

MWAF interview: Trish Jordan

Work title: Bayer Canada - Public & Industry Affairs Director

Educational background: BA in English Literature, minor in journalism; completed studies towards MCS (Masters in Communication Studies).

What are the main milestones of your career? What were the reasons of your milestones?

I've had different milestones or advancements throughout my career depending on my career stage at the time.

My first job was a summer job with Alberta Wheat Pool, a farmer-owned grain cooperative and I stayed there for 12 years. I haven't left agriculture since! I was offered several roles with more responsibility and opportunities to learn and show I was capable. Over that time, I was exposed to organizational structures, working with farmers, different personality types as well as the CEO and executive team and the farmer-elected Board. My positions always had some sort of communications or stakeholder relations angle.

The next milestone was when I made the decision to move to Winnipeg in 1996 to take a job with the charitable organization, Canadian Foodgrains Bank. They created a new role for me and I took the plunge and our family left friends and family to try something new. With them I travelled the world, learned about very different types of agriculture and interacted with farmers in Canada and in the developing world, while handling fundraising and communications for the organization. As a result, I got a much broader understanding of agriculture that included food aid, development, and the challenges faced by resource poor farmers and those who go hungry. I also saw the value of developing industry relationships and engaging with other stakeholders in Winnipeg during this time.

I joined Monsanto Canada in 2001 and it has been such a rewarding organization to work for. Working for Monsanto gave me a multitude of challenging work experiences that I believe really allowed me to excel and hone my skills. The Schmeiser case took me to the Supreme Court of Canada; working on GM wheat in the early 2000s gave me a lot of media opportunities and experience in sharing our position on innovation and technology. These are just two examples where I learned to think on my feet, make quick decisions and deal with adversity. As the saying goes, "Smooth seas do not make skilled sailors!"

Today, I see myself more as a mentor and a leader for people earlier in their careers – both internally and externally. I try and share my learnings or experience with others. I never really viewed myself as a leader or "clued in" to the fact others were looking to me for guidance but there was a moment where I thought, "Oh, I am not just an employee doing a job. I am a leader and I need to engage and lead." In retrospect, I see now I had that impact in previous roles, I just didn't realize it at the time. At Monsanto I was part of the Canadian Leadership Team and was held accountable for things like professional development, coaching, mentoring and advancement of women.

What motivates you in good times and through road blocks?

Doing a good job has always been a motivator for me. Or tackling a project and creating and achieving a positive result. The people I work for - farmers, retail customers, industry stakeholders and my colleagues – they motivate me every single day. Outside of work, having some close friends I can lean on is huge. I may have a frustrating day, but they will let me vent, listen to me, and give me their feedback and advice.

Roadblocks are simply challenges to me and I am motivated to figure out how to get around them. Monsanto faced a lot of criticism from opponents, but I know how our tools and technologies helped them and the planet. That continues to motivate me today as I transition to Bayer.

Did you see yourself as a taking a leadership role in the field of advancing women before?

I didn't see myself taking a leadership role in this area and never felt held back or that I somehow wasn't given opportunities because of my gender. The issue of a gender pay gap never entered my mind for the first 20-years of my career until we started doing research at Monsanto. That's when I learned more about impediments to advancement that women may face and how women may approach the workforce differently. For instance, men and women think about advancement differently - a woman will look at a job posting and if she doesn't have all the requirements, she doesn't apply. A man, instead, sees they have one of the requirements and thinks he is the best candidate for the job! That was interesting to me because my brain never worked that way. I never thought about who I might be "competing" against for a role. I looked at it more as a matter of whether I wanted it or thought I could be good at it or ready for it.

I got involved externally on this issue because I was approached by the Canadian Agricultural HR Council (CAHRC) and asked to sit on the initial committee that CAHRC had pulled together to look at the issue of diversity and advancement of women in agriculture. Monsanto was one of the leaders in this area and our team had done a significant amount of research and outreach, both internally and externally, to try and figure out what the impediments were to women advancing in agriculture (specifically within the legacy Monsanto organization) and what we could do about it.

