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Women Breaking the Mold 2021: Doreen Becker

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Doreen Becker's introduction to the plastics industry was not anticipated.

Becker was an analytical chemist when the company she worked for was sold and she was told by the new business that she would be working in the plastics applications lab, testing the pigments in blow molding, extrusion and injection molding equipment.

"When I saw our products being extruded into a parison for the first time, I was so excited to see how beautiful they were and began to realize the possibilities of what could be achieved with our products in plastics. It was so much fun," said the corporate sustainability director for Tarrytown, N.Y.-

based materials maker Ampacet Corp.

Becker has a bachelor's degree in analytical chemistry and a master's degree in creative design.

"I also started attending SPE and AMI conferences learning all about different types of plastics and technologies that I could apply to our products and began experimenting with different polymers and techniques that sparked numerous application patents," she said. "Where other people saw limitations in our products around stability and color properties, I saw challenges and opportunities to create something new."

Under her title of corporate sustainability director, Becker executes and represents Ampacet's sustainability initiatives globally, serves as the company's sustainability ambassador as an active member of organizations in recycling and circular economy, and creates opportunities for innovations and enhanced business practices, among many others.

One of her biggest challenges involves the education of "how broad the world of sustainability actually is."

"Our business and our industry cannot operate in a linear fashion," she said. "We need to be more circular in our approach. We are a part of a larger society, and we must contribute positively to it if we want to survive, be profitable and sustainable."

Becker is involved in numerous associations and organizations, including the Society of Plastics Engineers, PlastiVan, Alliance to End Plastic Waste, Association of Plastic Recyclers, Sustainable Packaging Coalition, Daughters of the American Revolution and Shiba Club of Greater New York.

"The plastics industry is changing," she said. "It is not just an industry for white male engineers. Diversity will strengthen this industry, and I would encourage people who don't fit that mold to consider a career in plastics."

Becker was nominated by Linda Carroll, global insight and innovation director for Ampacet.

Q: What is your personal "mold" that you are breaking?

Becker: I never fit the typical mold of a plastics professional. As a woman, I still get "mansplained" occasionally, but I think being outside of that mold has also



allowed me to find my own path in this business. I don't play golf and I don't smoke cigars, so some of the old ways of connecting don't work for me, but I have found new ways to connect by joining committees, contributing my time to volunteer on boards and mentoring other women and younger employees.

I think the mold that I am breaking is that when I am building relationships, I am not looking for people who are the same as me, but people who are different and think differently and have had different life experiences and then connecting with them in our industry. It is frequently surprising how quickly we can build relationships based on our differences. I find that very rewarding.

Q: Who is your mentor or someone you look up to?

Becker: I have been very fortunate to find people who have taken risks to help me and given me unparalleled opportunities. In my current company, I have a boss (and a former boss) and their boss who always take time to hear me out and allow me to determine my path without just providing quick-fix solutions. Even the owner of our company takes time to sit down and offer guidance and support. I respect all of them tremendously and feel very fortunate to have them in my life.

Q: What is your greatest achievement?

Becker: Next to raising my magnificent son, I would have to say that my current job is my greatest achievement. When Ampacet decided three years ago to commit to a serious sustainability program, I jumped at the chance to lead the challenge.

It was apparent (and it still is) that the plastics industry was on a collision course with consumers and the planet. Not only is this portrayal of the plastics industry unfair, it is also untrue. I was hearing from inside my company that employees were ashamed of working in the plastics industry, and I was determined to turn that around.

The basic tenets of the plastics industry are based on rational technologies and data to support those technologies. Sustainability is different. Sustainability has a foothold in both the rational world and the emotional (irrational) world. In order to be effective, we have to address both sides. I set up an educational program in my company called Ampacet Proud. The idea was to tackle these claims head on and teach our employees that they should be proud to work for a company that helps provide clean food and water to people all over the world.

We also make recycling plastics easier and more effective. We also create products that save energy, water and CO2 for our plants, customers and the earth. Our employees are also being taught the truth about plastics and how essential they are for our health and well-being. We have been taking this information and our sustainable solutions to our customers, brands and communities to let them know that there are things we can all do to improve the health of communities and our planet. We have a lot to be proud of in our industry, and it feels like a great achievement to play a part in that.

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