

Generative AI Is Here. Now What?

By Kerry Stackpole, FASAE, CAE, PMI CEO/Executive Director



Kerry Stackpole

Plumbing manufacturing executives today are increasingly recognizing the transformative potential of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. These cutting-edge systems – such as Google Bard, IBM Watson, ChatGPT and others – can generate human-like text, images and even audio. To leverage the power of generative AI effectively, plumbing manufacturers need to consider the

key aspects of AI when planning for its integration.

As a business leader, you will need to gain a comprehensive understanding of generative AI and its capabilities. You should familiarize yourself with the underlying principles, limitations and potential use cases. This knowledge will enable you and your team to make informed decisions about the implementation of generative AI in your business operations.

Your company team should identify specific use cases where generative AI can provide significant value. This could include content generation, virtual assistants, chatbots, creative design, product development, customer support, or even personalized marketing. By identifying these opportunities, you can focus efforts and resources more effectively.

Generative AI models require large amounts of data to learn from and generate accurate outputs. You need to assess your organization's data accessibility, quality and privacy considerations. Do you have enough relevant data to train an AI model effectively? In addition, data security and compliance measures must be in place to ensure customer trust and regulatory compliance.

Artificial intelligence raises ethical concerns, including potential misuse, biased outputs, and misinformation. As a business leader, you should prioritize ethical considerations and establish guidelines for responsible AI use. You should ensure that the generated content aligns with your organiza-

tion's values and complies with legal and ethical standards. Regular audits and monitoring can help identify and mitigate any unintended consequences.

Generative AI systems excel at augmenting human capabilities, rather than replacing them entirely. You will want to plan for human-AI collaboration to leverage the strengths of both parties. This could involve training employees to work alongside AI systems, setting up feedback loops for continuous improvement, and establishing clear roles and responsibilities for humans and AI within the organization.

With the increasing reliance on generative AI, your business must prioritize security and risk management. You should assess potential vulnerabilities, implement robust security measures, and stay up to date with emerging threats in the AI landscape. Regular security audits, data encryption, and access controls are crucial to protect both business and customer data.

Do you have the significant computational resources essential to supporting generative AI models? You will want to evaluate your company's existing infrastructure and determine whether it can support the deployment and scalability of generative AI systems. This may involve investing in cloud computing and high-performance hardware, or partnering with AI service providers.

Generative AI is a rapidly evolving field. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability within your organization is essential to staying current. This includes staying

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In-Person Meetings with PMI Members Strengthen Ties

By Judy Wohlt, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

Productive, eye-opening, collaborative and helpful. These words are a few used by Plumbing Manufacturers International staff and four Atlanta-area members to describe their recent in-person meetings.

“Visiting face-to-face with members allows us to get a broader understanding of who they are, what they’re interested in, what day-to-day challenges they’re facing, and how PMI can help,” said PMI CEO/Executive Director **Kerry Stackpole**. “Our visits are another way for us to stay informed and up to speed on what’s happening in their world.”

The PMI team spent time with various senior leaders and staff at BOCCHI, Dornbracht, Duravit AG and Hansgrohe. In addition to Stackpole, the PMI team visiting greater Atlanta included PMI Director of Programs and Administration **Jodi Stuhrberg** and PMI Education Program Coordinator **Leslie Smith**. The PMI visitors answered questions about PMI and shared information about the PMI Manufacturing Success Conference and other programs, codes and standards resources and legislative tracking, and educational topics of interest to members.

“We enjoyed seeing our members at their plants and offices to better understand their day-to-day responsibilities and how PMI can be of service to them. There’s nothing like in-person meetings to generate deep discussions and new ideas for our annual conference and programs, too,” Stuhrberg said.

PMI members expressed their appreciation for the dedicated face time with staff. “On behalf of our company, I want to extend a sincere thank you to the PMI team for taking the time to visit us and for their continued partnership,” said BOCCHI President and CEO **Akgun Seckiner**.

Sharing ideas, concerns and membership benefits

PMI members’ concerns focused on water efficiency and demands being put on manufacturing companies for packaging and single-use plastics, Stackpole reported.

Conversations about how the pandemic ramped up supply chain challenges and the added costs to move products into the United States emerged, particularly with members who have headquarters overseas in places such as Turkey and Germany. “I was impressed by the innovative ways our members cut costs and worked through supply chain challenges,” Stackpole said.

