

July 22, 2024 12:19 PM

Angelica Gonzalez, HEXPOL Compounding Americas | Women Breaking the Mold 2024

Maintenance systems engineer

[ANDREW SCHUNK](#) - Rubber News Staff

BURTON, Ohio—Angelica Gonzalez has taken the road less traveled in her career, certainly as it relates to the paths of family members from her native town of Venadero in Aguascalientes, Mexico.

In her town, convention dictates that the husband works and the wife "stays home and takes care of the family."

"To my great fortune, I was the youngest and with whom (her family) they were not as strict," Gonzalez writes in her memoir, "Empowering Women in STEM: Working Together to Inspire a Future." "Growing up in a traditional Mexican family is one of the most beautiful and nurturing things that could have happened to me. You grow by default with endless values, humility, respect, hard work and many other things that help you face the real world."

Iron sharpens iron, and her experiences as a minority woman in a predominantly male field have been critical as she has developed her career, which currently finds her as a maintenance systems engineer at HEXPOL Compounding Americas in Northwest Ohio.

HEXPOL is the largest rubber custom mixer in North America.

"Going into a problem assuming that you must be treated differently because you are a woman will make it very difficult for you to be confident and perform to the best of your ability," Gonzalez told *Rubber News*. "It's not about being a woman in a man's world, it's about being a person in a person's world."

Today, she works to produce "good data and good numbers so we can take actions based on that."

She does not yet have any direct charges at HEXPOL, but she does have a team of about three to four people between Burton and California.

Her journey into the rubber industry "began with a blend of curiosity and opportunity."

She completed internships in mechanical engineering at the University of Puerto Rico about eight years ago, and HEXPOL hired the bright young mind immediately.

"The leadership that I saw at HEXPOL was the biggest thing that helped me to stay there," Gonzalez said. "Every day, I challenge my company and co-workers by advocating for continuous improvement and excellence in maintenance."

She encourages others "to offer their best and to ask if they have questions."

"My leadership style is 100-percent to let them do it," she said. "And the leadership I have at HEXPOL—John Sedgwick—he thinks about how actions will affect others and he considers everything."

"He really reinforced my belief in the power of mentorship and teamwork."

Diversity of thought—whether on the shop floor or in direct business-to-business communications—remains critical, Gonzalez said.

"HEXPOL certainly needs to have that diversity ... it is a global company and communication with customers is critical," she said. "As well, challenging ideas from others is important ... being from Mexico, they challenged me and I am pretty sure I challenged them in other ways of thinking."

Gonzalez advised other women entering their own careers to "surround yourself with people who have high sense of integrity."

"They will give you all that they know, if you ask," she said. "Be true to your beliefs. Set high standards of ethics, discipline and passion for what you do. And own the way you act—be smart and put your assets first."

While Gonzalez' career may have started in Spanish, her bilingualism has set her apart today, a unique asset in a world that has gotten smaller and more interconnected.

"The language barrier played a big role for me, especially the language barrier in day-to-day relationships. Sometimes when I say something, people take it as rude. It's been hard, because I am translating something in my head before I speak."

Indeed, Gonzalez has come a long way, and at 29, she is nowhere close to being satisfied.

"On the way, you will always find people who do not want the world to change; they just like the way things are because in their heads that is how things are supposed to be," Gonzalez said. "They will put obstacles (up) for you to fall and ridicule you to make you give up."

"However, you will also find people willing to help you with your day-to-day. People who see everything from a different perspective, and who will join you to achieve everything you propose. People who let you follow your path, and if they watch you fall, they offer you their hand to get back on your feet."

Years with company: 8

Years in rubber industry: 8

What drew you to the rubber industry, and what has made your career in the industry rewarding?

My journey into the rubber industry began with a blend of curiosity and opportunity. After completing my internships in mechanical engineering at the University of Puerto Rico, I was eager to apply my knowledge and continue learning. HEXPOL opened its doors to me, offering a platform to grow despite being a novice. The most rewarding aspect of my career has been the chance to drive tangible improvements in maintenance and reliability, seeing our efforts translate into operational excellence. The trust and support of leaders like John Sedgwick have also played a crucial role in my career development, reinforcing my belief in the power of mentorship and teamwork.

How are you challenging your company and co-workers every day?

Every day, I challenge my company and co-workers by advocating for continuous improvement and excellence in maintenance. I work closely with maintenance managers, providing data-driven insights and strategic guidance to enhance our processes. My goal is to foster a culture of reliability and proactive problem-solving. By emphasizing the importance of ethics, transparency, and collaboration, I aim to inspire my colleagues to push boundaries and strive for higher standards in everything we do.

What does leadership look like and how do you demonstrate it?

Leadership, to me, is about empowering others and leading by example. It involves building trust, demonstrating integrity, and providing unwavering support to your team. I demonstrate leadership by being approachable and open to new ideas, always ready to listen and offer guidance. I focus on creating an environment where everyone feels valued and encouraged to contribute their best. By maintaining high ethical standards and being transparent in my actions, I hope to inspire others to adopt the same principles in their work.

What book or podcast do you recommend and why?

I recommend "Empowering Women in STEM: Working Together to Inspire the Future" a book I contributed to along with other inspiring women. It provides valuable insights and motivational stories from women in various STEM fields, highlighting their challenges and successes. This book is an excellent resource for anyone in STEM, offering practical advice and inspiration for navigating and thriving in these fields.

What do you count as one of your most significant failures? What did you learn?

One of my most significant failures occurred early in my career in the industry. I failed to follow up on some basic requirements, which led to delays in inspections. This experience was a critical learning moment for me. I realized the importance of diligent follow-up, having a Plan B, and addressing issues head-on. It taught me to be more proactive and meticulous in my work, ensuring that every detail is attended to and that there are contingency plans in place.

When you unwind and take time for yourself, what does that look like?

When I take time for myself, I prefer to go to the gym. Working out helps me relax my mind and strengthen my body. I also enjoy meditating and praying, which bring me peace and clarity. Finding quiet areas to drink a cup of coffee allows me to reflect and recharge. These activities help me maintain a healthy balance between my personal well-being and professional responsibilities.

At the end of the day, what does success look like?

Success, to me, is about making a positive impact and leaving a legacy of improvement and growth. It's about seeing my efforts translate into a more efficient, reliable and ethical workplace. On a personal level, success means knowing that I've supported and inspired others to reach their full potential. At the end of the day, it's about contributing to a culture of excellence and continuous learning, where everyone feels valued and empowered to achieve their best.