

MILLENNIAL CORNER:

ALL generations should create a new pattern and work together

Editor's note: SEAMS has introduced a new feature on the newsletter, Millennial Corner. This blog gives the younger generation – who in the near future will serve in leadership positions and guide the direction of the association – a larger voice and platform NOW and will help them engage more the entire SEAMS' membership while busting stereotypes.

By: Xochil Herrera Scheer
The Chicago Pattern Maker

Like many people who go to college to major in fashion design, I thought I wanted to be a fashion designer.

I became a pattern maker because I enjoy the analytic side of fashion, making products come to life through technical design details and careful product development. I actually enjoy the spatial thinking and math involved, and the process of prototyping, revisions and perfecting a product for production.

I knew early on that I wanted to be an entrepreneur – but found myself starting perhaps earlier than I expected, because I faced a layoff in 2009 and needed to figure out a way to realize my dream of working in this industry.

At first, I created my own path by piecing together a part-time pattern making job, a part-time tailoring job and freelancing for independent designers and brands the rest of the time, growing that until I was able to employ myself full time with freelance clients. I honed my skillset in technical design and pattern making, and built my clientele for product development services, visited factories to gain contacts as well as to get feedback on my abilities.

Over the years, I have worked with many different brands, as well as many non-designers who had a product and business idea. I re-branded in 2016 as The Chicago Pattern Maker, growing to the point where I have now taken on freelance staff to help me stay on top of it.

In addition to running my company, I keep myself busy with professional organizations, and volunteer my time to speak to young people about opportunities in our industry. I am incredibly thankful for the more experienced people in my life who have offered their guidance and support over the years and believe that paying it forward is important.

I was in high school prior to the days of Project Runway (and these days, I feel like I have to educate people to how that ISN'T the reality of this industry) and had no idea the many different jobs there are in textiles and sewn products. I took drafting and AutoCAD classes because that was the closest skill I could think of that was available to me. My school had only one sewing

class, so I spent my senior year taking non-credit sewing and pattern courses at the local community college (alongside very sweet retirees who were making their own clothes) so I could get a leg up.

I've been pretty used to being one of the youngest people in the room throughout my career. As a Millennial, as a minority, as a female and as a small business entrepreneur in the same room as older, majority male, corporate or more established professionals, I've had my share of experiences where I've felt like I didn't belong or wasn't being taken 100 percent seriously as a professional. Some of that implicit, and some of that may have been in my own head but trying to find acceptance and respect has been a challenge until more recently – maybe now that I've passed the age of 30 and have a decade of business under my belt has helped.

My first experience with SEAMS was attending the TexProcess show in 2012. I was really intrigued by the organization. Though I wasn't at a point where I was ready to join, I loved the mission and was especially excited by the Made In USA pride and passion. Unlike some of the other vendors at the show, every company in the SEAMS pavilion was kind; even if they couldn't help me due to not being in their market, or my client not having quite the purchasing power to meet their minimums, they still spoke with me and I felt welcome.

I came to the show in search of machines for a client who wanted to start a factory – and they bought their machines from Henderson Sewing Machine Co. because of the experience I had during that show. Fast forward to my fourth trip to TexProcess in 2018 – this time I attended with my friend and colleague Lacey Bell of Fireflyline, who exhibited at the show.

Of course, BEING in the SEAMS pavilion meant even closer contact with the other vendors, and attending the networking reception provided me a strong contrast to the networking reception put on by the show itself, in how welcoming and personable people were. And to my surprise, Mr. Gerald Schwartz actually remembered me from a custom client order I had put through almost a year prior. Battling for the top position on the TexProcess social app led me to meet Devin Steele of eTextileCommunications.com, among others.

Following my great experience at TexProcess, I attended the SEAMS Spring 2019 Conference, and had a blast. I knew a handful of people but expanded my network even more. Unlike some conferences where you just want to retreat to your room after a full day, I was excited to spend extra time with people – group dinner, blues bar and dancing, drinks at the bar – all the while, talking about opportunities, as well as commiserating on similar struggles we go through, no matter what size business we each are in.

As for my passion for manufacturing in the USA – I think this stems from a few places. I am the daughter of a union laborer, so ideas around workers' rights, workplace safety and taking care of each other have been ingrained in me early on. I also love small businesses – crafters, makers and independent stores – it's both inspiring and the best way to support your community – by keeping your local economy thriving.

Finally, the devastating Rana Plaza tragedy and the resulting advent of the Fashion Revolution and their #WhoMadeMyClothes campaign really impacted me and the importance of a transparent supply chain, among other ideas. To me, the easiest and best way to ensure sustainability, transparency and supporting local economies is to produce domestically. And purchase domestically.

#OKBOOMER, let's be friends?

I laugh about this hashtag among the many other things floating around the internet pitting Millennials against Boomers. We have so much to learn from one another, it's silly. When I first started working in this industry, a lot of people were closed off about sharing resources, providing guidance or giving a newbie (especially a young newbie) the time of day.

Proving that I could speak (and understand) the lingo, but also be open to learning the ropes, listening to criticism (and then doing something about it), people start to take me more seriously. Proving that by sharing resources and recommending colleagues (or even "competitors"), that it all comes around and lifts us up together. More business for one is more business for ALL.

Let's talk about thread strength, stitch types and machine attachments. Let's also talk about on-demand manufacturing, AI, and having a user-friendly website and maybe an Instagram account. Please, share your knowledge with me, I'm ready to listen and learn. I'd love to share my knowledge with you, too.

I think the older generations (including you too Gen X, because there are lots of you, too!) should take on a Millennial buddy so we don't lose any of the valuable experiences and knowledge you've gained over the years – and we can continue to have a thriving industry that is growing with the times, and able to attract the next generation, beyond Millennials.

The spirit of sharing is the major reason I joined SEAMS -- everyone really seems genuine in their efforts to connect with each other and share information. I look forward to many more opportunities to do this with you all, and am proud to be a member of this amazing group of people.