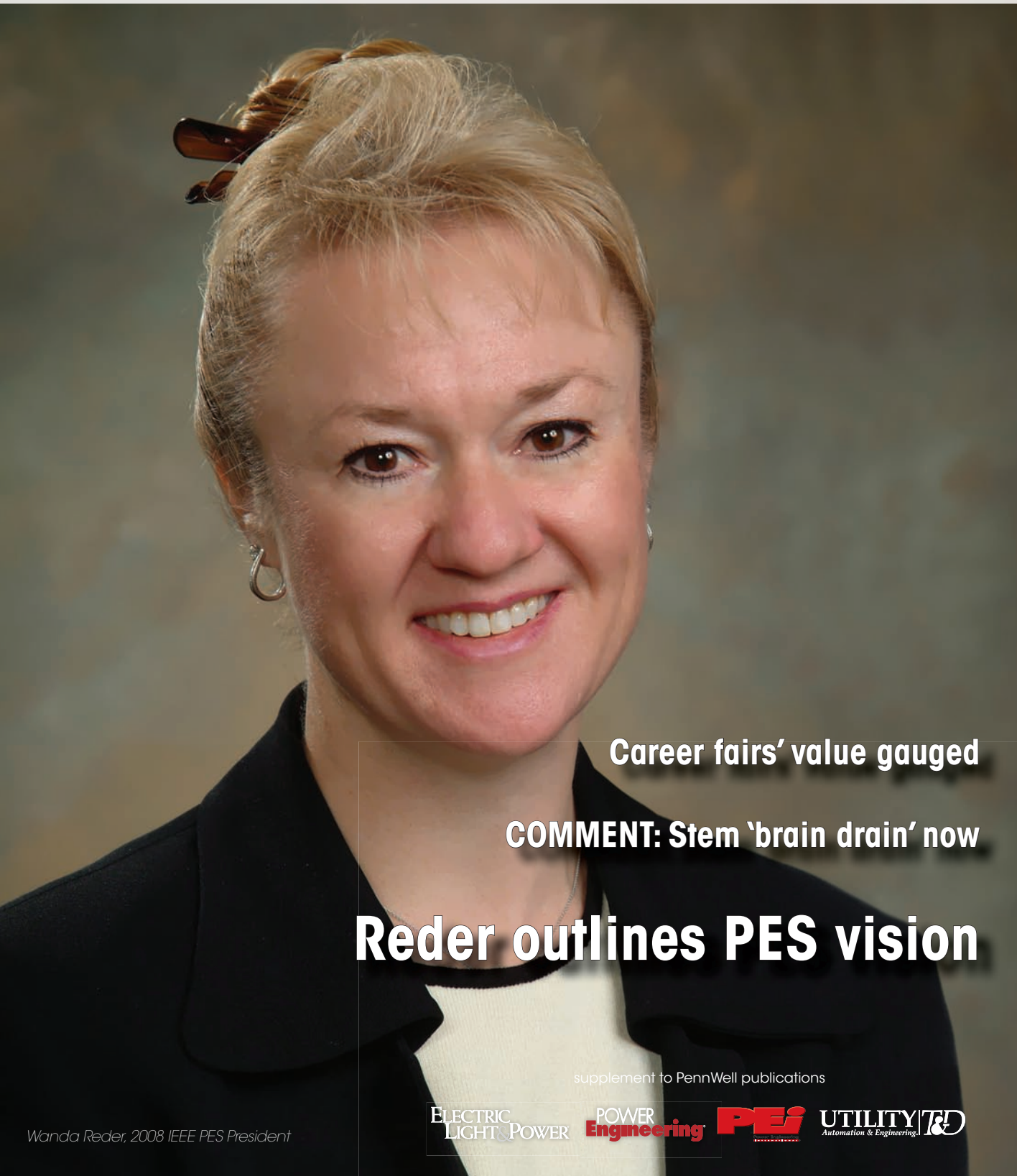


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Career fairs' value gauged

COMMENT: Stem 'brain drain' now

Reder outlines PES vision

supplement to PennWell publications

Wanda Reder, 2008 IEEE PES President

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CONTENTS

- 2 Reder outlines vision for PES growth, engineer shortage
- 9 COMMENT: Industry must act now to stem 'brain drain' in power engineering
- 12 HR experts: Career fairs add value to professional development
- 21 2007 - 2008 Power events calendar
- 22 Job Listings from PennEnergyJOBS.com

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Reder outlines vision for PES growth, engineer shortage

By Bob Williams, Managing Editor

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' Power Engineering Society (IEEE PES) has embarked on an aggressive strategy to tackle the looming worldwide shortage of power engineers, says 2008 IEEE PES President Wanda Reder.

