to leadership positions.

**Shipbuilding and Repair**
The shipbuilding and repair industry sector is responsible for the design, construction, maintenance and modernization of our nation’s fleet of military, merchant marine (non-military) and pleasure craft vessels. While women played a historically noteworthy role in shipyard work during World War II - think “Rosie the Riveter” - today a relatively small number women compared to the total workforce work at shipyards and marinas across the U.S. Although women make up approximately half of the total American workforce, they are dramatically underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated skilled trade jobs: of the 10 million skilled trade positions in the U.S. in 2014 only 8.9% were performed by women. Skilled trade jobs represent the majority of shipbuilding and repair industry sector work. Top skilled labor jobs at shipyards across the U.S. include:

- electrician
- welder
- mechanic
- carpenter
- marine painter
- shipfitter/rigger
There are both skilled labor and professional occupations that represent well-paying, family-sustaining wages. While the U.S. pay gap stands at slightly more than 81 percent (women make approximately only 81 percent of the salary earned by their male counterparts), skilled trade labor positions represent a higher rate of pay equity. For example, according to the Chicago Center for Women in Trades, in the construction sector women earn an average of 93.4% of men’s earnings. And beyond the skilled trade occupations, according to a 2013 U.S. Maritime Administration report the average income for all shipbuilding and repair industry sector jobs - $73,000 - is 45% higher than the national average.

**Port Operations and Logistics**

There are 360 public and private ports in the U.S. facilitating the import-export business and domestic movement of goods which is the backbone of our nation’s economy. The average salary of port-related jobs is $46,300. These ports support 13 million jobs and according to American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) CEO, Kurt Nagle, “the U.S. could see an increase of 3.5 million jobs (related to ports activities).”

While it’s true that women make up approximately only 8% of the total workforce at the top 100 seaports in the U.S. that tide is turning. Ports are making significant efforts to increase the number of female employees. At the Port of San Diego, for example, women make up nearly 50% of the total workforce. Overall 11 American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) member ports are led by women.

The U.S. can look to its industry counterpart in New Zealand for best practices in this area. In 2011 the Port of Auckland made a significant commitment to increasing the number of female employees including in operational roles such as stevedoring. Over a four year period, the number of female managers jumped 26% and women in stevedoring roles increased from 0% to 10%. Port leadership noted the significant financial ROI for creating aggressive female recruitment and hiring strategies. Women outpaced their male counterparts’ productivity rates by nearly 14% which boosted the port to the top spot for productivity among all Australasia ports.

**Vessel Operations**

This industry sector includes the movement of cargo (by container ships, Ro-Ro vessels, barges carrying breakbulk on inland and near-shore waterways) and passengers (by ferries, cruise ships). Seagoing vessels represent the single largest mode of transportation for our country’s international trade. Each year over 40,000 vessels move more than 2.3 billion tons of domestic and international cargo worth nearly $2 trillion across 25,000 miles of domestic waterways. In 2011, the average annual wage for seafarers ($43,000) was 75% higher than that for other transportation workers; over the last five years, seafarer wages have increased by 22% compared to 12% for other transportation workers and 15% for all U.S. occupations. Technicians with seagoing skills, competencies and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) credentials and certifications are needed to operate, repair and maintain highly-technical deck and engineering department equipment as well as facilitate movement of offshore materials.
According to the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITWF) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) the number of female mariners makes up less than 2% of the entire 1.2 million mariners working worldwide. Of that number, nearly 20% work onboard cruise ships.

Virtually all vessel operations positions - whether on inland river waters, nearshore or offshore U.S. waters and transoceanic work - requires that mariners spend extended time away from home for a period of days to months at a time. With women taking responsibility for the majority of child-raising and household work, this facet of vessel operations positions has traditionally been the single largest barrier to women fully participating in this industry sector. Time away from home is not as large a factor for mariners working on public passenger vessels such as ferries, which is likely part of the reason why the International Labour Organisation found in 2003 that 94% of professional mariners across the globe worked in this employment sector.

In 1988 the International Maritime Organization (IMO) launched a campaign to increase the number of women working in the vessel operations industry sector. The group’s “Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector” program has released a coordinated set of white papers, videos and workforce development tools. While this program has primarily targeted women in developing nations, the overall recruitment effort for women to enter the maritime industry is applicable to the U.S. as well.

Because most licensed merchant marine officers attend and graduate from one of the seven U.S. maritime academies (one federal and six state maritime academies) there has been a concerted effort by the academies to increase the number of females enrolling. Efforts are paying off. According to the Military Sealift Command (MSC) - the merchant marine support arm of the U.S. military - “within the last five years female admission to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy increased from 15% in 2016 to 19.7% for the class of 2020.”