PMI members also discussed the benefits of their PMI membership and the in-person staff visits. “We had a productive exchange of ideas and explored opportunities for collaboration in areas such as professional development, research and advocacy. We were impressed by the knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm of the PMI team and look forward to working closely with them in the near future,” Seckiner said.

One of the members highlighted the value PMI delivers through its resources and educa-

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l-r: Akgun Seckiner, BOCCHI president and CEO; Dawn Robinson, BOCCHI director of marketing and communications; Kerry Stackpole; Leslie Smith; and Jodi Stuhrberg



l-r: David Scarborough, Dornbracht director of technical services; Carrie Messmore, Dornbracht director of operations; Kerry Stackpole; Leslie Smith; and Jodi Stuhrberg



l-r: From Duravit: Tanaka Mark, senior product manager; Galen Stump, VP technical sales; Bryan Huie, product manager; Bob Downie, president. From PMI: Kerry Stackpole; Leslie Smith; and Jodi Stuhrberg

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tional offerings, such as guidance on complying with extended producer responsibility and packaging laws, Stackpole noted.

Smith described her time with PMI members as “eye-opening,” saying she learned more than she could have imagined. “The one-on-one time was invaluable. Our members opened up and provided lots of ideas for future webinars and courses,” she said. Workforce issues were top of mind – especially recruiting more installers, plumbers and women into the plumbing industry, she added.

A new staff member, Smith said she’s trying to absorb and learn everything she can about PMI member companies. “I was impressed by our members’ high level of innovation, as well as the volume and variety of fixtures and fittings they all produce,” she stated. For example, Smith noted the Duravit team’s presentation on the new antibacterial glazes and flushing technologies the company has developed.

The PMI team road trip visiting members and sharing strategies heads to Denver in July. All PMI members are encouraged to reach out to Jodi Stuhrberg to schedule a visit.

“Our members know that PMI staff are always interested in staying in touch – whether through calls, Zoom meetings, emails, or face-to-face visits. We’re continually looking for new ways to support them and add value to their PMI membership,” Stackpole said.



l-r: Leslie Smith; Jodi Stuhrberg; Robert Kaminski, Hansgrohe president; and Kerry Stackpole

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updated on the latest advancements, attending conferences, collaborating with research institutions, and encouraging employees to engage in ongoing professional development.

The fascinating thing about generative AI systems is they interact directly with users. It is essential for you to monitor the user experience closely and gather

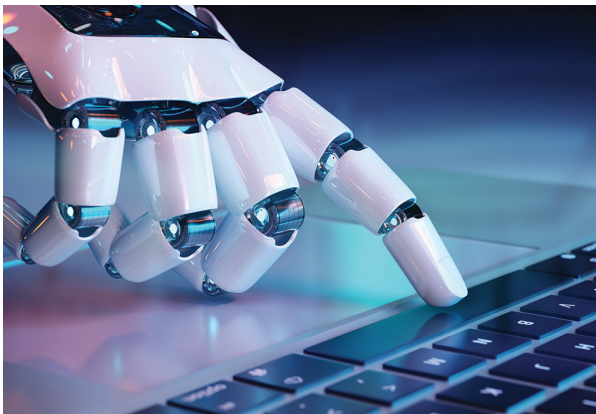
feedback to improve the system’s performance and address any issues. Regular user testing, surveys and sentiment analysis can provide valuable insights for enhancing the AI-generated outputs.

Finally, as a company leader, you must navigate the regulatory and legal landscape associated with generative AI. Be aware of relevant laws, regulations and guidelines related to privacy, data protection, intellectual property rights, and fair competition. Complying with these regulations will ensure that your company avoids legal pitfalls and maintains a trustworthy relationship with your teams, customers and stakeholders.

Generative AI is already here and there’s more

to come. Planning for its integration requires a comprehensive understanding of the technology, thoughtful consideration of ethical implications, and a strategic approach to implementation. By carefully addressing these aspects, you can harness the power of generative AI to drive innovation, enhance customer experiences, and gain a competitive edge in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

A special note: Not sure where to start? **Reid Hoffman**, co-founder of LinkedIn, investor at Greylock Partners, and former board member at OpenAI has shared his experiences interacting with advanced AI in a new book, “Impromptu: Amplifying Our Humanity Through AI.” The book was written with ChatGPT-4, the newer, more powerful version of ChatGPT. A complimentary PDF version of the book is available at tinyurl.com/vfxb4uqm.



