



INFORM, INSPIRE, AND MOTIVATE *with* **HOLLY HENDERSON**

REGULATORY AFFAIRS MANAGER, GULF POWER

What inspired you to join the energy industry?

My motivation, my drive, my inspiration to work in the energy industry – it all ties back to my desire to work in an industry that impacts peoples’ lives in a positive way, in a way that makes life better on an everyday basis. The same desire to participate in work that is truly meaningful and impactful led me to telecommunications and, from telecommunications, to electricity. This year’s hurricane season and the resulting days of electrical outages have been an acute reminder of this reality. Days of outages in Florida were serious and caused disruptions and complications, but, to appreciate the long-term consequences of having little-to-no electricity, think of how water, communications, transportation, health care, education, and public safety are all affected in Puerto Rico and how the people there are truly struggling. Electricity matters to everything we do in modern life. It is essential.

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Can you tell us about your current role?

I view my role as serving as a bridge between my company, our customers, and our regulators. I help people communicate with each other, share information and perspectives, and work together on outcomes. At the end of the day, a good outcome is one that is efficient and effective for our customers, productive for our company, and fruitful for the regulators involved. It’s a balanced outcome.

Please describe to us your journey in arriving where you are now. What has been your motivation?

Several years ago, a colleague paid me a compliment by saying that I was “calm on the surface,” but he knew that I was “paddling like crazy underneath.” For me, the duck analogy captures how I approach work and life in general. People want to associate with people who work hard but who project a sense of composed confidence and capability. The duck analogy also illustrates the resiliency that women leaders like myself need to cultivate in order to succeed. We have to avoid letting slights, petty criticisms, nay-sayers, and doubters divert us from achieving goals. Let it all roll off your back and keep paddling! Finally, recognize that people are often looking for someone to chart the path. There are leadership opportunities in energy, both formal and informal, that women can fill. Sometimes, it involves “raising your hand” for the role; other times, it’s merely stepping into a leadership void, providing the impetus, inspiration, or direction that’s missing but sorely needed. Either way, a woman shouldn’t hesitate to assert herself as a leader, and, when she does, often she may be surprised by how readily others will follow.

What motivates you on a daily basis?

There are many things that motivate me in my work. Beyond the ability to impact daily life in a positive way discussed earlier, I work for a great company with a tremendous group of people who are all dedicated to delivering safe, clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to our customers and to supporting the communities that we serve. For me personally, if I didn't believe in the company that I work for and its goals, and if I couldn't trust the commitment of the people that I work with, doing my job and doing it well would be incredibly challenging. Not all organizations are built this way, and I count myself fortunate in this respect, and it is very motivational.

What is a special area of opportunity that you see in energy?

Opportunity in energy can be viewed two ways. The first is looking within our industry and the roles filled by women. We are underrepresented in many technical aspects of our industry, particularly in areas that require training and education in STEM areas. What women – and men, too – may not realize is the breadth of roles in an electric utility that require a STEM background. It's not just electrical engineering. I see opportunity for women to continue to press ahead in all aspects of our business and, for those of us who are already here, to encourage and support the young women who will follow us. Looking externally, I think the electric industry in particular is facing a significant opportunity to shift our thinking of our overall business and grow beyond electric utilities that merely make, move and sell electricity. As technologies emerge and evolve, as interactions between businesses and customers shift, and as societal expectations change, the wants and needs of electric utility customers will change. I can't speak for utilities in other parts of the country outside of the Southeast. But here, I believe we are viewed as a trusted partner by our customers, someone who can give sound advice and good recommendations, someone with whom the relationship can change and evolve into the future.

What advice would you give to other women who aspire to join the energy industry?

As I think about women who are coming into the workforce today and may be considering the energy industry, I think a lot about my own daughter. She is seven years old, and one of my goals in raising her is to encourage her in STEM areas. More importantly, whatever her interests, I want to raise her to be ambitious and fearless in where she goes in life, reaching for things she wants to do and explore. I want her to develop the self-confidence and belief in her capabilities that will sustain her, even if those around her don't believe her to be capable, doubt her ability, and aren't encouraging. While women have made progress within the energy industry in terms of our roles, our leadership opportunities, and our overall participation, we still have a ways to go. So, my advice is to not shy away from what you really want to do if it involves working in the energy industry. Be fearless. In the near term, don't be too surprised to often be one of very few women – perhaps the only woman – in the room. Develop a supportive network of people to sustain you, but, more crucially, cultivate the confidence to sustain yourself. And, be supportive of other women and bring them along with you.

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Describe the energy industry using one word.

OPPORTUNITY!

The annual Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum (FWELF) aims to promote opportunities in the energy industry by recognizing the success that women leaders in the energy industry have demonstrated in growing Florida's economy and diversifying an already tremendous workforce.