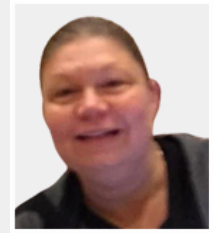


her story of rising

An interview with Jen Schoenherr & Bernadette Lois



JEN SCHOENHERR
MECHANICAL FORENSIC
SPECIALIST
FORD MOTOR COMPANY



BERNADETTE LOIS
LEAN FORD PRODUCTION
MANAGER
FORD MOTOR COMPANY



*I'm Kristin Kolesar, Mentor Coach for the Women Rising® program and I'm sitting down with two of our Women Rising® Alumni, **Jen Schoenherr**, Mechanical Forensic Specialist and **Bernadette Lois**, Lean Ford Production Manager at the Ford Motor Company. This is their story of rising.*

Kristin Kolesar: Thanks for being here with me today. Jen, do you want to start by sharing a little bit about your background?

Jen Schoenherr: I am a problem solver. I literally refer to our problems as cadavers and many areas of the plant as the morgue, and we do autopsies. And that's why I call myself a mechanical forensic pathologist. We just had a problem with an e-motor where the pinion, the small pinion gears were literally shredded and had we problem solved in the old way, and they hadn't gotten me involved, I can guarantee you they would still be working on it, but we finished it up within 4 days. I look at what is going on and I utilize the physics or geometry behind the problem that we're having so that we can make strategic splits to quickly get to the causal explanation.

Kristin Kolesar: Very cool, mad respect. I'd love to hear from you too, Bernadette, please share a bit about your background.

Bernadette Lois: I'm Bernadette and I've been with Ford for 30 years. I'm an engineer by trade. I spent a lot of my career in Power Train, and I support a mix of Powertrain and Vehicle Operations, including ICE, Hybrid and Electric. I'm a Lean Ford Production System Manager and Coach; outside the company I'd be called a Lean Manufacturing Manager. I use my knowledge and experience to help teach and coach our rules of the road. I translate what our vice president and leadership set for our strategy and help operationalize it so that we continuously improve and meet or beat our targeted results.

Kristin: Ford is lucky to have you both. **What change did you notice in yourself after going through the Women Rising® program?**

Bernadette: I noticed as I paid more attention to myself and my development, because we're all going so fast working a lot of hours. My role and my personality are very customer service oriented in helping the plants. Being able to focus on myself, making the time, helped me have goals and a targeted plan, not just work tasks, but for my softer skills to propel myself forward.

Kristin: Awesome. Jen, do you want to add for you what the experience was like?

Jen: The experience overall was wonderful. To be honest, I really thought it was going to be more of a diversity training, and I was a little worried going into it. But it totally was not that. It was all about improving ourselves, and how we could view ourselves. And I really appreciated that instead of looking at others, it was a true workshop on me. I would say one of the things that the Women Rising program really helped me with was I applied for a promotion outside of engineering in marketing. I didn't feel bad about not getting a job I applied for, but at the same time the old me prior to that program



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would have said, “Nope, I only have three of the qualifications out of the ten”, even though it was more like four or five when you include my outside of work activities. And I went for it. Had I not taken the program I would not have done it. I just would have clicked out and said, “Oh, that's an interesting job. I wish I could do it.” So that's how it helped me.

Kristin: That's great. I think as women, we tend to sometimes box ourselves in and stepping outside your comfort zone in that way can be such an empowering experience, even if the outcome isn't exactly what you wanted. outcome isn't exactly what you wanted. **What were some of the blind spots that were revealed as you went through the Women Rising® program?**

Bernadette: I would have to say one of the items that I focused on with my mentor coach, which was really a wonderful experience, was my gut instinct or my intuition. The goal was to have more personal authority, that I didn't think I had, but once I employed allies in my work situations and leadership environments, I realized I did have it. I wasn't taking advantage of it and trusting my gut, needing to have all the information before I might chime in on something. Just practicing not having to be right every time and getting more comfortable doing that.

