



Shellie Saiki on self-advocacy and empowering women in manufacturing

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.



Shellie Saiki is a partner with Deloitte & Touche LLP's Audit & Assurance business, specializing in the Industrial Products & Construction (IP&C) industry. She has more than 27 years of experience at Deloitte, and she is a champion of continuous learning and encourages women to be leaders and their own advocate.

Shellie Saiki
Partner
Deloitte & Touche LLP

Deep industry knowledge in manufacturing

Shellie launched her career at Deloitte immediately after college, joining the Audit & Assurance business in Los Angeles. For the first two years, she served a complex, high-profile client, a challenging opportunity that sparked her interest in gaining a deep understanding of the business.

Recognizing her potential, a partner selected her to be part of a new team serving an Aerospace & Defense (A&D) client. This pivotal moment in her career exposed her to a wealth of experience and accelerated her professional growth. It equipped her with the skills to navigate a complex, high-stakes environment filled with brilliant minds; sharpen her technical abilities; and thrive under intense pressure.

It also taught her how to lead effectively and conduct herself in challenging situations. She remarked that these skills are instrumental in her current role as a partner.

On the progression of women in leadership

Shellie often found herself as one of few women working with male-dominated teams and clients, a situation that significantly shaped her perspective on women in leadership. For instance, when Shellie was more junior in her career, during a client facility tour to enhance her understanding of the business, her then-manager insisted that a male colleague accompany her due to the gender-biased environment at the client facility. She notes, with a sense of progress, that the same client now has a female lead client service partner (LCSP).

As her career advanced, she observed the changing dynamics of gender disparity. Early in her career, she recalls a heavily male-dominated environment that led her to question her professional fit. The birth of her children further challenged her with questions, such as "Can I make this work?" This was just one of a few doubts she experienced.

Shellie recounts that, in the past, "there were far less women at the firm, let alone women partners. But now we see more women in leadership roles." Nevertheless, she believes that the journey toward gender

equality in leadership is far from over. Shellie feels that if we are still discussing the representation of women and diversity in leadership roles, it means we have more opportunities for growth and improvement.

Shellie highlights the importance of leaders fostering inclusive environments, which is an important key to retaining top talent.

"In my experience, people tend to not stay [at a company] unless they see someone in a leadership position that looks like them and has similar obstacles and career challenges ... and that's one of the reasons why I think it's so important to have women in leadership positions."

The mentorship effect: A journey of empowerment

Reflecting on her career, Shellie credits one of her early mentors for teaching her the critical lesson of self-advocacy. This mentor, who was known for his willingness to challenge the status quo and assert his sometimes unpopular standpoints, instilled in Shellie the importance of finding and using her own voice.

"If you want something, you really need to stand up for yourself ... and sometimes you have to be loud about it."

Milestones in her manufacturing career

A high point in Shellie's career was her tenure as Deputy Industry Professional Practice Director (IPPD) for the A&D sector within the Audit & Assurance business. This period coincided with a transformative phase within the business, providing her with the unique opportunity to overhaul Deloitte's workflows and redefine industry leading practices. The challenges were further amplified by the onset of the pandemic, intensifying the scale of change and transformation.

Shellie found this role rewarding as it allowed her to engage with teams across the A&D sector, contributing significantly to Deloitte's transformation. As Deputy IPPD, Shellie plays a key role in bridging the communication gaps and fostering knowledge exchange among teams. She underscores the value of maintaining an open dialogue.

Reflection on a career mindset

When asked about what fuels her enthusiasm for work, Shellie shared that it's the people that inspire her the most. She thrives in an environment where individuals have a career-oriented mindset and investing in their personal growth and in the success of the organization. This investment in learning and progress is what makes her eager to start each workday.

Leaning into adversity

Shellie, a native of southern California, now lives in Orange County with her family. When discussing work/life balance, she candidly admits that it's not a daily achievement, given the high-pressure nature of a client service career. She believes in the importance of taking time off and maintaining balance throughout the year, cautioning against the self-imposed stress of expecting daily equilibrium.

In her professional life, Shellie has adopted the philosophy of “it always gets done.” She uses this mantra to guide herself and less experienced colleagues when faced with a daunting volume of work, encouraging them to overcome mental barriers by tackling tasks one at a time.

However, Shellie’s personal philosophy underwent a major shift following her diagnosis with stage four lung cancer two years ago, despite having no personal history of smoking or family history of the disease. This life-altering event made her realize the importance of living in the moment rather than constantly deferring dreams to the future.

“I used to always say, I used to always say, ‘when I retire or when I’m 80 ... I’ll travel, spend more time with friends.’ But someday is not one of the days of the week. If it’s really that important to you, then go do it. Stop saying ‘one day’ because life is unpredictable.”

Reflecting on lessons learned, Shellie admits that she used to be someone who avoided medical visits. Now, Shellie prioritizes well-being and encourages others to do the same. “Be an advocate for your body and mind, and listen to your body,” Shellie pleads.

Shellie shares, “Know where your limits are. It’s very easy to forget about those limits and keep pushing yourself. But that has major impacts on your health. We need to remember this.” She stresses the need for mindfulness about these boundaries, a lesson she underscores through her personal journey.

Shellie Saiki: The lightning round

Women in Manufacturing

Describing herself in three words: Teacher, focused, straight shooter

Favorite food or drink: Mexican food and previously was an avid Coke drinker

Favorite place to travel: Hawaii (her whole family is from Hawaii—she says, “It’s like being young again” when she visits)

One thing on her bucket list: Go back to school for architecture

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