California Lawmakers Express Support for Rethink Water

By Judy Wohlt, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

Recent visits with California legislators allowed a Plumbing Manufacturers International team to shed light on low market penetration of water-efficient toilets in the state. Lawmakers expressed support for PMI's legacy product replacement initiative, providing optimism to PMI members that proposed legislation may fund the installation of water-efficient plumbing products – a key goal of PMI's Rethink Water initiative.

Topping the PMI team's agenda at the California Legislative Forum and Fly-in in May was addressing the California Energy Commission's request for information relating to the Title 20 requirements for toilets on Docket 22-AAER-05. The team particularly addressed the risks of flow rates below WaterSense standards.

The PMI team's agenda included meetings at the offices of the CEC, state senators **Richard Roth** and **Susan Rubio**, and state assembly members **Steve Bennett**, **Laura Friedman** and **Jim Patterson**. The PMI team also connected with **Buffy Wicks**, assembly member and author of AB 1072, which would provide state budget funding for low-income residential customers to install water-efficient conservation devices, such as WaterSense toilets.

"The forum provided a unique and excellent opportunity to engage in dialogue with lawmakers on the top priorities and challenges for PMI, including sharing key elements of PMI's Rethink Water initiative," said first-time forum attendee **Bob Neff**, a member of the PMI Board of Directors and product compliance and regulatory manager at Delta Faucet Co.

Joining Neff on the visits were PMI members **Fernando Fernandez**, senior director of codes and standards, TOTO USA; **Lesley Garland**, vice president of state and local relations, International Code Council; **Lowell Lampen**, a PMI



l-r: PMI California Legislative Forum attendees Bob Neff, Delta Faucet Co.; Fernando Fernandez, TOTO USA; Lowell Lampen, Kohler Co.; Kyle Thompson, PMI; Jerry Desmond, PMI; Joe Wolff, Zurn Elkay; Cambria McLeod, IAPMO; and Kerry Stackpole, PMI

board member and strategic technology partnership manager with Kohler Co.; **Cambria McLeod**, IAPMO vice president of industry relations and business development; and **Joe Wolff**, manager of product compliance, Zurn Elkay Water Solutions.

More research needed on unintended consequences

During their meetings, the PMI group strongly recommended that legislators and the CEC consider improved water efficiency, through legacy product replacement, as an important aspect of an overall strategy to save water.

"The need for improved water efficiency in California is a multi-faceted and complex problem. Ours is a forward-thinking approach supported by PMI members. We're making good progress and our industry continues to demonstrate that they want to innovate," said PMI CEO/Executive Director **Kerry Stackpole**, who met with legislators during the forum.

PMI stressed the potential risks to infrastructure and public health associated with lowering toilet flush rates below WaterSense specifications. Adequate water is required to flush solids out of a toilet bowl, into a drainline, and

through to a sewer line. Lower flush rates would likely cause more toilet clogs and double flushing as well, according to PMI's letter to the CEC in March. The current WaterSense specification of 1.28 gpf delivers an ideal balance between water savings and sufficient flushing, washdown and drainline carry, according to PMI.

Other stakeholders, including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA), shared comments that align with PMI's position on legacy product replacement.

PMI and IEUA have noted to the CEC that California's current infrastructure of drains and sewers is designed for much higher flow rates than what are currently in use.

In recent comments to the CEC on Docket 22-AAER-05, the IEUA expressed concerns about "compounding impacts" that additional lower flows may have on wastewater systems – particularly on water reuse. "As per capita indoor water use continues to decline, we believe it is important to recognize the level to which wastewater systems and recycled water production is negatively impacted and for the CEC's

analysis to be in sync with that of the State Board,” the IEUA stated.

The IEUA recommended that the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) be included on the CEC’s study team to advise on any updated analysis to better understand how continued water-use efficiency will impact municipal wastewater systems.

