



## CHAMPION IN ENERGY

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### Marlene Santos

President

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**You have recently stepped into your role as President of Gulf Power, with over 20 years of experience in the industry, including with NextEra. What advice can you give to an individual considering an occupation in the energy industry? What most influenced and encouraged your career?**

Don't compromise, get cross-functional experience and dream big. When interviewing for my first job, I fell in love with Florida Power & Light. My dream as a 21-year-old was to be an energy executive. After studying finance, I wanted to be in a capital-intensive industry. Even though I was not offered the position, I did not compromise by accepting other job offers. I continued with my education, getting an MBA in the hopes that this would make me a more valuable candidate. A few months into my MBA, I received a call from FPL and was hired.

The energy industry has many different aspects – engineering, construction, technology, customer service, finance, regulatory and more. Getting experience in various areas of the industry broadens an employee's perspective and ultimately makes them more valuable. So, take the risk and make lateral moves. I spent 10 years progressing in finance and then went to the customer service side of the business – managing key accounts, call centers and revenue before I became a vice president. After being offered the position of VP, I continued to take on several special projects. Some of the most recent special projects included serving as chief integration officer for the proposed mergers with Hawaiian Electric, Oncor, and culminated with the honor of being asked to serve as president of Gulf Power after the acquisition earlier this year. Having broad experience in the energy industry is a key to success.

Throughout my career, I was trained and mentored by people with very high standards. I didn't give up my dream though it required hard work, late nights and lots of sacrifices. Success requires sacrifices. My mentors stretched me, developed me and gave me tough assignments. I am grateful that they believed in me, and, ultimately, helped me reach my dream of being an energy executive.

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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.

**Gulf Power and NextEra Energy offer apprenticeships and internships for individuals aspiring to enter the energy field, how important are these programs in encouraging careers in the industry and what can participants learn from these opportunities?**

Internships are an ideal way for individuals to “test drive” a company, its culture, the industry and the day-to-day activities of a job. They have also become table stakes, as this has become the way many employers hire their entry-level talent. I think it is essential for students to get an internship their junior year of college so that they can experience at least two internships before they finalize their career decision.

**Gulf Power provides energy for approximately 463,000 customers over 7,550 square miles across eight counties, what is the biggest challenge managing such a vast service area?**

One of our key focus areas that is also one of our biggest challenges is ensuring we’re providing the most resilient and reliable service we can to all of our customers. With almost 8,000 miles of distribution lines and more than 1,600 miles of transmission lines, our team has embarked on an aggressive strategy that calls for making major investments in our grid – replacing all wooden transmission structures with steel or concrete, installing flood monitoring at our substations and smart technologies throughout our energy system. These investments will improve our reliability by 20% by 2021. We are excited to bring this service improvement to our customers.

**Gulf Power has been recognized and awarded for providing excellent customer care, especially in the wake of a natural disaster. What procedures do you and your workforce implement that have given you this distinction?**

Our service area has seen everything from hurricanes and severe lightning events to ice storms and tornadoes, and our team is well-practiced and prepared for any weather-related event. Just last year, Northwest Florida was devastated by Hurricane Michael when it made landfall in Bay County as a Category 5 hurricane, with winds in excess of 160 mph. This was an unprecedented storm and our team provided an unprecedented response.

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What we have learned through these experiences, whether we have a major natural disaster knocking out power to thousands or a blue sky outage, is that communicating well to our customers is just as important as restoring power. Our customers need to be able to plan their day and take care of their families or businesses. In the case of a major natural disaster, the stakes are even higher to make sure that our customers are getting the critical, and in some cases, life-saving information they need. During Hurricane Michael, cell phone service was lost for many customers in some of the hardest hit areas, which created a huge communications challenge. Our team went to work to print thousands of flyers daily that included the latest power restoration times and safety tips for our customers. These flyers were hand delivered to central locations in the hardest-hit communities including shelters and emergency operations centers. Our goal was and will continue to be to provide the information our customers need, when and where they need it.

**Gulf Power was recently acquired by NextEra Energy, how has the Gulf Power team navigated this transition and how does this change benefit the Gulf Power customer?**

It has been a big year for Gulf Power, and I am very proud of how our team has risen to the challenge. What has impressed me the most is that the team has been able to successfully continue to “run the business” while “transforming the business.” We are not only meeting and surpassing our goals for the year, but are simultaneously working aggressively to help implement several transformational projects that will benefit Gulf Power customers – planning and constructing new solar facilities, modernizing our power plants, building a new transmission line, even implementing an entirely new customer service system that will make doing business with Gulf Power even easier.

In order for this to happen successfully, we’re maintaining a strong focus on our employees, including implementing change management programs across the company and continuing to work on cultural integration with our new NextEra Energy family. I think what keeps us all motivated is the knowledge that the work we’re doing now will ultimately benefit our customers greatly in the long term by lowering bills, providing more clean energy and improving service reliability.

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