



“The job that I do now I would do even if they didn't pay me because it is exciting and the position that I am in gives you a chance to show your creativity. You can influence change and that's a part of what our group is doing now through Reliability.”

Mary Bimbo

Manufacturing

CAREER QUICK LOOK

Years in Field:

15 years

City/State:

Sylvan Springs, AL

LinkedIn:

[Profile](#)

Video Clip:

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Ethnicity:

African American

School:

Lawson State Community College, University of Alabama, Birmingham

Degree:

AS Electrical Distribution/Industrial Electronics, BS Business Administration

Career Pathway:

Manufacturing, Steel Production

Personal Time:

Time with grandson and daughter

Other:

Adjunct Electronics Instructor Lawson State

How did you get interested in Manufacturing and what has your journey been like so far? What is your background?

I was working as a clerk at U. S. Steel and one of the maintenance technicians came up to do work in my office and I asked him, “What do you all do? You are always all over the plant and it seems like it is a cool job. You're not just in one place doing the same thing.” He said we are electricians and we go where needed. So, I asked, “How do you get into that?” and he told me the company had an Electronics Training program and who to contact.

Then a few months later, I saw the Tech again and he asked, “Did you ever start that program?” and I told him I hadn't. A few weeks after that, someone from the Electronics Training Program called me and said I heard you were interested. I told him, “No, I'm not really interested, I was just curious.” And he said, “We would love to have you, so why don't you come over and take a look around?” I said I'd come if I had time. Then Human Resources called to say they'd love to have me in the Training Program and asked me to come and look around and give it a try.

So, that's what I did. I went up, took a look around and I started the program.

Why did they have to work so hard to recruit you?

Well, as a clerk, I was in my comfort zone. I was in the top tier of clerks. I knew nothing about Electronics. It is hard to move from what you are comfortable with to something you don't know anything about.

What type of training did they provide you?

First, I was in a self-paced program that I did on my own, as I continued to work as a clerk. I finished that program and they asked me to start a new Industrial Tech program at the community college for basic Electronics, basic Electrical and a few Mechanical courses. That program is now Lawson State's Manufacturing program.

I was the only woman in that program other than the instructor—Nancy Wilson. She inspired me—here she is a woman and of course she knows what she is doing, because she is the instructor. Well, I thought, "If she can do it, I believe I can do it." She made sure I understood it is important to know what you are doing as a technician. She didn't show me any favoritism because I was a woman. But if I needed additional help, she was there for me. So, I made it through that program and kept going.

U. S. Steel deployed a new Electronics Training Program, which had the Learners doing hands-on in the steel mill. For example, if you were doing crane theory in the classroom, you would go to the mill and work on a crane. That way, you get that hands-on experience. When I started at the mill, I worked with a lot of guys and I was fortunate; the guys were very encouraging and embraced me. They wanted me to be there.

Of course, they knew I didn't know much. I will never forget this one time I was working with this guy named Richard and we were finishing up a job. He said, "Hey you need to go over and tighten that up." I asked, "How tight do you want me to tighten it?" and he said, "As tight as you can get it." I put my wrench on it and I tightened and tightened and said, "This is as tight as it's going to go, it can't get any tighter." Of course, being a Learner, he had to come behind me to make sure that I was doing it right. He went over and turned, turned and kept turning the bolt. I mean with no effort he turned it about four times then explained, "You have to get under it and put your body into it when you turn it." He just laughed about it.

Were there many times you needed physical strength to do your job?

There were different instances where a lot of strength was required. Fortunately for me, the guys that I worked with would see me struggling and would come over and do what they needed to do to help me get the job done. I will never forget this one time when I felt for certain I couldn't do something. A motor control unit (MCC) blew, so they called us out to come and repair it and we had to wire it back up. We needed to sit on the MCC with our legs open about eight feet up in the air. We were taking turns because you can't sit in that position for a long time.

