



## **Jeff Householder**

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**You have seen significant changes in the energy industry over your career. What challenges do you anticipate for the industry over the next decade?**

Well, first thanks for reminding me how old I am. I started working, out of college, on energy policy issues in Florida when Jimmy Carter was President. It was a time of great change: a few years out from the first Energy Crisis with major concerns over oil and gas reserves, utility demand side management programs, Energy Codes, old gas/new gas commodity price controls and the restructuring of the natural gas pipeline business to enable open access. These were exciting times. I never thought I would see another energy industry transformation of that scope in my career, but here we are. Shale gas has revolutionized the gas industry, is driving a transformation of electric generation and has had a dramatic impact on oil and coal. Who could have predicted we would go from the gas lines and pipeline curtailments in the 1970's to the U.S. being on the verge of becoming a net energy exporter today.

Energy is the backbone of our economy. The job of providing that energy will always be challenging. Over the next decade we will see an ever escalating focus on safety and reliable service. As we replace and upgrade our gas and electric systems, and move toward smart technologies, the impact on customer rates will be a challenge. Meeting customer expectations for service, reliability, product offerings and access to data in an increasing cost environment will require rethinking many of our traditional practices. The Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) oversight initiatives of many energy industry investors and other stakeholders is already shaping operational decision-making and investment strategies, for both investor-owned and municipal energy companies. Communicating a clear message of our industry's overwhelmingly positive impact on the country's economy and security to investors, customers, regulators and the communities we serve will become one of our most challenging tasks. Finally, our ability to attract and retain the best and brightest workforce is an issue that I spend time on every day.

**Throughout your career you have been a champion for women, including being a strong supporter of the Florida Women in Energy Leadership Forum. What has influenced your support?**

My grandmother and mother were strong women actively engaged in the workplace and running small businesses. My wife is an avid proponent of gender equality in support of women in business and government. We have two daughters and a granddaughter. Our hope was always that our daughters would be able to get an education and work or raise a family or both, with an equal chance to succeed without regard to their gender. We wanted them to believe

that anything was possible with enough determination and hard work. In my career, especially as a manager, I have simply tried to apply the principle that capability and competence count for far more than gender (or for that matter race, age or any other group classification). I know that as a nation we have a long way to go to achieve true gender equality. It is certainly not always done right. So it's important that organizations such as the Women in Energy Leadership Forum keep the spotlight on gender equality issues and provide networks for mentoring and supporting women in our industry. I am keenly interested in the organization's success and in ensuring that the women employees in my company have the opportunity to participate.

### **Do you believe it is important to embrace diversity of thought in business?**

It's not just important, it is critical. I tell people all the time that our business runs on ideas. If we run out of ideas, we will fail to meet ever evolving stakeholder expectations and stop growing. Nothing good comes after that happens. At Chesapeake, we are working pretty hard to ensure an inclusive, no risk environment where all ideas and opinions are welcome. Having people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives at the table, and encouraging disparate views, helps drive innovative thinking and minimizes the risk of tunnel vision. This is especially true at leadership levels throughout an organization. I hold the view that an organization's employees should be generally representative of the customers and communities they serve. I think those organizations have a greater likelihood of success because they have a greater likelihood of understanding and delivering products or services valued by their customers. The energy utility industry serves very diverse communities. It's just good business to ensure that our employees and the employee ideas that propel our companies reflect the diverse populations we serve. The last time I checked women were half of those populations.

### **What steps should companies take in support of gender diversity and to empower women to rise in the ranks of leadership in the energy industry?**

I think the first step is for a company's current leadership to recognize that there is a real issue that requires real effort to address. Virtually all companies talk about their commitment to diversity; but, nothing really happens until the leadership team makes diversity a priority, communicates their intentions across the organization and acts accordingly. Most everyone is "for" diversity. Committing to a real change in hiring and promotional practices requires action. Second, in my experience the things that get counted and reported are the things that generate action. We need to understand how many women are getting hired and promoted, especially at the entry and middle manager levels. A recent McKinsey and Company report talks about the "hollow middle" in female employee diversity. There are disproportionately fewer women hired into entry level professional jobs and they are less likely to be promoted as first-line managers. It's difficult to develop internal female candidates for higher level leadership if you have a significant gender gap at the middle manager level. Third, a company's culture has to be respectful, inclusive and safe. That seems obvious, but too often we assume things are fine when they are not. Finally, if you are leading an organization, you personally have to find ways to intervene in traditional practices and ensure that women are hired and developed as leaders. The energy industry has been a male dominated business for decades. It's up to us to break a few norms, promote employee diversity and ensure that our industry is well equipped for the next transformational period that is sure to come. My granddaughter is going to need a job some day and I would be proud if she joined this special group.

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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.