

Women in Security: Overcoming Old Challenges in a New Era

2 years ago



In an ideal world, conversations about the representation of women in security and leadership roles should not be necessary. But the equal society we envision is still in the future, though it is one we are progressively approaching.

It is essential to recognise the progress made towards gender equality, especially in industries where women are underrepresented, such as the security industry. However, despite the increasing awareness of the impact that women can make in the security sector, there is still a long way to go in achieving gender diversity and inclusion. In this article, we speak to Melanie Innes, and Sharon Kane, security professionals in Bidvest Noonan's UK and Irish businesses, about the challenges and opportunities for women in the industry.

How do you view the attractiveness of the security industry for women?

Melanie: The security industry has faced challenges with gender diversity in the past. However, this has significantly changed over time as more women enter and stay in the sector due to equal opportunities for both genders. Today's change-makers in the security industry are strong women with a change-oriented ideology. The industry today offers a wider range of tasks that do not only include manned guarding but also customer liaison roles, which broadens the industry and makes it more accessible for women.

Sharon: There has been a misperception among some that the security industry can be challenging and too physically demanding for women who aspire to work in the field. For views to change, the industry needs to be more than just inclusive. It means that our industry must establish a culture that promotes diversity and values the contributions of women. This can involve initiatives like setting up leadership

programs and flexible work schedules for women, among other things. For example, Bidvest Noonan recently signed the Menopause Workplace Pledge that supports colleagues experiencing menopause and making reasonable adjustments in their working schedules and environments.

Why do you think the industry feels less appealing to women?

Melanie: The lack of professional networking opportunities and mentorship remains a big challenge for women in security. I believe that professional networking opportunities and mentoring programs are crucial for women to rise to the top in this industry. This also means that women should seek out mentors and colleagues who can provide direction, guidance, and support which would help them form strong networks.

Sharon: Insufficient representation is one of the key challenges women encounter in security and management roles to date. I came across a study which mentioned that only 11% of security leadership positions worldwide are held by women. This is not a particularly appealing number, and the problem is that even this 11% of women are underrepresented in the sector. It can be challenging for young women to picture themselves in senior roles when they lack a female role model in the industry and examples of strong successful women in security. Melanie and I are fortunate to have had strong women role models in our business units, both are led by female Managing Directors.

Can you share your thoughts on perceived gender bias in the industry?

Melanie: For a business to be productive overall and to combat gender bias, inclusion and diversity must be achieved. To deal with the shifting landscape, organisations should make sure they can keep attracting and retaining talented women. To attract more women into the industry, and to promote female leaders, there must be a desire to make the right decisions from the leaders and do so with positive intent. The fact that a woman is the Managing Director of Bidvest Noonan London Solutions Business Unit is an incredibly motivating example.

Sharon: It is true that gender bias remains an issue and it is a global problem across different industries. I learned recently that the global average gender disparity is around 31%. In order to work towards closing this gender gap in our industry, a lot of effort has to filter down from management. One of the most effective measures that a company can take is to develop an environment that promotes 'conscious inclusion'.

What advice would you offer to a woman considering a career in security?

Melanie: There has never been a better time to pursue a career in the security industry. Take advantage of all the opportunities that are offered to you. At the end of the day, it's important that women realise they can accomplish everything they set their minds to. Someone considering a career in security should concentrate on being persistent, being able to take constructive criticism, and having confidence in their skills.

Sharon: Women can achieve great heights in this industry. Women do indeed face unique challenges in their journey, but with perseverance and support from their colleagues and mentors, anything is possible. It's time to challenge the way women are perceived inside and outside this industry.