Women seeking to work as an unlicensed officer can enter the vessel operations industry sector after completing post-secondary training offered through maritime training providers including the Seafarer’s International Union Paul Hall Center for Maritime Education and Training (Piney Point, Maryland) and community colleges including the SMART Center’s host Tidewater Community College (Virginia Beach, Virginia) and partner San Jacinto College (Pasadena, Texas). Those educational and training institutions are also seeing a rising number of female students as they engage in targeted marketing and recruitment efforts from feeder schools.

In addition to vessel operating positions there is significant onshore work that is - and can be - performed by women to support mariners at sea. For example although female MSC employees comprise only 8.81% of the organization’s at sea workforce (up from just 3% in 1992), they occupy nearly 33% of its shoreside positions.
Challenges

There are numerous challenges to increasing the number of women working in positions at all levels across the maritime and transportation industry.

1. Employment Trends

One of the most potentially surprising trends facing employers who want to hire more women into their workplaces is the decline in the number of women participating in the workforce. Between 2000 and 2015 the percentage of women participating in the labor force dropped by more than five percent (from 59.9% to 56.7%). There are numerous contributing factors to this trend including women leaving the workforce after the recession in 2008, and women leaving the workforce temporarily or permanently to care for relatives or dependents or to pursue additional education.

2. Awareness

One of the most fundamental reasons behind the low rate of women moving into the maritime and transportation industry is a simple lack of awareness. For example, through the SMART Center’s annual Summer Maritime and Transportation Institute, less than 40% of secondary-level and college educators who lived and worked within a 50-mile radius of major maritime employers were aware of the industry or its career opportunities for their students. If educators aren’t aware of the industry they cannot adequately prepare their female students for future maritime and transportation careers.

3. Work-Family Balance

This is likely one of the most significant barriers - real or perceived - to women not only entering the workforce but choosing a career in maritime and transportation. Because maritime and transportation is considered a non-traditional industry for women there are often fewer or less progressive policies and accommodations in place to help women stay in the field when they choose to start a family. That’s significant because according to the book Lean In by Facebook CMO Sheryl Sandberg, studies have found that “43% of highly-qualified women with children are leaving careers or off-ramping for a period of time.” The top 100 companies for working mothers - as ranked by Working Mother magazine - cites benefits that facilitate women’s ability to more easily navigate work-life balance such as paid maternity leave, job flexibility, and family support tools including eldercare and bereavement services as key to maintaining a strong and loyal female workforce.

4. Unconscious Bias

While maritime and transportation industry leaders have made efforts to hire and promote more women one of the most significant hindrances to expanded gender diversity in any workplace is unconscious bias. According to the University of California, San Francisco, unconscious or implicit biases are “social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.” For example a hiring manager may
“cherry pick” criteria when evaluating two applications - one from a man and one from a woman - to place more emphasis on job criteria that more closely matches with the male’s resume than the female’s. Another example is making assumptions about gaps in employment or taking longer to attain academic or industry credentials. A woman’s choice or need to temporarily leave the workplace to care for children or dependents does not directly correlate to her ability to perform in a new position. The effects of these stereotypes can hinder diversity recruitment, retention and promotion efforts to boost female participation across all occupations. This can be exponentially true in non-traditional fields for women such as maritime and transportation.

Benefits to Hiring Women

There are several, significant, and compelling reasons for companies to create robust HR strategies to recruit, hiring and promote women:

1. **Profitability**

A 2016 survey of nearly 22,000 publicly-traded companies in 91 countries found that having women in C-suite (corporate leadership) roles is associated with higher profitability. However, according to the “Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey” report published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, “nearly a third of companies globally have no women in either board of C-suite positions, 60 percent have no female board members, 50 percent have no female top executives, and fewer than 5 percent have a female CEO.” A 2014 Gallup Poll is consistent with the Peterson Institute findings: gender-diverse workplaces show 14% higher average comparable revenue to non-gender diverse business units. Increased female participation among business units in 800 companies correlated directly with 19% higher average quarterly net profit.

Jennifer Boykin is President of Newport News Shipbuilding, the sole industrial designer, builder and refueler of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and one of two companies that designs and builds nuclear-powered submarines.
2. Corporate Culture

Like other industries, maritime and transportation industry employers are facing significant succession planning challenges as the majority of current leaders are at or nearing retirement age. As employers look for internal and external candidates for leadership positions it’s worth noting that a 2015 Pew Research study on men and women in business leadership found that women significantly outrank men in two key areas:

- honesty and corporate ethics (31% for women to 3% for men), and
- providing fair pay and good benefits (30% for women to 5% for men).