The CEC responded to the IEUA’s comments by saying, “The CEC looks forward to working with IEUA and CASA on water closets to help establish standards that are feasible and reduce total costs to consumers over the designed life of the appliance.”

Considering past market penetration challenges

“We provided the eye opener on low market penetration for efficient water closets. The CEC and lawmakers acknowledged that there is a problem, and they are showing a willingness to address it,” said **Jerry Desmond**, PMI’s California government consultant, who helped put together the forum.

The PMI team helped the CEC and legislators realize how challenged the state has been in getting residents to comply with current toilet-replacement laws. Two laws – SB 407 (Chapter 587 statutes of 2009) and SB 837 (Chapter 61 statutes of 2011) – have called for residents and businesses to replace old plumbing fixtures, including toilets, with more efficient models.

PMI Virtual Washington Legislative Forum

July 25, 1-2:30 p.m. CT

Learn more and register at tinyurl.com/8aspbm52



PMI shared findings from its 2022 GMP-commissioned research study showing that targets for Title 20 compliant fixtures and fittings have not been reached, noting that only 23% of installed water closets in California are EPA WaterSense and Title 20 compliant with 1.28 gallons per flush (gpf). In addition, the research showed that 70.9% of installed water closets are 1.6 gpf and 6.1% of installed water closets are 3.5+ gpf.

PMI recommends ensuring a complete transition to products compliant with existing law before the state implements more restrictive regulations. PMI recommends the replacement of up to 26.1 million toilets in California that use more than 1.28 gpf. Lawmakers have been expressing their support for PMI’s efforts and an interest to learn more, Desmond said.

Desmond noted that he and PMI’s Technical Director **Kyle Thompson** also met by Zoom with representatives from the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association to further explore how the association is pursuing water conservation through legislation. “They found that more efficient plumbing fixtures, such as toilets, aren’t penetrating the home market. We are helping them document the need and opportunity specifically with the GMP research that PMI has shared,” Desmond said.

Visits with legislators allowed PMI members to highlight how plumbing manufacturers have innovated to improve plumbing fixtures. For example, Lampen explained to one legislator

how manufacturers have used advanced computer-aided engineering tools in the product development process to not only meet California’s water-efficient toilet standards over the years, but also improve product performance.

New rental cost issue brought to light

A couple of legislators involved with housing planning in California brought up a new potential rent control issue.

Housing and apartment rental prices have been rising and the legislators are concerned that landlords could increase rents to cover the cost of legacy product replacements, including toilets, in their buildings, Stackpole explained.

One approach to manage the issue could include a requirement that landlords promise not to raise rents for a specified period – if they take advantage of a state-funded direct toilet installation program, he noted.

Next steps on funding and CEC’s proposal

AB 1072, Wicks’ proposed funding bill for water-efficient plumbing devices in disadvantaged communities, was referred to the California State Assembly Committee on Appropriations, which held the bill in committee on May 18 for potential consideration in 2024.

In the meantime, Desmond said that the CEC is expected to release its proposal on whether to lower flow rates sometime in June.

PMI and its members are hopeful for a positive outcome. “It is important to be engaged with state legislators and the CEC so we can advocate for meaningful water policy that PMI and its members help shape,” Fernandez said. “I am confident we will find an agreeable path forward.”

Tighter PFAS Rules Already Impacting Plumbing Manufacturers

By Judy Wohlt, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

States including Maine, California and New York have already passed strict laws relating to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Meanwhile, proposed federal PFAS rules will likely cause additional liability risks for plumbing manufacturers, according to a webinar presentation provided to Plumbing Manufacturers International members.

Kate Thoreson, senior associate with WilmerHale, shared an update on regulations restricting PFAS in several states and on a proposed federal standard regulating PFAS chemicals in drinking water during the April 27 webinar.

PFAS, a family of chemicals also commonly referred to as “forever chemicals,” can be found in some building and plumbing materials such as sealants, caulking, plastic coatings, and O-rings, Thoreson explained. They also can be found in some refrigerants in water coolers and water stations. PFAS have been linked to potential health issues such as cancer and high cholesterol, she added.

EPA seeks greater transparency and accountability from polluters

The Environmental Protection Agency recently proposed rule-tightening measures to increase transparency around PFAS and better hold polluters accountable for cleaning up any contamination, Thoreson said.