When it was my turn, I sat up there and I tell you that was the most uncomfortable position to be in for 30 minutes. When I got ready to get up, I couldn't, because my legs had gone to sleep. The guys laughed at me about that. I understood then why we rotated every 30 minutes in that position. When it came time for me to go up again, I was hoping they would let me out of that, but they said it's your turn. I said, "I can't do this," and they told me, "The quicker you can get it to work, the quicker you can come down." I had to go one more time, but I made it through. I positioned my legs a little bit better when I went up the second time.

What was the job title you had after completing the program?

I started the program as an Electronic Technician; I did that for about a year and then they moved me into the Electrical Bull Gang. When I tested into a Labor Grade 5, this enabled me to do Electrical and Mechanical, which included Welding.



Mary and Her Grandson

What advice do you have for other women considering a Manufacturing career?

If you are going to go into this industry, don't just do it for the money—because it pays well. Do it because you want to learn the craft. I was good in school, so I could easily take tests and pass them—that was no problem—but when it came to learning this skill, it wasn't just the theory you had to know—you had to know the trade. I had to know what I was doing in the field because in this industry, safety is your number one concern. If you really want to learn the craft and do the craft, put everything you have into it and of course, it becomes easier as it goes.

What is the pay like for an Electronic Maintenance Technician?

As a clerk, I was at the highest grade and the pay at the time when I left was \$49K a year. Once I went into the Maintenance program, the salary increased as a Learner up to \$53K and by the time that I had gone through the ladder promotion, my base salary was \$69K-\$71K a year. After I finished the program and met the test requirement, I was considered a Maintenance Technician Labor Grade 5, my salary increased from \$71K to \$74K a year. When the economy was booming, I made as much as \$107K—which included a considerable amount of overtime.

Tell us what you do in your current job as a Reliability Assurance Manager: What is a typical workday like?

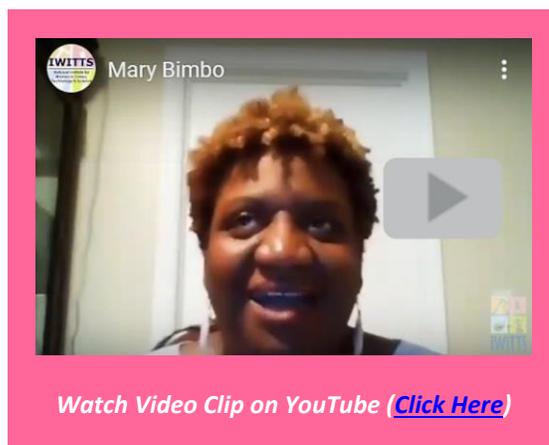
Right now, I am part of the Corporate Reliability Team, and I am responsible for what's called Work Management. One of my jobs is to make sure accurate data is entered into our Computerized Maintenance Management System. For instance, when the Technician goes out to work on the equipment, we must make sure they document the proper and correct information, which includes but is not limited to, how much time they spend on it, what materials they used and any problems that they had. This information helps our leadership analyze the data and make decisions about the equipment now and in the future.

A typical day in my current position involves spending a lot of time working on my computer making changes to work standards, which means I am influencing how they are going to work on the equipment. I also create a lot of training documents and job aids. In addition, I work with several teams throughout the corporation to develop ways to make different jobs easier to do. I also conduct conference calls with the other plants to see where they are in their reliability efforts and try to find out how we can help them further improve their reliability efforts. In my role, whenever teams at our plants have problems with reliability efforts, I am one of the people they will call for help.

What makes you successful in your work? What is your greatest professional accomplishment?

When I was an Electronic Technician our manager came to me and said, "I would like to make you a manager. Would you be interested?" I said, "Sure I wonder where you want me to manage," and he said, "I will get back with you."

So, the guys in my group found out that they were trying to make me a manager and they asked me to manage our crew. I didn't want to manage the people that I worked with. But they really wanted me to. They told me they wanted me because I was fair and knew the business. They said, "You know what we are doing, so we want you." They signed a petition and gave it to the manager. The next thing I knew, management told me, "We want you to manage Electronics."



