

Society of Women Engineers Annual Conference November 2012, Houston By Jenna Harpole

I attended the 2012 SWE Annual Conference this year in Houston. It was a great place to meet other SWE members from other regions and across the globe. The conference highlights for me were networking and attending professional development sessions. Some of the most interesting sessions to me were about *Dual Career Couples, Negotiating, Work-Life Balance, and Personal Financial Planning*. There are over a hundred sessions to attend at conference depending on your particular interest. There are sessions for collegiates and professionals alike.

The most interesting session I attended was titled "How to Negotiate" that was led by Suzanne Dobson. Some of the key insight from that session was: women earn 82% of what male coworkers wage and only 16% of women negotiate salary. When asked what your salary requirements are advise them that you expect a competitive salary in line with the industry, but don't give a number. Articulate your expectations in terms of time off, benefits, and job title. Consider negotiating the "extras" including: educational reimbursement, paid travel to SWE conference, organization membership, and paid time off to volunteer. Be able to quantify your value and performance: how much did you save/generate for your company, tell them how valuable you are to them.

Another really interesting session I attended was called "Thriving Amid Chaos: Balancing the Demands of Work and Life". Some of the key insight from the session included:

- Don't be afraid to redefine your path. It doesn't have to be the same path as your boss or your peers. Do informational interviews to find out what really interests you.

- Everyone's support network is different but you might include: neighbors, friends, administrative assistant, house cleaner (outsource), babysitter (outsource), lawn care (outsource), and others.

- Balance: a support network helps you be able to take on more than you could do alone. What other resources are available to you? Amazon.com, Amazon prime, and Online bill pay to list a few. One can also combine interest, for example do something great for the community and spend time with your spouse or child, by volunteering together or combined friends & exercise by inviting a friend to exercise with you so you can chat while improving your health.

The final session I'll share some insight on is the New Breadwinners. This session shared that 60% of women are the breadwinner or co-breadwinner of their household and 40% have masters degrees.

The top 3 Challenges for them are:

- Stress: 63.4%

- Family responsibilities: 48.4%

- Corporate challenges: 38.9%

The top 3 Positive Effects:

- Financials

- Confidence

- Flexibility

Ideas for the new breadwinners are:

- Maternity and Paternity Leave

- Financial Planning

- Time Management

- Mentoring

- In home childcare

- Culinary students make the meals one day a week
- Cleaning
- Culinary classes- Pay for classes to teach your spouse or children how to cook if they are interested

Overall SWE Annual Conference 2012 was a great experience, and I look forward to see you next year at SWE Annual Conference 2013 in Baltimore October 24-26.