That’s important for companies looking to position themselves as the industry employer of choice for both women and millennial workers who place a high value on corporate transparency, pay equity, and family-supporting wages. With millennials now representing the largest generation in today’s American labor force it would benefit companies to consider the positive message it sends to advance females within the workplace to positions of managerial and executive leadership.

3. Next Generation of Educated Leadership

Women significantly outpace their male counterparts in higher education credential attainment. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2013-14 “larger shares of undergraduate degrees and certificates were awarded to female students than to male students” across all racial and ethnic groups.
4. Development of Mentorship Programs

As employers seek workplace-based training and development strategies to retain and promote workers from within, mentorship and mentor-led initiatives including apprenticeship are gaining increased traction. Women can help accelerate those efforts. The 2015 “Women in Leadership” Pew Research study found that women are far more favorably viewed as “providing guidance or mentorship to young employees” than men.

Recommendations

There is an international movement among educators, employers and workforce intermediaries to recruit women into the maritime and transportation industry and promote them to positions of supervisory and executive leadership. There are practical steps educators and employers can take to engage and equip females of all ages to move into skilled labor and professional occupations in every industry sector.

Educators and Educational Institutions

1. Implement Female-Targeted Maritime and Transportation Industry Career Awareness Strategies and Tools

Increasingly employers and educators are realizing the importance of introducing girls to the maritime and transportation from a young age. “It is never too early to begin talking to students about possible future careers and career pathways,” notes SMART Center Director and Co-PI Jennifer Palestrant. “That’s especially true when encouraging female students to consider a non-traditional industry like maritime and transportation. It will take more effort on the part of educators, guidance counselors, employers and student influencers (i.e. coaches, parents, etc.) to help girls and young women ‘see’ themselves working in shipyards, at ports,
and on board vessels. A large part of the SMART Center’s work has been creating tools and providing professional development to facilitate that process on a national scale.”

The SMART Center has created tools (available on its website: http://www.maritime-technology.org/) to help educators expand girls’ and young women’s’ awareness of - and interest in - the maritime and transportation industry including:

**Digital career guide and resource handbook** - The SMART Center Career Guide and Resource Handbook is a 120-page guide that provides:
- Deep overviews of each industry sector
- Feature stories about current employees working in the industry
- Information on maritime post-secondary education and training providers
- Pre- and post- assessments to use with students in career pathway advising

Educators can also order print copies of the handbook from the SMART Center website. The handbook is part of a larger Educator Toolkit which includes the handbook as well as DVDs of the 20 2-minute “Make the SMART Choice” videos about academic pathways and careers in every industry sector and a set of visual career pathway tools.

**“Make the SMART Choice” DVD segments** - The SMART Center has produced more than 20 2-minute videos featuring each of the maritime and transportation industry sectors as well as current employees working in those fields. The videos are available on the SMART Center website or YouTube channel.

**Posters** - Posters featuring women working in maritime and transportation are available for order from the SMART Center for classroom or workplace use.

Other creative outreach strategies to increase girls’ and women’s awareness of the industry include:
- San Jacinto College’s annual week-long “Maritime Venture” summer camp for Houston-area high school students ages 14-17.
- The Massachusetts Maritime Academy’s “Maritime Girls” program involves hosting campus and vessel tours for local Girl Scouts troops and awarding special uniform ribbons to freshman cadets for earning special Girl Scout recognition.
- SUNY Maritime College hosts an annual “National Girls and Women in Sports Day” event.
- Cal Maritime’s annual “Women in Maritime Leadership” conference is designed to boost industry career awareness and provide networking and career pathway planning resources for female high school and college students, graduates, and professionals.
- The Great Lakes Maritime Academy hosts an annual “Women on the Water” conference to provide professional development, networking and career building opportunities for female cadets.
2. Create Clear Maritime and Transportation Career Pathways

There are few clear, standard career pathways from high school either directly into the maritime and transportation industry or to related post-secondary education. However with the new focus on creating guided pathways at the community college level there is an opportunity to utilize successful models of integrating maritime into a 2+2+2 pathway that begins with high school dual enrollment courses through 2-year college certificate and degree programs that can articulate to a 4-year degree program.