That shortage will get worse before it gets better, according to recent statistics:

- By 2010, one in three electric utility US workers will be 50 or older (see Fig. 1).
- One half of the technical workforce will reach retirement age in 5–10 years.
- At 50+ years, utility craft workers have highest average age of any industry today.
- In 2015, with a 15% decline in the 35–44 age group, the demand increase is projected at 25%.
- Demand for US electrical engineers in construction is expected to jump to 175,000 by 2010 from 150,000 today.
- The number of power engineering graduates has declined during the past 15 years.

"The PES is working collaboratively with industry, government, and universities to define what the next steps should be," Reder says. "In that regard, a number of initiatives, including image building, online career services customized to student needs, and collaborative efforts to create an action plan for technical workforce development have been launched."

Reder's commentary on the staffing shortage crisis for power engineering begins on p. 9.



Perhaps most important is encouraging industry to do more to support involvement in PES, which in turn benefits companies because of what PES can do to help sustain the supply of power engineers that will become even more critical for industry in the future.

– Wanda Reder,
2008 IEEE PES
president

IMAGE BUILDING

It's crucial to improve the visibility and image of both PES and power engineering as a career, Reder contends. In addition to increasing membership, she cites other aspects of the PES image-building strategic initiative, which include boosting the involvement of GOLD (Graduate Of the Last Decade) members, improving the public image of power engineering, and seeking collaborative efforts and opportunities to communicate the value of the power industry profession.

PES began addressing the society's image challenge by implementing online surveys to gain understanding and perspective for a branding campaign. Themes emerging from the survey feedback were for PES to:

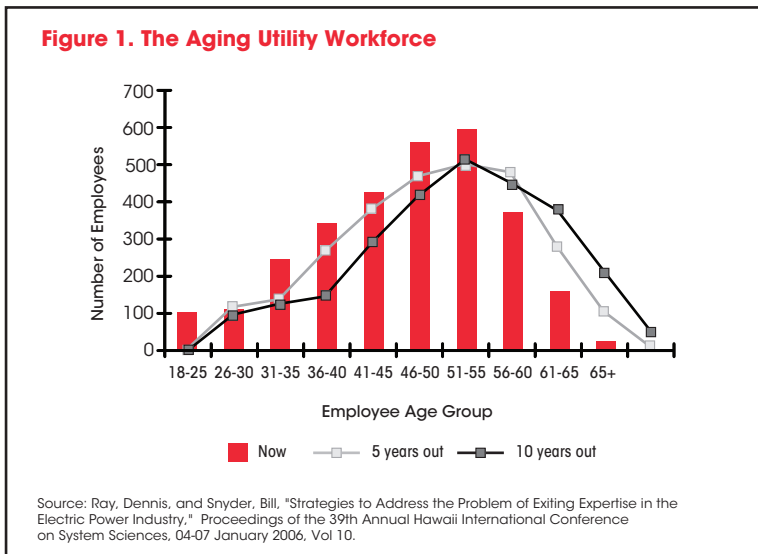
- Assist students into employment; retain their membership.
- Provide practical information and education.
- Readily embrace emerging technologies.
- Expand education offerings to including webinars.
- Make offerings relevant worldwide.

- Recruit members by asking them to join.
- Support/involve students and GOLD members.
- Enhance online tools and web communications.
- Emphasize “criticality to society” to build image.

“PES must move forward on these fronts while clarifying our purpose and mission in the emerging context of energy reliability and the environmental impact of growing energy use,” Reder says.

One step toward that end is effecting a name change for PES to Power & Energy Society, a name that Reder contends better reflects the society’s existing mission, scope, and field of interest while being relevant to current interests, aligning with global needs, and providing a framework for embracing emerging technologies.

“We are heading down a path to more visibly embrace energy,” Reder



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says, noting the pending name change. “A lot of the things that we have underway now are already in the energy space—electric vehicles, battery storage, interconnection work for wind, etc. I’m not sure that we’re very visible there, and certainly there’s a big need from a societal aspect to bring those technical aspects to the forefront. You’ll see more from us in that arena.”

The PES approved the name change, and efforts are underway for approval within IEEE. The new name is expected to be adopted in 2008.

Other PES image-building initiatives include:

- Updating the website to make it easier and more exciting to navigate.
- Encouraging technical committees to keep websites current.
- Providing tools for K-12 outreach on the website (<http://tinyurl.com/32ar3k> and www.tryengineering.org).
- Providing links for mentoring (www.mentornet.net).
- Developing online tutorials.
- Offering stand-alone, practical training that will be supported by chapters.
- Creating membership brochures and posters advocating the importance to “Get into Energy.”
- Creating two additional vice-president positions within the IEEE PES board that can focus on membership and new initiatives and outreach efforts.

ONLINE CAREER SERVICES

Another vital area for PES involves creating an IEEE PES online career service to help address emerging engineering workforce challenges; to provide a service to students and their future employers; and to facilitate collaboration among industry, government, and academia to provide a quality education for the next generation of power engineers.

