

Women In Energy: Tracey Evers

- August 6th, 2018



The Women in Energy series is a joint project between USEA and USAID that was developed out of USEA's Engendering Utilities Partnership, a program funded by USAID to improve gender policies and gender outcomes at their respective organizations.



Tracey Evers is a Business Development Executive for Mortenson's High Voltage Transmission business. With over 20 years of experience in project management and business development and almost 15 years in power engineering, Mrs. Evers currently leads the strategic growth and positioning of Mortenson's solutions and services with OEMs, utilities and developers in the energy transmission arena. Her focus is on large complex projects such as HVDC (High Voltage Direct Current) projects, long-haul transmission projects and other projects with more complex technology like FACTS devices. In addition to her specific market responsibility, she manages the strategic marketing and communication team. This team is responsible for the strategy and Prior to Mortenson, Mrs. Evers held several positions at ABB Inc. a world leader in the power and energy industry. At ABB she served in various roles across multiple business units ranging from a substation design engineering to business development. She has a background in AC and DC power delivery, air insulated and gas insulated substation technologies and submarine and land cable applications. A native of Jamaica, Mrs. Evers splits her time between Minneapolis, MN and Raleigh, NC. She holds a bachelor of science and a master of science degree in power engineering from North Carolina A&T State University. She spends some of her free time volunteering with the Raleigh Rescue Mission and with Habitat for Humanity.

*Neither USEA nor USAID alters the substance of the responses from the women featured. The answers are their own.

Women In Energy Interview Questions

How have your education and career path led you to where you are now?

Without my education, I could not be here today. Those who know me know how much I advocate for formal and informal education. I recall being told from a very early age, that education was going to be my only access to a better life. I grew up in Jamaica and my early childhood years were not easy. During this time Jamaica was called a “third world country” and like all such countries, access to secondary and tertiary education was highly competitive. I won a scholarship to one of the best high schools in my region. It was a girls-only Catholic high school, there were no programs preparing girls for careers in engineering; so, once I realized that I had some interest in what is now called a STEM career, I took classes at the boy's high school next door. After graduation from high school, I enrolled as the only girl in the pre-engineering program at the local community college, you see I didn't have the financial support I needed to enter university. By the end of my first year, I won a few scholarships one of which gave me a chance to study in the US. I accepted the scholarship to the US and enrolled in a computer technology and aviation program and found that yet again I was a minority in the engineering and physical science classes. I was typically 1 of 2 or 3 girls in class sizes ranging from 22-26.

Once I graduated, I returned to Jamaica but had a difficult time finding gainful employment in my field, so I decided to teach. A few years later I received another scholarship to return to the US, I pursued both a bachelor and master of science degree in Electrical Engineering with a focus on power systems. Here again, I was one of 2-4 females in classes ranging from 12-28. I became quite accustomed to being the lone female or one of the few females in the room.

After my masters, I took a job on Wall Street. I was in a technology management program and here again, women made up less than 25% of a class of 40. Two years later as we graduated the program female participation had dropped to 15%. During my tenor on Wall Street a female in a technology leadership role was a scarce sighting and when you did come across a female it seemed as if she had to sacrifice everything else to get to a position of leadership and authority. So, I was never intimidated by the idea of being outnumbered by men as this has been my reality in my entire career. I had grown comfortable enough in my talent and abilities that I could challenge the status quo regarding diversity representation in the organizations I was a part of.

My career path to where I am now has been a winding road filled with as many detours and hurdles as there are accomplishments and advancements. Every challenge I faced then, stretched me and forced me to develop the tools that I need today to be effective in my role as a leader in my organization.

Over the course of your career, have you witnessed changes in the sector that have launched more women into leadership positions?

My career in the power/energy market was the third career of my adult life so when I entered in the early 2000's, it was clear that there had been progressing regarding women in this sector but there was still so much further to go. Today as I look back at how things were when I first entered the market compared to how things are today, I can say without hesitation that there has been significant progress in the promotion of women into positions of leadership. The focus on promoting STEM programs among young women from as early as elementary schools are paying off as more women are entering and staying in STEM-related careers. The push for inclusion and not just diversity has been a fundamental part of educating the male dominated workforce. Having a few men in leadership champion the need for the female perspective and inclusion has been key to shattering the stereotypes and creating a place for female leaders and decision makers. When I first entered the sector, I was the only female engineer on our team of more than 25 and there were not any women in any technical leadership role. I have countless stories that display the subtle and blatant gender biases that I encountered. I recall sitting at the desk of my predecessor who was a female engineer, I asked why she was no longer with the company and I was told with a chuckle, she quit to become a missionary as she could not handle the pressure of the work, that she frequently ended her day in tears especially when she was working in the field. As I pondered why she chose to quit versus elevate the situation I realized there were no women in positions of authority that she could turn to and the leadership of the day was not quite "tuned in" to the plight of women and the need for diversity in leadership. My experience was not unique and was quite commonplace.