Kristin: I love that. Jen, do you want to share?

Jen: In regards to the promotion of self, I've been in Six Sigma since 2003. I've had other jobs, but always once I became the Master Black Belt for the plant, whether I was a quality manager or a production manager, I still carried the Master Black Belt role there. There wasn't anyone else. You kind of get stale. I'll be honest. And going into the Women Rising® program, I was stale. I was stale about my work life, and it helped me rip myself out of this staleness and be more passionate about my work again. And the other thing is, I've always kind of below the surface called myself this forensic pathologist. And because I have more belief in my capabilities that I am a good problem solver, I decided to take that title with pride. I'll introduce myself as that now. In fact, I did that to Elena Ford recently. I happened to sit next to her at an event, and she looked at me funny. And I'm like, “It's a title I gave myself”, then I explained what I do, and she's like, “Oh, I get it!” And that's what I like about this program. It made me feel more passionate about the skills that I do have, these natural skills and some that I've acquired. I may always be at [the same] level from here on out. I don't know. At the same time, I have that passion back, and I can rise within the problem-solving realm here at Ford. So that's what the program gave back to me.

Kristin: That keyword is passion. It makes such a difference. **What challenges have either of you tackled, using your strengths?**

Jen: The challenges that I usually face when people come to me with “Hey, Jennifer, we need your help” is one of the things I feel, and I don't know if it's true, but I do feel it when I walk into the room is “Oh, hey, Jennifer's here. We're going to get to the root cause in like 5 min”, and that's not quite the case. [laughter] We'll get to it maybe in five minutes, maybe in a couple of days. It all depends on people's bias for action usually. But my strengths of being able to speak publicly really helped in that situation, because you usually have a lot of eyes looking at you to start the problem-solving process and leading that. And then, of course, my engineering background and really pushing people to think through the physics or geometry when we have a technical problem.



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I see some of my strengths of being able to read people and understand how I have to interact with them to get the most out of them, and then a lot of my public speaking. I'm not afraid to do that. When I'm in front of a group to help coach and guide, I can have that strong presence so that people want to follow my lead and talk about data instead of just guessing.

We have to understand everything about all the products which you're never going to do, right!? And then you also have to understand how that applies to the customer. Our customers are huge. I've got one customer right now, and they're global and it's a full-time job just keeping up with them. I love that continuous learning. I'm super proud that I made the leap.

Kristin: When you look at the world you came from before moving into what you're in now, whatever is behind us is like a steppingstone to a certain degree, or we take something with us that helps us. Is there anything that stands out to you?

Rachel: For sure. I was in finance and then I was in engineering doing basically analytics, and programming. That analytical mindset of trying to follow the data and see what the data is really telling us. You will hear a lot of things from the account team, and different people on the account team will have different opinions, and the customer will tell you something else. Then, you'll look at the data and realize that the story is somewhere in between. When you're negotiating contracts, and I'm deeply involved in that, you have to go back to the data and get people's stories straight. I was recently able to pull some data that we got from finance into a power BI and visually show the account team what the year over year growth truly was to understand what we could forecast in the future, and what kind of contract we could expect them to sign. It was pivotal getting everyone on the same page because there were assumptions certain people were making along the way and stories they were telling and sharing that just weren't quite true. To negotiate effectively, we have to be able to empathize with the customer's perspective too. And not come at things from an angle that they don't recognize. So those skills were massively helpful. And with that comes an ability to tell a story from the data and boil something very complex down to a succinct story.

Kristin: I love that! What were some of your blind spots that maybe were revealed to you as a result of going through the Women Rising® program?