The website, developed in cooperation with Power Systems Engineering Research Center (PSERC), is running at <http://www.PES-Careers.org>. The prototype targets students and potential employers in the US and Canada to help them connect with regards to full-time, part-time, and internship power engineering positions. Geographic expansion outside of the US and Canada will be evaluated after a trial period.

The functions of the site include:

- Organization profiles for students.
- Job openings.
- Online job applications (if desired).
- Student profiles search capability for needed career interests and skills.
- Student search capability for geographic preferences.
- Screen function based on identified criteria (e.g., GPA, degree, etc.).
- Mechanism to communicate with potential job candidates.
- Vehicle to announce web-based information sessions to students.
- Shared calendar for tutorials, conferences, and other society events.
- Ability to capture forecasted engineering need from employers, which is required to inform discussions about how to meet the need for new power engineers.

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While it is free for employers to use this service, they are asked to encourage new power engineering employees to receive IEEE PES services by becoming regular members. All students need to do is provide a resume and profile with career interests, courses taken, skills, states/provinces where they will consider employment, and more. Faculty members are urged to encourage their students to use the service and to join IEEE as student members. Faculty can view employers and jobs—but not student information—to understand market trends.

ACTION PLAN

According to Reder, PES is developing a recommended industry action plan that proposes possible next steps for the electric power industry, its regulators, and the supporting educational system in addressing the aging workforce challenge.

The objectives of the proposed action plan are:

- Analysis. Increase understanding of aging-workforce challenges and facilitate planning of effective collaborative responses to those challenges.
- Students. Increase the number of well-trained engineering graduates prepared to meet the need for the next generation of power engineers.
- Infrastructure. Create a sufficient and sustainable power engineering education system.

The action steps to be taken cover a wide range, including:

- Preparing youth for careers involving science, technology, engineering and math.
- Getting more youth aware of and interested in power careers, providing tools and games that simulate the various aspects of running the business.
- Building and sustaining the post-high school educational system.
- Improving workforce planning, recruiting, and management.
- Redesigning jobs and the work environment to attract and retain the new workforce.
- Retaining existing employees, particularly senior employees.
- Including workforce issues in strategic and

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financial planning efforts.

- Developing sensible and balanced outsourcing practices.
- Facilitating more immigration and employment of immigrants.
- Reorganizing to improve efficiency in use of suppliers in the production chain.
- Rehiring the retirees.
- Developing knowledge retention systems.
- Fostering early career education programs that expand university education.
- Incorporating automation as part of the new workplace.
- Re-examining public policies to ensure that they support workforce solutions.

For these efforts to succeed, says Reder, it is necessary to develop a good understanding of such things as:

- Current employee age profile and retirement trends.
- Historical industry trends in employment of engineers.
- Business strategies and their effects on employment of engineers.
- Public policies affecting employment of engineers and support of the education infrastructure.
- Technology and policy drivers of the future need for engineers.
- Retention rates in the power industry.
- Factors influencing student interest in power career choices (such as compensation, image, challenge, contribution to solving societal problems, etc.).
- Trends in K-12 student interest in science, technology, engineering, and math.
- Trends in university student interest in engineering, electrical engineering, and power engineering.
- Programs to stimulate interest in science, technology, engineering, and math.
- Domestic and international trends in engineering education.
- Current faculty situation and retirement trends.
- Characteristics of viable power programs.
- Education system practices in curriculum development.
- R&D funding of university research.
- Educational system graduation capacity, as compared with demand for those graduates (i.e., a gap analysis).

PES is working with PSERC, the National Science Foundation, and the National Energy Reliability Council to host a workshop to address the national challenge on the future power engineering workforce in November 2007. Information from the workshop will be used to complete the action plan, according to Reder.

“We’re having a workshop in Washington, DC, to bring together academics, industry, and government types together to figure out how to fuel the power education system,” she says. “The workshop will bring together about 50 industry, government, and academic leaders to frame an industry action plan that will bring strong, concerted efforts to sustain university power programs, which are needed to create the talent required to ensure that the nation will continue

to enjoy reliable and cost-effective energy in the 21st Century.”

The specific objectives of the workshop will be:

- To assess the current state of knowledge of the future demand for and supply of university-educated power engineers, thereby reducing the extent to which there will be a gap between the need for new engineers and the ability of universities to meet that need.
- To develop an understanding of what it takes to sustain university power programs and the role of research infrastructure in educating undergraduate and graduate power engineers

REDER'S VISION FOR PES

Retirees figure largely into Reder's vision for PES effecting a broad scale of transferring knowledge to young power engineers.

“Clearly, there's a big need for education, and we will rely heavily on retirees for that knowledge transfer,” she says. “One of the things that we're doing is creating stand-alone courses, and we are generally using retirees to deliver that kind of material. Those are offered in person, but we are also moving in the direction of webinars and online training as well. I see the retirees as being the real kernel for the delivery mechanism.”

