

# These women run their own manufacturing companies. Here's what that's like.

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May 3, 2018



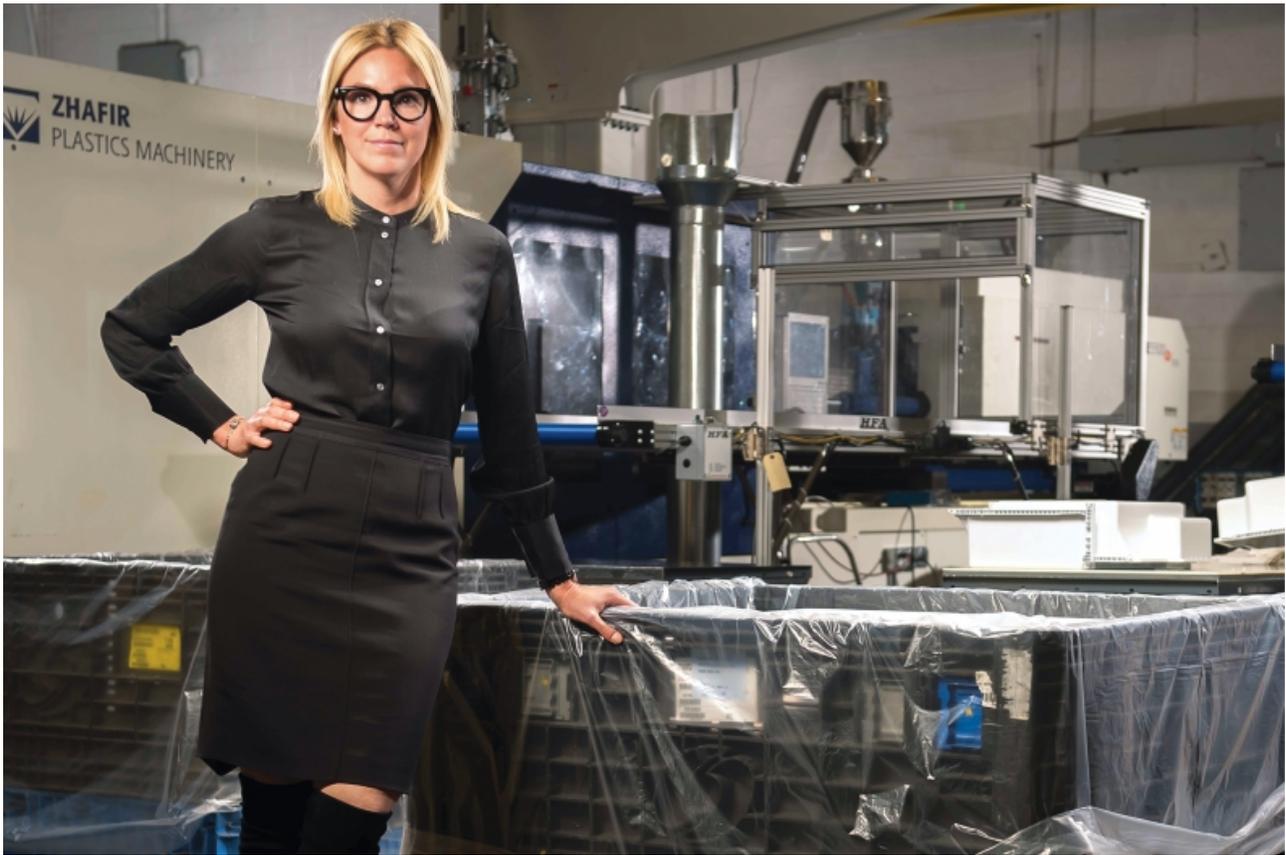
John R. Boehm

Women make up less than a third of the local manufacturing workforce. Their presence is probably even lower at the top of the industry, among chief executives and owners. From the factory floor to the C-suite, though, women experience many of the same work hazards, including bosses who still can't fathom women in the sector.

The tight labor market—job openings in manufacturing are at a decade high—may change men's minds. If companies want to grow, they'll need to expand their labor pools.

Here three top female executives talk about running their own companies in this male-dominated industry. (Their stories have been edited and condensed for clarity.)