I still wasn't sure, but they asked me to give it a try.

I started out managing Central Electronics; with eight guys and as time went on, it got to be as many as 24 people in the crew. They embraced me as their manager. I had no problems whatsoever, and this is a Union plant where there is a separation between Union and Non-Union when it came to who could work on the equipment. Once I became a manager, people started asking my team to come help them from different areas that had not asked before and I think that was a great accomplishment. The crew then became known as *Mary's guys*, they would say, we'll get *Mary's guys* to do it or just call Mary.

Do you ever have any female company? What is it like working with mostly male co-workers?

I was the only woman for two years, but as a Technician, that was a little bit exciting. It gave me the opportunity to prove to the people that I worked with that a woman was perfectly capable of doing a job that had historically been done mostly by men. I earned the respect of my co-workers by doing my job well every day and by asking for help when I needed it, rather than trying to fake my way through something. While there still aren't as many women in this field as I'd like to see, there's been a lot of progress for sure. And I'm proud to work at a company where women play central roles in all functions—from Technicians at our plants to our CFO on our executive team.

Do you belong to any Women in Manufacturing Associations? Do you have a mentor or role model?

Two weeks ago, our company participated in a video conference event hosted by Ernst and Young called "Power Up Women Summit." They invited women from the entire corporation to hear speakers from U. S. Steel—in different positions and parts of the country—talk about how they got to where they were and what they had to do to get there. The Summit gave me a lot of inspiration to start looking at what I can do to move to the next level professionally.

So, my Director, Malisa Sommers, was one of the speakers, and right after she spoke, I put in a request to meet with her. I said, "Tell me what I need to do to move up" and I asked her to be my sponsor. She said, "I already am" and I replied, "I need you to be my mentor," and she wanted to know why. I told her, "From what I heard in the conference, a mentor is someone you seek out and so I am seeking you out." If you met her, her energy, you would never know how she does the things she does, so I told her, "I need you to help me move forward. Tell me what I need to do." She said, "You are doing everything. You just have to decide for yourself where you want to be and where you want to go and once you do that, then we can work together." The Power Up Summit was really dynamic for me. Ever since, I have been plotting the course for my future.

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Do you have any Certifications?

Certificates in Electrical Distribution and Industrial Electronics
Six Sigma Green Belt

What are your future goals for your career?

In the Reliability sector of the company, I just had a talk with my director about moving to another level. The job that I do now I would do even if they didn't pay me because it is exciting and the position that I am in gives you a chance to show your creativity. You can influence change and that's a part of what our group is doing now through reliability. We are bringing about a change in the company and that is exciting to see. I have been in this position for five years, and when I started, we were just really getting our reliability efforts off the ground. But to see it move from where it was to where it is now is just so exciting. So, to move to another level, I think I would like to focus on one plant and be a Change Manager. I would like to take something that is struggling and make it successful.

How do you like to spend your time off?

I have a three-year-old grandson (Israel) and if I could spend all my waking hours with him, I would but his parents won't let me for some reason—I think they are afraid I won't give him back. I have a ten-year-old daughter (Layla) who I adopted when she was three days old. She wants to be in everything at school and she really enjoys gymnastics, so I am an Uber driver for her. In the past, I was a foster mom for about 8 years. I have a daughter (Jacqueline) who is married (Isaac) and has her own small business in social media marketing and she is very successful. About a month ago, the Birmingham Business Journal had a women's conference during which she received an award and I attended. I couldn't believe how many people she knew and wanted to talk with her during that conference. I am so proud of her.

When I am home alone, I like to read history and I enjoy listening to music: Jazz, Rhythm and Blues. I do not like Rap even though my ten-year-old says I should try it.



Mary and Her Family

Layla, Israel, Isaac, Jacqueline, Mary

