



2025 WiM VA Leadership Conference

Purpose-Driven. Progress-Focused. Powered by Women.

Join us for the WiM Virginia Leadership Conference on Thursday, October 2, at the University of Richmond's Jepson Alumni Center—a **purpose-driven, progress-focused gathering powered by women in manufacturing.**

This premier full-day event is designed to **empower, connect, and inspire** women across all levels of the manufacturing industry. Experience a powerful lineup of keynote speakers, engaging professional development sessions, and meaningful networking opportunities that will elevate your leadership journey.

Hear from industry trailblazers like **Diane Leopold**, former COO of Dominion Energy, and **Ana Kraft**, founder & CEO of Xena Workwear, as they share their stories of resilience, innovation, and bold leadership.

Whether you're on the **shop floor or in the boardroom**, this is your moment to grow, lead, and thrive in manufacturing—alongside a community that's shaping the future of the industry.

AGENDA

8 - 9 AM | Registration

9 - 9:05 AM | Welcome & Kickoff

Speaker: [Bridget Bender](#), Associate Manager of Talent Acquisition, Altria

9:05 - 9:45 AM | The Power of Your Voice: Leading with Purpose & Courage in Uncharted Spaces

Introduction: [Bridget Bender](#), Associate Manager of Talent Acquisition, Altria

Speaker: [Diane Leopold](#), Former Chief Operating Officer, Dominion Energy

Join us for an inspiring keynote presentation from Diane Leopold, recently retired Chief Operating Officer of Dominion Energy and a trailblazing leader in the energy sector. In this candid and empowering session, Diane will share pivotal moments from her remarkable career—leading massive infrastructure projects like the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind initiative, navigating high-stakes decisions in a male-dominated industry, and finding the strength to speak up even when it was uncomfortable or unpopular.

Diane will explore how authenticity, resilience, and purposeful leadership can open doors—not just for yourself, but for the women around you. Through storytelling, humor, and heartfelt insight, she'll challenge us all to step outside our comfort zones, trust our instincts, and recognize the influence we wield when we choose to speak up.

Don't miss this opportunity to hear from one of Virginia's most accomplished female leaders as she reflects on her journey and shares practical wisdom for women in manufacturing and beyond.

9:45 - 10 AM | Break & Networking Icebreaker Activity

10 - 11 AM | Unmasking Potential: Women & Disability in Manufacturing

Introduction: [Brenda Clarke](#), Engineering Operations Director, ITAC

Speaker: [Dr. Kelsey Dunn](#), Founder, [Disability Workforce](#)

Women in manufacturing face unique challenges, which are amplified by disability. Many women with disabilities, particularly neurodivergent individuals (and those with invisible disabilities), often mask their challenges. In fact, women are three times less likely than men to be diagnosed with ADHD during childhood. Consequently, many women receive a diagnosis later in life, revealing that they have been masking their symptoms for years. This prolonged masking is linked to burnout, mental health struggles, and lower career satisfaction, making it even harder to navigate male-dominated industries like manufacturing. This session explores the intersection of gender and disability, highlighting systemic barriers, the impact of masking, and strategies for a more inclusive workplace.

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize how masking and late diagnoses impact women's careers.
2. Identify systemic biases and barriers in manufacturing.
3. Implement strategies to foster inclusive workplaces that support women with disabilities.

11 AM – 11:30 AM | Mentoring Program & Leadership Certificate Ceremony

Presenters: [Jenni Owen](#), Engineering & Supply Manager, Alfa Laval

[Kerry McAvoy](#), Principal, One Environmental Group

11:30 AM - 12 PM | Lunch

12 - 12:45 PM | Fireside Chat with Ana Kraft

Moderator: [Caryn Durham](#), Director of Strategic Communications, Universal Corp.

Speaker: [Ana Kraft](#), Founder & CEO, [Xena Workwear](#)

Join us for a powerful lunchtime fireside chat with Ana Kraft, the visionary founder and CEO of Xena Workwear. Ana will share her inspiring journey—from launching a bold startup born out of frustration with ill-fitting PPE to leading a movement that champions safety, confidence, and style for women in industrial roles. Discover how she's turning barriers into breakthroughs, building a community of female leaders, and reshaping the future of manufacturing—one pair of boots at a time.

Don't miss this energizing conversation on innovation, leadership, and the importance of creating work environments where women can truly thrive. One lucky attendee will walk away with a free pair of Xena boots!

12:45 - 1 PM | Breakout Sessions Introduction

Throughout the day, you'll have the opportunity to dive into sessions designed to enhance your career and leadership skills.

1 - 1:45 PM | Breakout Sessions #1 & #2

Breakout #1 – Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage

Speaker: [Dr. Kelsey Dunn](#), Founder, [Disability Workforce](#)

Neurodivergent individuals are often underestimated in manufacturing environments. The industry's fast pace can lead to overlooking strengths like pattern recognition, deep focus, and process improvement. This session will challenge these misconceptions and explore how neurodiverse employees enhance efficiency, innovation, and workplace culture. Drawing from real-world examples in manufacturing, attendees will engage in an interactive exercise called Strengths Mapping.

Breakout #2 – The Power of You: Poised, Polished, & Prepared

Speaker: [Katy Stuck](#), Founder, [Shine Strategies](#)

Working to uplift women in leadership. From mastering first impressions to refining workplace etiquette, participants learned the art of standing out while staying authentic.

Key takeaways? Confidence isn't just what you wear—it's how you carry yourself. And executive presence? That's the ultimate power suit. Here's to building leaders who inspire trust, exude confidence, and leave a lasting impact!

2 - 2:45 PM | Break Sessions #3 & #4

Breakout #3 – Staying Competitive in the Job Market

Speaker: Kaisha McCrea, CEO & Founder, [Growing Perspectives Career Consulting](#)

In today's fast-evolving workforce, staying ahead means staying informed. This session explores the latest job market trends, the technologies shaping career advancement, and the industries on the rise. Learn practical tools to elevate your professional brand, sharpen in-demand skills, and boost your visibility in a crowded marketplace. Walk away with purpose-driven strategies to remain progress-focused—and power your path forward.

Breakout #4 – AI Transformation Trends Reshaping Manufacturing Innovation

Speaker: [Katie Taylor](#), CEO, [Narratize AI](#)

AI is accelerating digital transformation in manufacturing like never before. According to Deloitte's 2025 Outlook, 98% of manufacturers have begun their Industry 4.0 journey, with tech spending rising to 30% of operating budgets—even amid economic uncertainty. Why? Because leading companies have realized digital transformation isn't just about modernization—it's about unlocking the collective intelligence of their people. This session explores how manufacturers are using AI to turn data into decisions, knowledge into advantage, and teams into engines of innovation.

3 - 3:30 PM | Postcards to My Younger Self Activity

Facilitator: [Katy Stuck](#), Founder, [Shine Strategies](#)

Every career journey is filled with lessons we wish we'd known sooner. At the beginning of the conference, you were invited to respond to the question: "*What do you wish you knew earlier in your career?*" During this session, we'll read and discuss a selection of these powerful reflections—sharing collective wisdom, personal insights, and lessons learned. It's a chance to connect, be inspired, and remind each other that every step in our journey holds value.

3:30 - 4 PM | WiM Virginia Chapter Update

4 - 4:05 PM | Closing Comments

4:05 - 6:30 PM | Networking Reception

We'll wrap the day with a cocktail reception in the beautiful Jepson Alumni Garden—because after a day of breaking barriers, we deserve to raise a glass to our achievements!