Rachel: I read the book *How Women Rise* a couple of times, because I identified with so many of the habits that I didn't realize. I can't even stress how huge that was to realize that even just the way you word an email has an impact on your brand and how you are perceived. My blind spots were habits that I didn't realize were undermining my own credibility. Recognizing that these are things that a lot of people do and these are just habits, just like a chocolate bar in the afternoon. I can break that habit if I decide it's not serving me. That was eye-opening for me and just talking about it I feel like I want to go read the book again. That's what I mean when I say I found every part of the program resonated. It blew my mind on the positive side, to do the strengths finder, and to really recognize what my strengths are and how they map to my ideal job. But then the blind spots that I have, as far as my own, the learned behaviors. Those were surprising to me.



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Kristin: What elements of the program were your favorite? What parts of the program did you get the most value out of?

Bernadette: When I coach, I coach at all levels, anyone from a team leader or operator on the floor all the way up to plant manager, director. Knowing your audience and frame of reference, and what's in it for them. Taking a step back before you dive into the detail. Listening for what's important to them. A lot of times the questions I get asked, the answers are within the people already. You help guide them to get to where they need to go. We usually try to do it together so that they own it that way. You're only one person, and you can't be everywhere. Leveraging relationships is huge in that space.

Kristin: On that note, I'd love to hear your take on leveraging relationships and networking.

Bernadette: Jennifer works at Van Dyke I came out of Van Dyke as my latest plant almost 10 years ago. So, when I coach there, it's like going back home. And I can bring up, "hey, when we were doing this launch..." to an area manager that was maybe in a different role, "this is what we did". What do you think? Or you bring up that connection and what you lived through, so that they want to help problem solve and work together. And then from a network standpoint, I keep in touch with my small learning group from **Women Rising®** Program because we're all from around the company, so that we can get different perspectives when we're running across different situations. That's been really helpful.

Kristin: I love the staying connected with your small learning group. Were there any parts of the program that were maybe intimidating or uncomfortable?

Bernadette: I'll say the elevator speech to be honest. The timing of the class was tough. I was working swing, and split shifts at Chicago Assembly Plant during that whole semester. So doing, homework seemed unfathomable. Right? Just role playing, I've never been a fan of. So that's just uncomfortable and it's always good to do something that's uncomfortable. And it did help, because then you're more in apt to have something ready when you're speaking.

It's more of that inward focus, because I'm not used to touting myself. That's why [elevator speech] was good to go through.

Jen: On that I would agree with Bernadette, the role play. I did not become a Thespian for a reason. It's always uncomfortable. It ended up being not a big deal, but I was very afraid to meet with my mentor coach afterwards. It might be a little bit selfish thinking that, but you wanted to appear smart and capable, and luckily, I think I did, meaning we hit it off right away. She liked to run. She had horses. Amazing how we got paired up. She was a nice, friendly, person who was there to help and listen. And I really appreciated it, and I've kept in contact with her.

Kristin: So it was a success.

Jen: Yes, it was!

Kristin: What advice do you have for others who will go through the program?

Bernadette: I would say, make the time. You get out of it what you put in. Take advantage as much as you can for yourself, and to get to know your class. I've also run across others that have been in other



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classes, and we instantly have a connection once we know we went through the Women Rising Program.

Jen: I agree with “you get out of it, what you put in”. You can have your video on, but you can still not be there, if you know what I mean. If you immerse yourself in this program, you will walk away with so much more. I changed from the beginning of the program to the end in that my passion was reignited. So that will make you rise, even if it's within yourself. I'd rather be walking around proud of who I am, and confident in my abilities than feeling like, “Oh, well, it's just another day.” I don't want to feel stuck and **Women Rising®** gave me tools or thought processes to believe I can do it, and I don't need to know everything to do it. And I think that was such a great takeaway from this program.

Kristin: Wonderful. I love that answer. You both are a wealth of wisdom. We'll end with finishing the following sentence. **The most important thing for a woman leader to do is....?**

Bernadette: Listen.

Jen: I agree, and believe in yourself. I think there are women leaders who naturally believe in themselves, but I think a lot of women have that trouble, and that's why there's this program.

Kristin Kolesar: I want to thank you for your time and sharing a little bit of your experience and imparting your wisdom.

