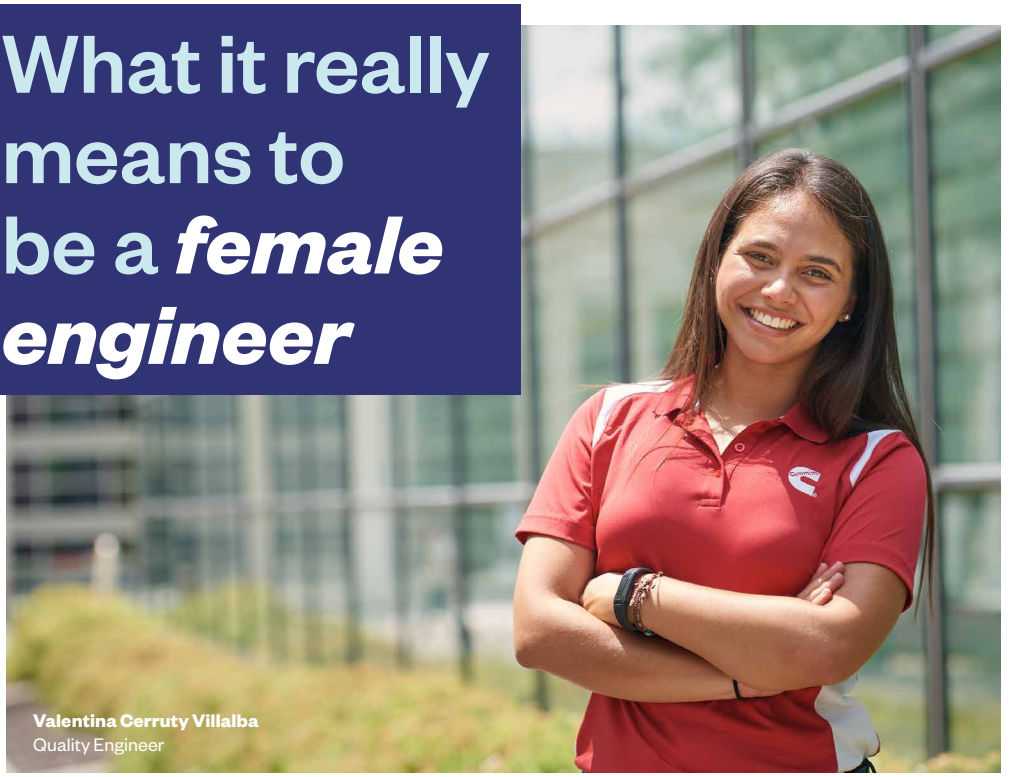
What it really means to be a *female engineer*



Valentina Cerruty Villalba
Quality Engineer

Engineers can make a meaningful impact on the world, say two women from the industry, who are passionate about what they do and keen to attract more women to the sector.

Dawn Whiting believes that she has the best job in the world. As an engineer, she's travelled the globe to work on projects in China, India, Brazil and the US, among other countries.

"I don't think people understand that this is where an engineering career can take you," says Whiting.

"The stereotype is that engineers are car mechanics, or someone who fixes your washing machine. Actually, we may have to work in similar high pressure environments and I've certainly been involved in some serious and challenging engineering issues. But I love that I'm always doing different projects and no two problems are the same."

> *In today's society, things are changing for women," she says. "It's happening in STEM, too, slowly and steadily - but it is happening.*

There's never a dull day in engineering, says Whiting. Plus, she admits, it's a good feeling to know that what she does can make a meaningful impact on the world.

As Global Project Leader – Engineering at Cummins Inc, Whiting is currently leading a team investigating new design innovations.

Yet she started her career at the company as an apprentice, 22 years ago. "I knew I wanted to do something in science and had an interest in vintage transportation," she says. "After college, the idea of earning while I was learning really worked for me."

Taking a lead from female role models

Back then, Whiting admits she wanted "to fit in and be one of the guys" in what was (and still is) a male-dominated industry.

"But a few years later, I realised there was so much support among my colleagues for who I was and what I was doing. That led me to find out more about the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives.

"Now I understand I have a responsibility to promote women in the industry because female role models are so important."

Whiting now regularly talks in schools about what it's like to be a woman in engineering and is a highly visible member of the company's Leading Inclusion for Technical group, which champions different cultures, backgrounds, religions, genders and sexualities.

"Going into schools is a chance to educate children, parents and teachers about what we do, and showcase some of the cool stuff," she says.

Of course, in a cutting-edge engineering role, you have to keep ahead of the knowledge curve so that your career can reach even greater heights.

Take Whiting. In 2007, she graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering, funded by the company; and she's now studying for her Master of Science in Global Product Development and Management.

"Technology is changing really fast," she explains. "As an engineer you have to keep up with practical learning and learn to apply it in your work."

Dawn Whiting
Global Project Leader - Engineering, Cummins Generator Technologies

Devna Devang Chauhan
Applied Controls - Technical Leader, Cummins Engine

> *I have a responsibility to promote women in the industry*

"This is an ever-changing field"

Devna Devang Chauhan, Applied Controls – Technical Leader at Cummins, agrees with Whiting's assessment.

"This is an ever-changing field," she says. "That's what keeps us on our toes and what makes it so exciting. There's always so much to learn and so many challenges to solve."

Chauhan believes that while talent is important, personal integrity is highly prized by companies in the industry.

"I've been involved in a lot of recruitment drives for Cummins," she says. "The great thing is that we're always concentrating on the core skills a person has, rather than how much they know on a technical level."

Chauhan, who joined Cummins as a graduate in 2014, manages a team involved in developing the software that controls the engines the company designs and manufactures.

Like Whiting, she is a strong advocate for women in engineering and heavily involved in networking activities.

"Engaging girls and young women is one of the best ways to attract more females into engineering," she says.

"If they can see, talk and listen to someone who is just like them, they'll want to find out more about the job and what it's like to work as a woman in STEM. That will help change mindsets."

For any young woman thinking of studying STEM or going into a STEM career, Chauhan's advice is: go for it - and don't give up if things get tough. "In today's society, things are changing for women," she says. "It's happening in STEM, too, slowly and steadily - but it is happening. So if you're always open to learning and happy to take on new challenges, then you can achieve anything you want in this industry."

Written by:
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