

Sandy Postel

UW Distinguished Alumna



UW Distinguished Alumna Sandy Postel (M.S. '96, natural science) is retired Boeing vice president of manufacturing, quality and production system strategy. She credits her groundbreaking success to her ability to translate difficult concepts into clear and understandable language—in short, her teaching skills.

"My approach was always to ask the people who are experts—who are the people actually doing the work—and then listen to them. Then apply what the strategy is going to be and teach it," Postel says.

Her accomplishments at Boeing include introducing new technology into the manufacturing shops, improving the fire-worthiness of airplane interiors, introducing the Japanese concept of lean manufacturing to 800 engineers and the quality management division, writing

technical papers, teaching seminars, and performing troubleshooting and change management wherever in the world Boeing needed her.

"Boeing valued my teaching skills," Postel says. "All I was really doing was listening to the guys who were the experts, and I didn't pretend that I was the expert."

She has also been a leader and mentor to women and minorities in the industry through the Society of Women Engineers and Boeing's diversity strategy leadership team.

Sandy credits her education for her excellent teaching and communication skills.

After earning a bachelor's at Purdue, she came to UW and earned her master's in natural science from the Science and Mathematics Teaching Center. There were 800 applicants that year, but only eight were chosen. She was one of those eight.

"I always wanted to be a scientist," Postel says, "but I also was drawn toward teaching. I think I was a natural engineer, but in 1971 that was never an opportunity that I saw in front of me—or was even posed to me. Back then, I thought engineers were guys with slide rules on their belts—no calculators in those days.

"The Science and Math Teaching Center taught some real fundamentals," she says. "When you're teaching elementary kids and you're thinking about science curriculum, there is a lot of real fundamental communication. Break it all down. Don't make it too complicated. But then you have to learn it yourself, really understand it, in order to break it down and explain it to other people. That was the joy of learning, for me. The Science and Math Teaching Center totally reinforced that for me."

After earning her master's, she taught for three years in Kentucky, but she found that it didn't allow her much creativity. When her brother got a job at Boeing in Seattle, she helped him move, and the rest is history.

"Boeing gave me the opportunity to be creative in technology and bridge that gap between technology and education," Postel says. "And then it became a leadership issue, too, because I was a good communicator—they didn't have many engineers who were technical who understood how to communicate clearly. I just started getting promoted, and I was the only woman."

Postel expresses her sincere appreciation in receiving the UW Distinguished Alumna Award and in reconnecting with her alma mater.



Keener Fry, executive director, and Laurie Nichols, UW president, at the Torrington, Wyo., community reception

During UW President Laurie Nichols's first months in office, she has spent a day or two of each week traveling around the state to meet with citizens, community college and public school leaders, legislators, alumni, media and others. Residents of these counties had the opportunity to meet Nichols during 10 public events throughout Wyoming hosted by the UW Alumni Association, local alumni and friends.