By creating a more structured, coherent set of programs, ("guided pathways") community colleges can realize greater success in informing and leading students to credential attainment in programs that lead to job placement. Guided pathways - particularly pathways that begin with a dual enrollment component at the high school level - are ideal for producing the type of educated, skilled technicians needed in the maritime industry. School systems located in areas with a high concentration of maritime and transportation industry employers should bring employers to the table to create industry-validated CTE courses, pathways and dual enrollment programs as part of a guided pathway approach to workforce development. “By showing female students - middle school through adult learners - the clear entry points into the maritime and transportation industry and the pathways to earn stackable academic credentials they will be more likely to enroll in programs that equip them for critically-needed occupations,” explains Palestrant.

The SMART Center’s host institution Tidewater Community College (TCC) has a solid guided pathway program that has been shaped by deep employer involvement to ensure curriculum alignment and embedded industry credentials. The SMART Maritime Technologies Pathway at TCC exposes students to the industry beginning in high school through (1) dual enrollment courses and (2) teacher resources provided to educators participating in the SMART summer Institute program including an in-depth industry career guide, DVDS and visual career pathway tools.
3. Incorporate Maritime into STEM Curriculum and Programs

Maritime is a STEM-based industry. Within every maritime industry sector there are numerous jobs that require workers to have STEM-based knowledge and/or experience. By incorporating maritime and transportation concepts, careers and knowledge areas into existing STEM curriculum and programs, educators can significantly increase female students’ awareness of the industry and the likelihood that they will pursue direct industry employment after graduation, post-secondary training, or an academic pathway to higher-level occupations within the industry.

The SMART Center maintains the only industry National Science Digital Library (NSDL)-linked digital repository of classroom materials, educational modules and tools related to the maritime and transportation industry. All of the materials can be easily and readily integrated into existing curriculum to give female students perhaps their first introduction to maritime and transportation. Access is free through the SMART Center website (http://www.maritime-technology.org/repository/).

4. Address Common Myths and Misconceptions

Most students, student influencers (parents, guidance counselors, etc.) and workers have an outdated paradigm of maritime and transportation industry work. It’s important to debunk common myths and misperceptions in order to inspire more women to choose careers in the industry. Common outdated misperceptions can include:

- “Maritime and transportation jobs are grueling physical work done best by men.” Today’s industry worksites rely heavily on STEM skills and technology; work in both the skilled trades and professional occupations can be performed expertly by both men and women.
- “Women should be prepared to deal with constant and overlooked sexual harassment in the workplace.” Like all other American industry employers, maritime and industry companies have workplace policies and processes to report and deal with incidences of harassment of any sort.
- “Maritime jobs are dead-end positions.” Leading maritime and transportation industry employers invest in their company’s human capital by providing professional development opportunities such as apprenticeship and leadership development programs as well as tuition benefits to encourage workers to pursue additional training and post-secondary education. This type of professional development support can help women advance within their career and/or move between occupational tracks such as moving from at-sea work to shoreside support or skilled labor trade occupations to supervisory positions.
- “It’s impossible to work in maritime and have a family.” While it’s true that seafaring occupations typically require more flexibility and family support for female mariners, the majority of other shoreside industry occupations have either standard 9-5 office hours for professional work or regularly-scheduled shift work for skilled labor positions similar to healthcare or retail jobs.
Employers

As companies compete for top talent it’s important to realize that women are actually one of the largest pools of untapped labor. Narrowing the gender gap can help companies not only fill critical occupations but increase profitability and create a more sustainable talent pipeline for future leadership positions.

However for women to not only choose a technician-level job in the maritime and transportation industry, but to stay in the industry, companies must have a comprehensive process for recruiting, training, retaining and promoting women.

1. Refining Recruiting and Hiring Strategies

Companies should refine and expand their current recruiting and hiring strategies to capture a greater share of the local, qualified female workforce by:

- Working with local Career One Stop Centers (www.careeronestop.org) that serve job seekers
- Working with local workforce development and investment boards which are a vital link to the public workforce system and can help create partnerships with other companies, educators or associations to develop tailored hiring and training strategies
- Expanding online hiring portals to include companies that have a strong track record of attracting female applicants
- Partnering with and supporting local female-oriented business or trade associations
- Reaching out to local career and technical high school and adult education programs, community colleges, and university alumni associations that can serve as “feeder” organizations to females on an academic pathway
- Connecting with local or regional military bases to create partnerships with Transition Assistance Program (TAP) officers who are responsible for helping separating or retiring service members find work in the civilian sector

In addition there are relatively easy steps companies can take in posting job advertisements to be more attractive to female applicants such as:

- Explicitly stating that you do not discriminate on the basis of gender (as per federal law) and welcome female applicants
- Including images of women in your workplace in advertising material
- Including current female employees in the interviewing process
- Expanding recruiting sources to ensure women see your job openings in the places where they consume content. For example, women are more likely to regularly use social media than men so companies looking to hire women can create relatively low-cost, targeted online ad campaigns.
- Including specific content on your corporate website with testimonies from current female employees
- Emphasizing any specific financial or workplace benefits that are of particular interest to women
2. Examining Pay and Benefits Packages

Women currently make, on average, 80 cents less per hour - or $10,086 less annually - than their male counterparts performing the same work. That statistic does not reflect the often wide disparities by geography - women in Louisiana for example earn 30 percent less than men while women in New York earn only 11 percent less than their male colleagues - or disparity by race or ethnicity. For example nationally Asian women tend to earn eight percent more than their Caucasian counterparts and a whopping 33 percent more than Hispanic women. Companies that are serious about narrowing the gender gap in their workplace need to evaluate their salary structures and ensure that they are offering equal pay for equal work.

In addition to pay, women are interested in company benefits that take their work-life balance needs into account. For example, women are responsible for 75% of the total unpaid care work (for children, aging parents, dependents, etc.). While federal law (Family Medical Leave Act) requires that eligible workers be given 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a new child, very few companies provide any paid maternity leave. However half of the top U.S. companies for working mothers (as measured by the annual “Working Mother” magazine survey and award) provide up to six weeks of paid maternity leave and nearly 30 percent provide nine or more weeks of paid leave.

Creating pay equity as well as building benefit packages that directly address women’s workplace and work-life balance needs will attract more women to your company and engender their long-term loyalty.

3. Workplace Support

Women are more likely to succeed and stay loyal to employers that offer in-house professional development and support such as career coaching. By providing women with a more senior, experienced female mentor to provide job performance tips, career advancement advice and help increase
her visibility by leadership in the workplace, they are more likely to be promoted into managerial or leadership positions which, over time, contribute to a strong, growing female workforce. More formal apprenticeship programs where women are paired with an experienced mentor for structured on-the-job learning, in addition to off-hours related technical instruction, has proven highly effective in increasing employee productivity and loyalty.

4. Ongoing Training and Education

Increasing gender diversity and maintaining a strong, healthy workplace for female employees doesn’t happen overnight. Companies must create a culture of acceptance that includes regular training on gender diversity and equity issues including identifying and eliminating harassment and discrimination in the workplace - gender discrimination is against federal law. Companies need both clear protocol on what workers and managers should do when a female claims discrimination in the workplace and policies in place to reduce and hopefully eliminate instances of discrimination or harassment occurring in the first place. Consider partnering with local workforce boards and women’s equity organizations - either local organizations or national trade associations serving companies in your industry - to evaluate and improve your internal training on gender issues.

Conclusion

Women represent an enormous, barely-tapped labor pool for maritime and transportation industry employers. As companies struggle with both a “silver tsunami” of baby boomers leaving the workforce and a well-documented skills gap for younger, incoming workers they should have a well thought-out strategy in place for increasing their workplace gender diversity.

Gallup polls have quantified the benefits of increasing the number of women in a company’s workplace:

- **Lower turnover rate** - More diverse workforces have a 22 percent lower turnover rate; an inclusive corporate culture facilitates the recruitment of women
- **Higher profitability** - Gender-diverse workplaces show 14% higher average comparable revenue to non- gender diverse business units. Increased female participation has also correlated directly with 19% higher average quarterly net profit.
- **Greater ROI** - The Anita Borg Institute found that Fortune 500 companies with at least 3 directors net an increased minimum 66 percent return on invested capital, 53 percent return on equity and 42 percent return on sales

Maritime and transportation industry employers will need to create strategies to recruit, retain and promote women. Those strategies must include holistic outreach approaches, pay equity, benefit packages that meet women’s real work-life needs, workplace support and training programs, ongoing staff training in gender inclusiveness, and enforcement of anti-discrimination and harassment policies.
Educators can play a critical role in increasing female participation in the maritime and transportation industry. By introducing girls to maritime as early as elementary and middle school through curriculum integration, field trips, summer camps and maritime-related competitions they are more likely to continue on an academic pathway into the field. Creating clear guided “2+2+2” pathways from dual enrollment high school programs through articulated 2-year and 4-year college and university programs will increase the number of women gaining industry-valued knowledge and academic credentials. Embedding industry credentials into stackable certificates and degrees will help companies have a more skill-ready, competitive workforce.

With a growing global economy and sustained demand for shipping goods both domestically and internationally the maritime and transportation industry faces a bright future. However employers will only be able to capitalize on those trends by investing in their human capital. Expanding the number of women in both skilled labor and professional occupations will help them meet the opportunity.
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