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Association for Laboratory Automation

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**Contact Information:**

Anne O'Day

+1.630.305.0003; +1.630.384.1478 fax

aoday@labautomation.org

**“Owning Your Career” is Key to Professional Success**

**CHICAGO** – In a special session at LabAutomation2008 (presented by the Association for Laboratory Automation, January 26-30 in Palm Springs, CA), a panel presentation emphasized that for individuals to succeed professionally, they must pro-actively take responsibility for themselves and “own their careers.”

The panel presentation, entitled “Stages of Career Development and Diversity for the Technical Professional in Today’s World Economy,” shared the perspectives of a senior associate at a large pharmaceutical company (Peter Grandsard, executive director of research, Amgen), an entrepreneur (Ed Delaney, president, Reaction Science Consulting), an executive recruiter (Megan Driscoll, president, Pharamlogics Recruiting), and an advocate for women technical professionals (Betty Shanahan, chief executive officer and executive director, Society of Women Engineers). In addition, audience members contributed to a lively question and answer discussion following the presentations by the panel members.

Betty Shanahan of the Society of Women Engineers began the dialog by emphasizing why diversity matters in the workplace, and then illustrating how individuals in the minority can succeed by balancing thoughtful self-awareness in a corporate environment.

Quoting William Wulf, past president of the National Academy of Engineering, Shanahan noted that “As a consequence of a lack of diversity, we pay an opportunity cost, a cost in designs not thought of, in solutions not produced.” With this in mind, Shanahan challenged the way in which many people regard and manage diversity issues, labeling the typical approach as “the illusion of inclusion,” and illustrating how even the most well meaning co-workers often alienate other members of a team.

Shanahan shared research results from a 2004 Catalyst study that illustrates how men and women basically agree that strategies for success include exceeding performance expectations, successfully managing others, seeking high visibility assignments, and having recognized expertise. They disagree (39% vs. 81%) on the importance of developing a personal work style with which male managers are comfortable.

Becoming a “white man in high heels” is not the answer to long-term success. According to Shanahan, team members who face diversity challenges must explore the value of being an authentic individual who is true to himself or herself and compare those values with the realities of being effective in the workplace. To “own their careers,” self-awareness, assertiveness, and open communication with employers are critical.

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330 West State Street, Suite 1, Geneva, IL 60134 (USA)

Tel: 888.733.1ALA (252)

Web: [labautomation.org](http://labautomation.org)

Fax: 630.578.0172

Email: [ala\\_office@labautomation.org](mailto:ala_office@labautomation.org)

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Executive Recruiter Megan Driscoll followed by offering practical tools and techniques for individual self-awareness, self-assessment, and workplace success. Her suggestions for maintaining an up-to-date resume, individual development plan (IDP), and personal network all emphasized an active vs. passive approach to professional development and career advancement. According to Driscoll, these tools can be a roadmap to success, and those who actively use them will know where they are and know where they are going, and will be “in the driver’s seat” of their own careers.

From a large corporate point-of-view, Amgen’s Executive Director of Research Peter Grandsard stressed that while educational and past employment credentials may get an employee in the door, it is personal initiative and leadership skills that will propel him or her to success within the company. Employees who excel in interdisciplinary teams are people who can effectively communicate their ideas, listen thoughtfully to the ideas of others, and build group consensus to creatively solve problems. Likewise, the most successful employees are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and they know where they want to go and have an idea of how they might get there. As a result, they actively search for opportunities throughout the company that will help them meet their goals for personal growth. Grandsard noted that while outside training can be valuable to success-oriented employees, its value is greatly overshadowed by opportunities to learn on-the-job, and to take risks and fail without penalty.

Ed Delaney explained how self employment can be a lucrative and satisfying career option for the technically-inclined who also possess the right mix of ambition, temperament, experience and skills. As the owner of his own business, Reaction Science Consulting, Delaney’s practical advice for aspiring entrepreneurs addressed the logistics of incorporation as well as the personal considerations that weigh into the decision-making process. Delaney reiterated that even when working for oneself, there is no substitute for conducting an honest self-assessment, establishing realistic goals, and actively striving to achieve those goals.

More in-depth coverage of this special session will be posted to the ALA Web site ([www.labautomation.org](http://www.labautomation.org)) in March 2008.

For more information about the Association for Laboratory Automation, LabAutomation2008 or LabAutomation2009, visit [www.labautomation.org](http://www.labautomation.org), e-mail [info@labautomation.org](mailto:info@labautomation.org), or call 888.7331ALA (1252) or +1.630.208.6830.

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The Association for Laboratory Automation (ALA) is a worldwide organization representing leaders in all aspects of laboratory automation. ALA seeks to provide a greater understanding of the importance and value of automation technologies in laboratory settings, to advance science and promote education related to laboratory automation by encouraging the study, advancing the science, and improving the practice of medical and laboratory automation.

ALA thanks Velocity11 for its premier sponsorship contribution to LabAutomation2008. LabAutomation2009 will be held January 24-28 at the Palm Springs Convention Center.