



Seema Pajula on the importance of challenging the status quo and being bold

Deloitte is proud to introduce the next profile in our series of women in the manufacturing industry. By highlighting the stories of women in manufacturing, we hope to help facilitate meaningful conversations, create connections, and showcase the myriad of opportunities available to enter and thrive in the manufacturing industry.



Seema Pajula is the US Clients, Industries & Insights Leader for Deloitte LLP, and has significant global experience as a member of the Global Leadership team and the US National Executive Management team. Prior to her current role, she served as the leader of Deloitte & Touche LLP's Audit and Assurance commercial audit practice in Chicago.

Seema Pajula
Deloitte Services LP

Dreaming of becoming the first female Major League Baseball player

As a child, Seema Pajula would not have guessed that she'd be where she is today. In fact, she thought she'd be on the baseball field. At an early age, before ever picking up a bat, she aspired to become the first female Major League Baseball player. Growing up in Baltimore, she was an avid Orioles fan and admired Cal Ripken Jr. She's currently reading his book and learning more about him and his career.

She laughs as she recalls other jobs she imagined for herself as a child, from a bus driver to a marine biologist. But it was in college when she uncovered her true passion. Through her coursework, Seema recognized her love of accounting and the role it plays in business. "Accounting fell into my lap," she says. "I believe the key to accounting—and all business careers—is a balance of emotional and intellectual intelligence, because it keeps every day interesting."

Pajula has spent her entire career in professional services working to solve her clients most difficult challenges, the last nineteen years of which she has been with Deloitte. Seema has continually showcased her passion for people and her desire to stay challenged by the work that she does. "I think the key to being a good client partner is building trust and relationships," she says. "I love helping clients with their complex problems and working with clients thinking around the corner."

Manufacturing from the start

Pajula's career path hasn't been a straight line. "I think what's so fantastic about Deloitte is that you get so many different opportunities. Your path is never linear," she says. "It can be whatever you want it to be, and I think that's what's so exciting about being at Deloitte."

However, she did know she wanted to be in the manufacturing field. "Walking through a plant gets me excited to see how things are made, what the supply chain looks like, and how we can think about companies of the future," she says. "This whole digital transformation realm is really exciting. I remember when walking through a plant for the first time and thinking, 'Wow!

This is really where I want to spend my career.'" Since then, Pajula served some of Deloitte's largest and most complex manufacturing clients.

Seema admits she has always wanted a career that challenged her to think differently. "I love that I can be creative at Deloitte," she says. "People don't think of accounting as being creative, but in reality, nothing is black and white. In accounting, you can navigate through laws, work through precedent, et cetera."

Leading by example

Pajula discusses the responsibility of stepping up as a partner at Deloitte, as she noted she did not have many role models like herself. "Earlier in my career, there were few female partners, principals or managing directors, and there were even fewer diverse female partners. I'm 100% first-generation Indian, so being a role model is important to me."

Seema sees her role at Deloitte as an opportunity to serve as a role model for women. Now, as a member of the Global Leadership team and a mentor to many, she shares how she has navigated her career by learning from everyone around her, especially all the women she has worked with throughout the years.

Pajula shares. "My advice would be to take the best of all of those around you, and also take note of the not-so-good as well, because knowing who you don't want to be may prove to be even more important than knowing who you want to emulate."

Getting out of the comfort zone

When asked her advice for women looking to enter the manufacturing industry, Seema encourages them to be bold and make sure to challenge the status quo. She inspires those around her, professionally and personally, to do things that can seem scary.

Taking on a challenge is how she got to where she is today. Pajula recalls a time when she was asked to interview for the national industry leader role, "and my first response was I'm not ready" she says. However, she faced that challenge, was selected for the role, and continued to step out of her comfort zone from there.

Pajula discusses the statistics on how women only apply for jobs they are one hundred percent qualified to take, and she wants her peers and daughters to be bold. As a mom, she reaffirms to her two daughters that they can be anything they want to be, and to challenge gender and cultural norms.

She shares her favorite quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "do one thing every day that scares you." Pajula continues, "I try to take myself out of my comfort zone. So I ask myself, what did I do, that really scared me this week?"

Beyond that, Pajula touches on the importance of having a continuous-learning mindset, as she believes that is what gives Deloitte—and their clients—a strategic advantage. She notes how quickly things in the manufacturing sector are moving, and how important it is to constantly learn and innovate; otherwise, there is the possibility of getting left behind.

Whether it is a passion for working with clients, the work being done, or the industry, Pajula emphasizes the importance of bringing passion to work with you every day.

"The passion that you have cultivates a culture where people care and are energized about what they're doing."

- Seema Pajula

Seema Pajula: The lightning round

Women in Manufacturing

Describing herself in three words: Passionate, garbage can (her childhood nickname, given as the result of her early love of eating and food), and caring

Favorite food or drink: Deep-dish pizza

Favorite place to travel: Aruba

One thing on her bucket list: Scuba diving with a Great White shark

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