



## **Catherine Stempien**

State President

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**How do you leverage your legal and financial backgrounds in the energy industry and current role as state president of Duke Energy Florida?**

In a highly regulated industry like energy, it is critical to understand the legal and financial regulatory framework governing us. Many of the requirements to which we are subject are not intuitive to a typical business, but rather require an understanding and appreciation of the ratemaking process as well as sometimes arcane laws that served their purpose but now do not align with 21st-century realities (PURPA, anyone?). My career path laid a strong foundation in these areas, preparing me well for this aspect of leading a utility like Duke Energy Florida – but it is only a foundation. Positioning our business to meet the evolving needs and wants of customers and communities and providing the leadership that inspires the talents and engagement of employees are the aspects of my job that keep me energized, focused and challenged.

**As a proponent of workforce diversity, where do you believe the energy industry should focus its efforts in order to recruit more diverse talent?**

At the core of our business is serving our customers, so understanding what they expect of us, what services they value and where we might need to improve is an important focus. One way to maintain a sense of the customer is to have a workforce that is representative of the diversity of our customers – gender, race, culture, economic background, etc. are all important aspects of that diversity. Since one of the best ways to mirror your community is to hire locally, Duke Energy spends time and resources investing in our communities and developing partnerships with many Florida universities, colleges and community colleges that offer the curricula to build today's and tomorrow's workforce.

The energy industry is evolving and it's an exciting time to be part of it. Those with diverse education, training and skills – from engineering, legal and accounting to biology, sustainability and cybersecurity – should consider a career in energy. We have a really great story to tell about how technology is changing our industry – and marketing those career opportunities is a great way to attract talent. As we continue to build a more diverse workforce, we need to make sure we keep those employees by providing what they need at various stages of their career – whether that's continuing education, paid family leave or other training to provide opportunities to develop into other areas of the business.

## How do you succeed in balancing constantly evolving technology and customer expectations with slow-paced policy change?

I view our job as being careful stewards of our customers' money. They entrust us to make difficult decisions that will stand the test of time. And, let me tell you, it is hard to predict the future! Duke Energy Florida established its roots in energy almost 120 years ago, and we remain focused on the future. We need to push ourselves to try new things and learn new technology, but we also can't chase every shiny object. Pilots are a good way to test new technologies. The evolution of solar energy in Florida is a good example. In 1988, Duke Energy Florida began working with solar technology – a universal solar array near the Econlockhatchee Trail. We learned along the way and are thrilled to be bringing a 74.9-MW solar facility in Hamilton County in just a few weeks. That investment may not have been appropriate in 1988, as the technology was still evolving and the costs unmanageable, but now it makes sense in every way.

*“We need to push ourselves to try new things and learn new technology.”*

## The theme for this year's Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum is “Champions in Energy.” What is one piece of advice that you have for women wanting to enter the field or rise in the ranks of leadership?

Push yourself beyond your comfort zone – be realistic about the challenges that you may face, but be overly optimistic about your own ability to overcome those challenges.

## What excites you about the future of energy?

So much is changing – we are on the cusp of making significant advances in the way power is produced, delivered and consumed. We're delivering on a multiyear plan to build a stronger, smarter, more resilient energy grid. It's about getting better at preparing and responding to whatever each day brings, especially during storm season. This goes well beyond the status quo of performing regular maintenance on the electric system, managing vegetation and responding to outages.

Through targeted undergrounding, installation of self-healing grids and replacement of aging equipment, we're creating electric infrastructure that is more resistant to storm damage and other physical and cyber threats. This provides direct value to customers because it means we can avoid many outages and shorten the duration of those that do occur. In 2018 alone, the self-healing functionality installed to date saved over 13 million customer outage minutes, which is significant.

We're making these strategic investments based on data identifying historically poor-performing circuits. We know these investments will strengthen thousands of miles of power lines across central Florida, providing the reliability our customers want and deserve. We're also preparing for the future of energy by meeting customer demands for greater insight into their energy usage each day and every season. We're doing this through technology. In the coming years, you'll see new smart meters that will enable customers to better control their energy use, along with hundreds of electric vehicle charging stations throughout our service areas to provide fast, reliable battery charging.

Customers have also let us know that they want renewable energy choices, and we're dedicated to providing solar energy in an affordable, reliable and sustainable way. Through 2022, Duke Energy Florida plans to invest an estimated \$1 billion to construct or acquire 700 megawatts of cost-effective solar power plants – in addition to the solar power plants we already have. This accelerates our previous 10-year solar installation plan by maximizing the renewable energy offered right here in our own Sunshine State. In short, I find all this exciting, because it comes down to having a positive impact by providing cleaner, more reliable power which in turn, enables people and communities to thrive.

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