On April 13, the EPA published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking, seeking comments by June 12 on whether to designate additional PFOS – PFBS, PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA, PFBA, PFHxA and PFDA – as hazardous substances. Thoreson encouraged plumbing manufacturers who use those substances in their products or in the manufacturing process to consider submitting comments.

On March 14, the EPA released the proposed National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for PFOA and



PFOS – with four additional PFAS to be reviewed for potential regulation. The regulation would limit any mixture containing one or more of the following four additional PFAS: PFNA, PFHxS, PFBS and HFPO-DA (GenX).

Water systems would use a hazard index calculation – an established approach defined in the proposed rule – to determine if the combined levels of these PFAS pose a potential risk, according to a March EPA news release. The public comment period ended on May 30 and the EPA intends to finalize the regulation by the end of 2023, Thoreson said.

PFOA and PFOS would be handled separately as individual contaminants, with proposed maximum contaminant levels of four parts per trillion and maximum contaminant level goals of zero, which are strict standards, she noted.

Thoreson shared updates on the EPA’s efforts to clean up polluted sites across the country and how manufacturers could be affected. Under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA, also known as Superfund), the EPA investigates and cleans up the most highly contaminated sites in the United States. There are 40,000 Superfund sites across the U.S., with 1,336 sites appearing on the EPA’s National Priorities List, Thoreson reported.

In August 2022, the EPA issued a proposal to designate two of the most widely used PFAS, PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under CERCLA. If finalized as proposed, the EPA rule may extend liability to businesses and others responsible for PFAS chemical release, including manufacturers, import-

ers, waste management and wastewater treatment facilities, and owners of PFAS-contaminated properties, Thoreson explained.

As part of the CERCLA process, the EPA identifies and enforces actions against potentially responsible parties (PRP) for any chemical releases that contribute to a Superfund site. For example, if the EPA designates a manufacturer as a PRP, that manufacturer would be liable for cleaning up the site or paying for the EPA’s cleanup efforts, which could be costly.

Businesses could face additional costs from government and private litigation. Manufacturers and importers of PFOA and PFOS and businesses that use or manufacture products containing those chemicals could face legal claims under statutes such as the Clean Water Act and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

States propose various PFAS standards

Currently, about 24 states have adopted over 100 standards and guidelines for multiple PFAS compounds at varying levels, Thoreson shared. She discussed established and proposed PFAS regulations in Maine, California, Colorado and New York, where rules tend to be stricter than in other states.

Maine has taken some of the most aggressive steps, Thoreson said. For example, Maine’s law requires manufacturers of products that contain intentionally added PFAS to notify the Maine Department of Environmental Protection of such products and uses.

PMI members can view Thoreson’s presentation and materials here (safep plumbing.org/members/webinars-videos).

This article is not intended as legal advice. Companies should seek legal counsel specific to their needs and situation.

NIST Hosts PILC Meeting, Expresses Support for Research

By Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

Twenty-four individuals representing 15 organizations that are members of the Plumbing Industry Leadership Council (PILC) attended the group's recent meeting at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) campus in Gaithersburg, Maryland. PMI CEO/Executive Director **Kerry Stackpole** termed the agenda for the meeting as “ambitious” and “wide-ranging,” covering the many issues facing the plumbing industry today.

He added that the meeting was “incredibly helpful” because of the ideas the participants exchanged on issues including talent recruitment, water and sanitation service improvement in disadvantaged communities, the post-COVID workplace, water infrastructure, water reuse, standards harmonization, extended producer responsibility, and more. In addition to Stackpole, **Chip Way**, PMI Board of Directors vice president from Lavelle Industries, represented PMI.

The PILC members were welcomed by **Laurie Locascio**, NIST director, who expressed support for premise plumbing research on behalf of her organization. Also in attendance from NIST were four researchers – **Natascha Milesi-Ferretti**; **Bill Healy**, Ph.D.; PMI conference and webinar presenter **Andrew Persily**, Ph.D.; and **David Yashar**, Ph.D.

