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Jerrie Fiala, Editor: jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu

WMU's first female engineering grad shares secrets to success

WMU's first female engineering graduate offered an audience of mostly women engineering students many first-person stories of and insights into survival in a male-dominated profession.

Margean Gladysz, senior vice president and regional director of the National Executive Service Corps., Tinton Falls, NJ, earned a WMU BS in Industrial Engineering in 1975. She broke barriers in both college and work in the "testosterone laden environment" of engineering.

During her junior year, Gladysz transferred from math to engineering after taking an inspirational physics class. She was encouraged by a father who had taught her drafting, a subject "girls" were not allowed to take. "Everything fell into place," she said. "I knew engineering was what I wanted to do."

Gladysz earned acceptance from engineering students and professors when they realized how competent she was. "[Being an engineering major] was like having 250 big brothers," she said, "but I had to prove that I deserved to be there."

Gladysz described "biting her tongue" when a professor accused her of seeking her "Mrs." degree and referred to her as the "secretary" of her first project group. After she scored so high on his test that she "broke the curve," the professor helped her get a foundry scholarship.



Margean Gladysz

She said WMU prepared her well for "the rigors of the workplace" and her career in the aerospace industry. "I have to thank Western for giving me a very well-rounded education," she said. After graduation, Gladysz began a long and successful career with Bendix Corp. (later called Allied Signal and then

Honeywell) in South Bend, IN.

Gladysz shared stories of her promotions (which included plant manager and senior strategic planner), six major national projects, problems, and on-the-job education. She also explained how off-shoring and out-sourcing trends resulted from actions taken by companies in the 1980s. "Know your industry," she told the students.



SWE officers and advisor with Margean Gladysz (1975 IE alum): (L-R) Mallory Good (ME), Melanie Hancock (AE), SWE advisor Dr. Ikhlas Abdel-Qader, Gladysz, Marji VanHoorelbeke (CCE), Courtney Heath (PCI), Sarah Gerbig (ME), and Aarti Valsadia (IE)

As "the first woman" to enter many areas of the corporate world, she encouraged females to develop and use good problem-solving strategies, dress professionally, and assert their credentials. She attributed much of her success to people and communication skills. "I was an excellent report writer, and I ran good meetings," she said. "I used my skills to interact with everyone."

Part of working well with people, Gladysz said, is learning to listen, developing human relations skills, having a "thick skin," and treating everyone with respect. "Never act as if you're better than anyone else," she said. "Those without degrees have practical experience you could never get in college."

Students were encouraged to be active as undergraduates and to continue their education after graduation. Gladysz passed the quality engineering exam on the first try, completed management training, and earned a MBA.

After the formal presentation, Gladysz answered questions from a group of engineering students that included several officers of WMU chapter of Society of Women Engineers (SWE), which coordinated her visit. "There was no SWE in 1975," she said.

Gladysz now runs a consulting group for 170 non-profit groups. "I find it very satisfying to use all my skills and background to help others," she said.

Send your thoughts or suggestions for future topics to the editor at jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu Thank you.