

Spotlight—Women in Industry



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Spotlight — Women in Industry is a monthly article highlighting emerging and seasoned female Optica Corporate Members in which we ask both professional and personal questions. This month features Jessica DeGroot Nelson, Director of Technology and Strategy, Optimax Systems, Inc. If you would like to be featured in this section, please email industry@optica.org for more information.

- **What currently excites you most about working in the optics and photonics industry?**

I love how quickly the industry is evolving! Innovation cycles are accelerating and we are seeing really cool research moving from the lab to commercialization at amazing speeds. Optics and photonics is enabling innovations in every technological field from biomedical applications, defense, communication to space. From an optics manufacturing perspective, take freeform optics for example. Just a few years ago designers were asking "I see the advantages of using freeforms for off-axis systems, but can you actually make them?" to now freeforms are being designed into systems and delivered every week enabling more compact and off-axis optical designs. It is really exciting to be a part of the continuous evolution.

- **What career advice would you give to your younger self?**

It is ok to reinvent yourself. I recently overheard someone tell a group of students "don't be afraid to reinvent yourself every 5 years." I think this is excellent advice as life should be all about following your passions and your dreams, and it is ok if those dreams change over time!

- **What is a hobby or passion of yours?**

I love optics, and especially optical materials, fabrication and testing technologies. I enjoy seeing how advances in these fields can help enable new science. However, optics is only one of my passions. My family is my true passion, I have a wonderful husband and soon to be 5-year old daughter. We love crafting, golfing, playing dress up and of course doing science experiments together!