As a member of the Leadership Team at Monsanto Canada at the time, we all embraced this work and tried to do things to improve. That is when we moved ahead with the development of an Employee Inclusion and Diversity team. Originally our focus was specifically on women, but we later expanded that work to encompass Inclusion and Diversity beyond just a focus on women. I was asked, along with another colleague, to be Leadership Team Liaisons to the employee-led committee to provide guidance and serve as the conduit between the employee committee and our leadership team.

With respect to the Advancing Women Conference, legacy Monsanto was an active supporter and sponsor of these conferences. I was fortunate to have Iris Meck ask me to deliver a key note, and I also participated on a panel and later, the sponsor panels. We saw the Advancing Women conference as a venue to bring women together from all walks of agriculture and at various stages of their careers to share experiences, learn from each other, network and grow. I am still a strong supporter of the concept and the personal and professional development it provides. I still learn something every time I attend. Bayer is committed to inclusion and diversity as well. We just need some time to figure out next steps and approach in Canada and how to bring this work and, potentially, the Employee Council to the broader Bayer organization (i.e. not just the Crop Science Division).

Why are you involved with gender issues in ag?

I like to think I am an advocate for agriculture generally and I know we need to attract all kinds of talented people to our industry to be successful in the future. Since the initial research we undertook, we have learned that it's not just about gender – creating a great place to work and strengthening an organization is about inclusion. Women are also becoming better at getting the support they need and recognizing you cannot necessarily "have it all." (e.g., to be the super women, have 4 kids, be the soccer mom, volunteer in the school and community and be the CEO). There are of course exceptions, but each individual needs

to figure out what's most important to them and how they can make it work, with the support of their families and their workplace.

Please comment on what's been going on with women in ag up to now? What's going on now? What do you see happening in the future?

I see some momentum and focus and a lot more engagement among women and men around talking about and tackling challenges such as gender diversity on boards or in management; ethnic diversity; addressing wage gaps; and more support for initiatives focused on women such as the Advancing Women in Ag Conference, and women's forums such as MAAF. When the conversation is broadened to include diversity, there is a role for everybody to be included but creating "safe places" for women to share also resonates with me. In the future there will be many capable women available to step into leadership roles. I'm confident our sector will continue to develop in this area. For instance, in the past 30-40 years probably there were not many women farming but today that's not the case. The acceptance of women on farm or industry boards is a challenge still today, but it's acknowledged as an area for improvement. At times, we may need others to approach women and advocate for our access to board positions. That was my case, when I became the 1st female president of Golf Manitoba. I would have never even thought of joining the board if someone hadn't asked me and that someone happened to be a male who later encouraged me to move up to the executive and eventually the President role.

What are you doing now? Why?

I would say I am in a transition period in my professional life with going through the integration of Monsanto and Bayer. I continue to be employed with Bayer and I am engaged in the effort to bring the two companies together as one, while supporting our customers. In my personal life, my husband retired 5 years ago so I am starting to think about that myself and feel I will know when I am ready to move on, if that's a decision I make. Also, my mom turned 87 last year and just went through heart valve replacement surgery (very successful) and we are her only family support here in Winnipeg so that takes some time and focus. I have also shifted my priorities a bit and started to carve out more time in my off-hours to relax and do nothing. The travel in my job has historically been extensive at times and I am starting to grow tired of travel. That said, I am still very committed to my work and my work-a-holic tendencies are still alive and well (or is that not well)?

What do you think are the most important characteristic good leaders should have?

The leaders who have inspired me in the past, were charismatic, strong communicators, great speakers, mentors, and genuinely wanted to see me grow and succeed. The ability to listen to people and consider other viewpoints or encourage the input of others is also important in a leader. I'll admit it's a challenge for me, at times, but I think it's important to have these attributes if you want to inspire people and have them follow you to achieve great things. When you listen to people and truly value their input or contributions, that can be quite impactful.

What do you think is necessary to engage industry in gender conversations and make progress for the women's file in Canada?

We need sensitivity for all viewpoints and need to be careful not make this a male vs. female issue either. Some of my greatest managers and mentors have been men. I think we need to create a comfortable environment where we can all talk about issues in a safe way. The key word is "respect" - we need to speak candidly and share our thoughts when we are feeling uncomfortable or see something unfair.