

JO MORRIS

FASTENER TRAINING INSTITUTE

Involved in the fastener industry since graduating from university, The Fastener Training Institute's Marketing Director and soon to be new Managing Director, **Jo Morris**, has worn many hats and juggled many tasks and roles throughout her career. She talks to *Torque Magazine* about the fastener industry and why she is passionate about education.



How did you get into the industry?

After graduating as a business major from Arizona State University, I had two options – a pharmaceutical job in Texas or a fastener job in Arizona. My boyfriend at the time was in Arizona, so I took the fastener job. I was an administrative assistant doing entry-level sales. It was a tremendous opportunity to learn from the ground up and I've been in the industry ever since.

What does your day-to-day job involve?

As marketing director for Fastener Training Institute (FTI) and co-owner of Desert Distribution, my days are full! For FTI, I plan the annual training schedule, develop course curriculum, coordinate with instructors, manage marketing and event planning and find new ways and methods for training. Our new initiatives include offering Spanish courses and implementing a Learning Management System. With Desert Distribution, I work with distributors and end-users to determine application-specific needs for fasteners and help supply teams source parts. I'm involved across departments, including quality and engineering, with the fastener lines we represent.

What prompted your involvement in FTI?

John Wachman was my first boss, and in 2014, he was FTI's inaugural board president. At the time, I had preschool-aged triplets and was working many hours as a sales manager for a large fastener distributor. He offered me a part-time job to launch the first FTI webinar. I worked with the late Joe Greenslade, who at the time was Director of Technology for the Industrial Fasteners Institute, and together we created a 90-minute webinar called Thread Fit Matters. It was a huge success. After that, I helped

create the overall online presence and it became more than a full-time job. Now I help run it all and I'm honoured to say I'll become FTI's new Managing Director in August.

What do you like most about being involved in education & training in the fastener industry?

I like having the opportunity to give back to the industry. I love being able to meet manufacturers and distributors and get to know the engineers who use our parts. We have attendees from the biggest OEMs in the country like John Deere, SpaceX and Blue Origin. The people who are really using fasteners – a lot are engineers – are coming to our classes to learn about fasteners, because when you are in school, they don't teach fasteners. Being involved in training has really opened my eyes to the limitless opportunities you can have in the fastener industry.

There is no UK equivalent of FTI, how important do you see networks are for developing, training and retaining talent in the industry?

It is extremely important. FTI started in the early '70s as part of the old Los Angeles Fastener Association. The founding organisers realised that, individually, no one really had the capacity to train their employees but if they came together collectively, some solid educational programs could evolve. That's how the first fastener basics class originated. From there, FTI has really grown. If we continue to combine the efforts of our industry's most experienced and talented people, we can continue creating great resources. Networking and associations are huge for large companies, small companies, new people in the industry and growing within our industry – it's really an integral part.

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the industry since you started?

I think the technology overall has been wonderful. When I started, we wrote pick tickets and orders by hand and managed inventory with index cards. I just hope with technology we don't migrate to a parts number system. To learn and grow, we need to get our hands dirty – hold the part, understand how it's made, what can go wrong when it's made – and understand real world applications. Technology is great, it helps with inventory and order entry, but we can't get away from understanding the attributes of a part and only know them as a number or SKU.

Can you share some of your career highlights and milestones so far?

The first is my sales support role where we supplied millions of fasteners to a very large airbag manufacturer. I was the grunt and tasked to do it all. I saw how parts were made, packed and delivered to the line. I learned about quality by sorting bad parts in a hot warehouse and I learned to understand and review PPAP. In this role, I learned every level of the fastener process from inception, design, sources, samples, manufacturing, distribution. I'll always be grateful for that opportunity.

Next is FTI and all the people I have met – those new to the industry, engineers, quality specialists, buyers, OEMs and the experts teaching our classes. Some of our instructors are so colourful and the best education happens when they just share lessons learned. FTI has allowed me to get involved in regional and national associations like NFDA, MWFA, Pac-West, SWFA, and IFI. There are just so many highlights with FTI and I know there will be many more to come.

Finally, it was a huge honour to be recognised as the 2021 Woman in Business by Women In The Fastener Industry (WIFI) and it was an honour when a young female fastener professional recently reached out for mentorship. Being seen as a leader and to offer pearls of wisdom to others is incredibly meaningful.

What is your favourite thing about the fastener industry?

The camaraderie and networking. We all stay together. The big joke is that once you are in the fastener industry, you never leave – and it's so true! We love to see each other succeed. There is no cap. It's a special industry.

What do you think needs to be done to encourage more women to get involved in the fastener industry?

I think highlighting women, such as with this article, is a great way. Right now, there are some incredibly impressive female executives in the industry. Highlighting them and their success provides other women with a glimpse into the future for their careers. A few colleagues I look up to include the impressive and fearless Simmi Sakhuja and Jennifer Sturm and up-and-comers Holly McDaniel and Dianna Barnes.

If you could, what piece of advice would you give your younger self as you started working in the fastener industry?

Stay the course, you are on the right track. I'd say to keep your eyes open, listen and do what you are told. Your future looks very bright. I'm incredibly thankful for every opportunity given to me. I've had the honour to work under some incredible leaders and mentors and I wouldn't change a thing. I love my life, my career path and how it has all evolved.

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Carmen Vertullo with Jo at IFE 2023

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Jo Morris with other Women In the Fastener Industry members