Today, I can say the numbers have increased, thanks to the focus of women in STEM programs over the last 15 years there are more women graduating with technical degrees and even more deciding to work in STEM careers on in adjunct professions that support STEM careers.

Technology is transforming the traditional utility business model into a more modern interactive grid. Some utilities see the transformation as an opportunity to morph their teams as well because of a correlation between an increase in diversity and an increase in quality, and innovation. What, if anything is your organization doing to attract, retain, and promote more women into senior management positions to respond to the dramatic industry transformation?

As mentioned before, Mortenson recognized that the engineering and construction sector was still challenged with including women to the same extent that they are represented in the population. After assessing the challenges within the company, Mortenson has embarked on a journey to ensure there are more female leaders in their ranks. This means identifying high performing team members at all levels of the organization, provide them with training and mentorship and support them with challenging career positions so they can experience a variety of careers. Each year there has been an increase in the number of females participating in the summer internship programs as well and those who decide to become full time team members.

Mortenson also has a mid-career program where they recruit high performing mid-career professionals who bring skills and talents that were honed in other sectors and companies into the Mortenson talent pool. In addition, technology is transforming the workplace and creating avenues for even more career options for women who are interested in challenging career paths. Participation with national and local affinity groups is encouraged and Mortenson takes part in celebration national events that promote women in non-traditional roles such as the Women in Construction Week. This feeds directly into Mortenson's values and their strategy of investing in team and talent. The face of Mortenson is changing and this change is spreading all through the ranks. Our customers and trade partners are positively impacted and influenced by the changes. As more companies like Mortenson accept their responsibility the industry will naturally evolve to represent something else.

Are talented women within your organization making it to top leadership positions? Why/why not?

My tenure at Mortenson is still recent but even in that short time, I have seen the company make significant strides in promoting more women to positions of leadership. Mortenson has a female CFO, a few Senior Vice Presidents and Presidents and multiple Director/Executive level women. The leadership of the company recognized that the female leadership representation in the organization is insufficient and requires some specific action. I recall as I was being recruited, I had a met with the COO and one of the questions I asked was why should I join a company where none of the people who were interviewing me looked like me, nor did the ones on the company's senior leadership organization chart? I appreciated that the company did not make excuses but rather they identified their current female leaders and acknowledged that they had much further to go. In addition, I was informed that they were in the middle of developing a program to address this "issue". Three years later I am happy to say they are walking the talk. Today, there are more women in leadership across all operating groups and at all levels.

Companies that embrace diversity outperform their competitors. What type of diversity programs does your organization have in place to mentor future women leaders? How does your organization measure and report gender diversity? Is the data publicly available?

The company continues to dedicate an entire week to bringing awareness to women in the industry; I believe I can speak for the women in our company when I say we can feel the support from the company and group leaders from our specific organizations. Leadership continues to support our participation in local and national conferences and seminars that educate and promote women in the industry. In addition, we are on a company-wide inclusion and diversity journey which focuses not just on recruiting, developing and retaining females but all minority groups. We are already benefiting from this journey by seeing an increase in the number of women in our ranks.

There are corporate tracking mechanisms for diversity recruitment, promotion and retention, however, there is not an official metric, the philosophy is that we should make every effort to create a diverse workforce and a metric may give people the impression that achieving the metric is sufficient. Because we are a private company, our diversity records are not public.

What actions should the energy and electricity sector be focused on to accelerate change, increase diversity, and foster a better gender balance in the boardroom?

Before I make any suggestions about the actions we should/could take I would like to acknowledge where we are regarding women in leadership positions in the energy market. In June 2018, I attended the Edison Electric Institute (EEI) CEO Convention, while there, I participated in the Women in Energy session and it was there that I learned that in the energy sector there are more women in the GM/CEO roles than in any other market sector. This indicates there is the steady progression with getting a better balance of gender representation and participation in the boardroom. With that said the statistics for overall diversity is dismal, so while there has been some progress in developing female leaders, the same progress has not been made with the other minority groups. So, while there has been progress, there is still a long road ahead to get to equal gender representation in the boardroom and an even longer distance to be travelled to get to the road of equitable representation of all the underserved minority groups in the U.S.

To accelerate change and get to “a better balance” I think we have to start with removing all the negative stereotypes that have been propagated about specific groups of people [including females]. Leadership needs to take ownership for shifting the paradigm of their organization to embrace diversity in all its forms and to appreciate the value that diversity brings. Those in the majority must be sensitive to the challenges of the underrepresented and make every effort to create the opportunity for the development of all team members especially those who do not look, sound or think like them. Secondly, there has to be a focus on developing a pipeline of future leaders who better represent the population demographics. This is not just a focus on gender, race, religion and physical abilities but also on talent. We should support the development of leadership from the talent pool in our craft organizations and not just from the traditional white-collar professions. Leadership positions should not be limited to persons with traditional academic degrees but to those who chose the skilled labor path.

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