The NIST team gave participants a tour of the institute's premise plumb-



l-r: PILC meeting attendees Christopher Lindsay, IAPMO; David Parney, Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute; Kerry Stackpole, PMI; Chip Way, Lavelle Industries and PMI board vice president; Dain Hansen, IAPMO; Dan Asheden, BNP Group Publisher; Cindy Sheridan, PHCC-N. America; Jeff Church, Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association; Nicole Krawcke, BNP Media; and Teresa Pezzi, Mechanical Contractors Association

ing research lab. NIST researchers have studied water efficiency in high-performance buildings; energy consumption and thermal losses in hot water systems, including premise plumbing; the impact of water-use pattern, temperature, and water quality parameters on the occurrence of opportunistic premise plumbing pathogens; the behavior of disinfection by-products in simulated residential hot water systems; and the measurement of pressure-flow characteristics of water in plumbing pipes and fittings.

Government affairs representatives **Chris Lindsay** (IAPMO), **Gabe Maser** (International Code Council) and **Stephanie Salmon** (PMI) updated participants about proposed legislation and regulations working their way through the federal government. “The benefit of having the three of them in the room at the same time and talking about issues is that you get three different perspectives. They're all on the same page but they have slightly different angles,” Stackpole said.

Extended discussions occurred on how to attract individuals into the plumbing industry and skilled trades, he said. These talks covered what Stackpole termed as IDEA – inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility, as well as

association programs specifically for women, emerging leaders, and students and workers interested in a career in the skilled trades. The post-COVID reality was another topic of great interest, with companies working to achieve a balance between onsite and remote working arrangements. “What's that going to mean for commercial real estate? What's that going to mean for our industry?,” Stackpole asked. “A lot of our colleagues around the table still have brick and mortar headquarters and some of them are quite large.”

The full list of PILC organizations attending the meeting: Alliance for Water Efficiency, American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association, American Society of Plumbing Engineers, Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute, Copper Development Association, IAPMO, International Code Council, Mechanical Contractors Association of America, National Institute of Building Sciences, NSF, Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association, Plumbing, Heating, Cooling Contractors (PHCC) – North America, PMI, United Association, and Water Quality Association. Individuals from BNP Media – publisher of Plumbing & Mechanical, Plumbing & Mechanical Engineer and Supply House Times – also attended.



Chip Way, Lavelle Industries

Set Your Sights on PMI23 in Seattle

By Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

Nominate a co-worker for complimentary registration as recipient of Paul Patton award



With registration for the Oct. 23-26 PMI23 Manufacturing Success Conference in Seattle opening this summer, start thinking about which of your co-workers you will nominate for the first annual Paul Patton PMI Manufacturing Success Conference Award.

The award will recognize an employee of a PMI member company who shows outstanding potential for a career in plumbing manufacturing. The award recipient will receive complimentary registration to PMI23, including the PMI Inspiring Leaders Program on Oct. 23 and the PMI Meeting of the Membership.

Any employee who is nominated by a fellow employee is eligible for the award. Nominees must possess outstanding characteristics relating to leadership, community service, teamwork, or other personal qualities.

The award's namesake Paul Patton was a former president of the PMI Board of Directors. He was passionate about developing the talents of young people, having served as a mentor for interns at Delta Faucet Co. and as an advisor for students at Butler University.

Nominate a co-worker today (tinyurl.com/6zu65fj4)! The winner will be recognized at the PMI Meeting of the Membership.

Arrive a little early, attend PMI Inspiring Leaders Program

The PMI Inspiring Leaders Program is a special event taking place on the first day of the PMI23 Manufacturing Success Conference. Open to all employees of PMI member companies, this program will take place at Seattle's Museum of Flight, an exciting backdrop for a program designed to cultivate the creative skills we all have to become better leaders, innovators and teammates.



To be facilitated by **Nicole Bianchi**, this year's program, "Leading with Clarity and Tough Conversations," explores being intentional as leaders and clear on leadership philosophy, setting expectations, building relationships, and having conversations that matter. The author of "The Five Tough Talks: How to Lead Brave Conversations for



Nicole Bianchi

Exceptional Results," which will be released in August 2023, Bianchi will discuss how to build working relationships of accountability and engagement, thereby increasing productivity and results.

Having worked with organizations worldwide, Bianchi's workshops have gained rave reviews. "Nicole's energy was tremendous, her presence was engaging, and the content was very relevant. Through her stories, I felt her vulnerability and passion. She truly inspired everyone to figure out their next small brave move and to go make it!"

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