

Attracting and Retaining Women in the Transportation Industry

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The attraction and retention of women in the transportation industry is an international challenge, even with the increases in women in the labor force and increases in educational attainment by women. Oftentimes, it is perception that drives women away from the transportation industry, as communal goals are not emphasized in transportation. Historically, many women have pursued communal goals, as opposed to men who are more attracted to agentic goals in a general sense. This general preference by gender is evident through the most common occupations for women and men. While this misalignment of goals has been found to be one reason that women tend to avoid the transportation industry, there are ways to highlight the goal congruity processes that contribute to transportation engineering,

planning, operations, maintenance, and decisions—thus attracting the most talented individuals, regardless of gender. Other literature has pointed to the lack of female role models and mentors as one reason that it is difficult to attract women to transportation.

Study Methods

The objective of this study is to summarize previously conducted research and identify additional research needed to attract, promote, and retain women in the transportation industry using detailed major findings and subsequent recommendations, based on the annotated bibliography, of the current atmosphere and the most successful ways to attract and retain young women in the transportation industry in the future.

Findings

Successful practices that have been found to attract women to the transportation industry include connecting with young people, networking, and encouraging professional organization participation, especially at leadership positions. Attraction is also dependent on education, access to jobs, retention strategies within the organization, and opportunities to advance to leadership positions. Organizations have successfully attracted more women by first ensuring gender-balanced final interview panels are responsible for all new hiring, with recruitment materials that establish specific targets, provide guidance to reach those set targets, and inform how regular monitoring benefits the succession plan to leadership. Organizations must also have an inviting harassment-free culture, with implemented policies that allow for taking earned time off, and mentorship with opportunities to build confidence and skills. Additionally, it is important to highlight how many planners, engineers, and policy makers are fulfilling communal goals in their transportation careers.

The promotion and retention of women in the transportation industry is multifaceted and requires holistic approaches and dedication from all levels of employment. One key aspect to retention of women includes the development and implementation of a clear succession plan, and the steps and accomplishments necessary to follow that succession plan to leadership positions within the organization. Another retention strategy includes promoting and providing access to role models and mentors for junior faculty, and access to mentoring opportunities for senior faculty. Mentoring at all levels is mutually beneficial as it helps to prevent threatening effects of stereotypes that shed doubt on the competencies of women in the transportation field. Knowing specific workforce and personal goals of employees will ensure that an organization can provide goal congruent opportunities, which will increase retention through job satisfaction. Family friendly policies, the ability to take all the time off that one has earned, and the opportunity to return to the workforce after childbirth are two factors that could reduce the loss of new mother workers, thus increasing retention rates of more diverse talent pool.

Policy Recommendations

Develop and adhere to a defined succession plan to ensure there is no bias in promotion decisions. With clear promotion guidance that is inclusive of specific requirements for advancement, there is no room for unintentional bias in the promotion process within an organization. Not seeing a path to advancement is a common reason provided by women who left the STEM industry.

Ensure policies allow employees to take earned time off, without fear of retribution or loss of work availability upon return. Policies that are family friendly and allow for time off after childbirth and other dependent care considerate policies will all contribute to retention rates of qualified talent.

About the Authors

Jodi Godfrey and Robert Bertini are both MTI Research Associates. Godfrey is also a Research Associate at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida where Robert serves as Center Director.



To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1893

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