John R. Boehm

**PATRICIA MILLER, 35**

*Matrix 4*

Woodstock

**Revenue:** \$8 million

*CEO Patricia Miller was a marketing director at Eli Lilly before taking over a plastic injection molding business started by her grandfather. She sits on the board of the National Association of Manufacturers.*

When I went to the White House last year to meet with President Trump around manufacturing, they sat me right next to him on the left-hand side, and then to the right of him was the National Association of Manufacturers president, and he's a man. But clearly that was an optic moment, right? That they're going to put this young woman next to him as every single news source was filming that day. He pulled out my chair for me and then pushed it in for me, which is a nice, gentlemanly thing to do. But he's not doing that for the man who's the president of the association next to him. Then he said something to me like, "Nice to meet you, sweetheart" or "You're welcome, sweetheart" when I said thank you for pushing my chair in. I'll get that often, like "young lady" or "sweetheart." I appreciate the genuineness around it, but there is

something where sometimes you question—OK, is that patronizing? Is that not being put as an equal because I look young or sound young? It felt a little bit interesting to me being in the White House Roosevelt Room with the president calling me a term of endearment.

My first year in the business, I went to the International Manufacturing Technology Show and was chatting with a few other people in manufacturing. A man came up to me and started asking me about the machines in the booth we were in. I'm like, "I'm sorry, I don't work at this booth." He said, "Oh, you're so gorgeous I thought you must be one of the sales reps." I said, "No, I'm sorry, I'm in the industry." And he was like, "Well, gosh, we just don't see many women at these shows, and we definitely don't see many women that look like you." So anytime I go to a manufacturing show, because I wear high heels or dresses, I must be a salesperson.

I don't feel like I'm sexually harassed. I feel like it's more, "Oh, my gosh, we've just never been exposed to a woman who's 35 who bought a company and is running it." But I feel like the minute that people catch up, for the most part, they're not dismissive as much as they are surprised. The assumption is going to be you're not the CEO, because we face a huge disparity in how many women are at the C-level, and then compounded with you're in a manufacturing organization, which in general has been male-dominated for as long as it's existed.



John R. Boehm

**ANNIE MOUHAUPT, 42**

Mohop

Rockford

**Revenue:** \$1 million

*CEO Annie Mohaupt started her custom shoe and handbag company in 2005. She graduated from 1871's WiSTEM program, a training and support program for female tech entrepreneurs.*

I took on a male partner in 2014. It's really, really helped the business a lot, having somebody who can help me along with the operations, but the technology side of things is what I've come up with. I'm the one who programs the robots. But when we are in meetings, a lot of times—and we both fully recognize this—he's the one who gets spoken to. There's a lot of times where we actually have to make a choice, where we have to figure out, is it in our interest to let him be the leader in this conversation? Because maybe me being the tech leader would be seen as a weakness. My feminist pride wants to be like, "Hey! I'm the one who came up with this tech! I'm the one who's like, 'Let's revolutionize fashion manufacturing!' " In fashion manufacturing, there are actually a lot of women, but these are women in developing countries who may be exploited, and that's an issue that I care about, as well. So my vision is more important than my ego in some cases, more important than making myself feel like I put some guys in a room in their place.



The reason we are so small is because I basically have had to make a choice between growth and R&D. I've kind of given up on pursuing venture capital. I went to the WiSTEM program at 1871, and we talked a lot about the amount of venture capital that women receive, which is like 2 percent. I did do a few meetings, and some went better than others, but I was like, "Do I want to be spending all of my time convincing people that I'm competent, or do I want to be spending my time pushing my business forward?" Like right now even, I'm able to say: We bought a factory. A 10,000-square-foot factory. We bought all of our robots, tools and equipment. We did this on our own. I feel very uncool that we haven't grown as fast as we could if we had lots of investment money, but I have grown to accept we have our own road.





John R. Boehm

**RACHEL CIULLO, 41**

*Composite Cutter Technology*

Volo

**Revenue:** Less than \$1 million

*President Rachel Ciullo owns the company her father, Glenn Isaacson, founded in 1983. It sells cutting tools made with polychrystalline diamond to customers in electronics, aerospace and other industries.*

We had a customer that would only speak to Glenn; he would not speak to me. A lot of it was he wanted R&D. He was a distributor, so he would try to see if we thought PCD would be a good application for one of his potential customers, and he truly would not discuss it with me. He said, "No, I'll wait for Glenn." Even knowing Glenn was not there—he was very, very ill, so he was nowhere near the business—he would still ask for him. I would say, "I'm not going to ask him that question. I'm not going to bother him with that. He taught me well. I can help you." So he did come around, but he would definitely speak to me in a different tone and a different style. He would almost speak to Glenn like he was trying to get Glenn's perspective; he was asking for his expert advice. When he would speak to me, it was more he was testing me. Do I know this? Do I think I can figure this out? But he did end up speaking to me.

Is his company still a customer? Every once in a while they reach out to us to quote a tool, but we never get the order. That has been something I've thought about. We certainly don't want to lose business, but there are other people out there who want to work together, that will build a relationship, somebody that doesn't have that old-school mentality with those blinders on. Because they're not going to be able to function like that in the manufacturing world for too much longer.

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