Reder also notes a push to expand the PES portfolio of stand-alone courses and making more of them available online.

“We've been offering stand-alone courses, and we're going to add to them, building up the portfolio,” she says. “We've got a few webinars available online



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now, and it's really a matter of broadening the portfolio of stand-alones and also taking excerpts from that and make those available as webinars."

Another PES initiative is to build its presence worldwide, an effort that "is going to take a while to develop," Reder notes. "Membership now is growing faster in regions outside the US than internally, so we always have to keep an eye on making sure that what we're offering is relevant to the regions outside the US and Canada."

And a PES collaboration with the IEEE Industry Applications Society (IAS) is geared to providing training of a more practical nature.

"We know that we have to be more proactive at providing practical, application-oriented training not only in the United States, where there's a lot of hiring going on, but also in China, India, some of the countries that are just booming.

"I think that we're heading down a path of doing it, and I'm still working on getting some of the infrastructure put in place, but it's really to leverage the practical information that's delivered at the chapter level. We need a mechanism so that people can talk about what they do day in and day out and bring their best practices and share them with others; we need to build an infrastructure so that practical aspects can be shared more readily. Right now, a lot of what we do is a little more academic in nature, and we're really trying to make sure that we balance that more with the practical aspects. And that's really of interest as you start going outside the US."

Part of that infrastructure would be the revised versions of the IAS Color Books, which cover a dozen different facets of electric power engineering standards developed by IAS and the IEEE Standards Association.

"A lot of the distribution engineers use these Color Books, and it's kind of been the bible for both industrial engineering and for distribution engineering, and they're getting rewritten," Reder notes. "IAS and PES are kind of getting connected at the hip to get these things rewritten, and then we're going to get that practical aspect out for a tutorial. We're shooting to get that out on the street in 2008."

Perhaps most important, says Reder, is encouraging industry to do more to support involvement in PES, which in turn benefits companies because of what PES can do to help sustain the supply of power engineers that will become even more critical for industry in the future.

"I've been reinforcing with middle-level managers to the extent that they hire new engineers, getting them to join PES and getting them involved in the chapters is a really good way to help them develop themselves, develop a network," she says.

"I think that a lot of the people that are involved in the society have kind of done it on their own, and they haven't had that much corporate sponsorship, if you will. With this issue of how are we going to develop this expertise and how are we going to develop these folks to replace the retirees, it opens up a really good platform to say, 'Hey, help them get involved, and we'll support their efforts too.'" ♦

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Industry must act now to stem 'brain drain' in power engineering

By Wanda Reder, 2008 IEEE PES President
Vice-President, S&C Electric Co. Power Systems Services

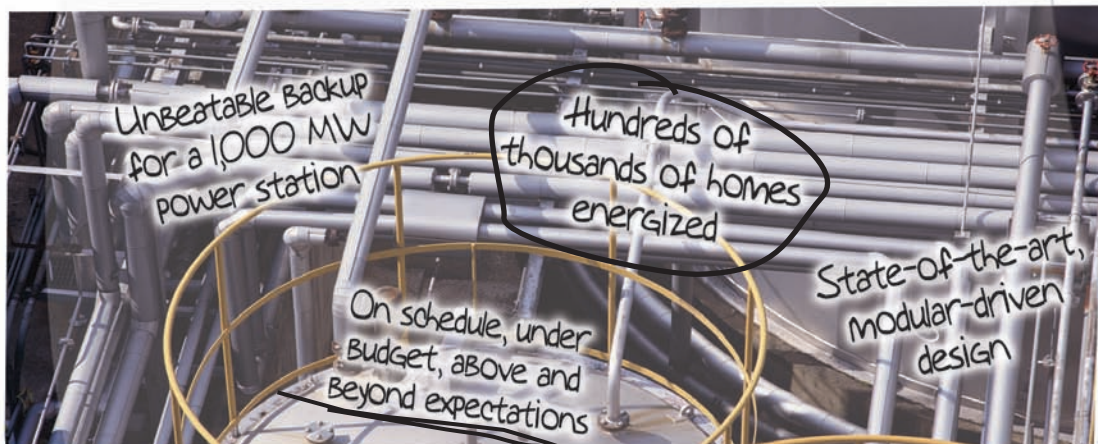
Power industry demographics are not usually a topic of interest for an engineer.

My curiosity about this subject started when I worked at a utility that faced a merger-driven downsizing accompanied by a hiring freeze. Soon the "graying" of my coworkers became noticeable, both at work and at industry meetings, and I began to wonder how these demographics might impact the electric infrastructure and, ultimately, the industry's economic future.

At least 20%—and at some companies up to 40%—of power industry employees in North America will be eligible to retire in the next 5 years. The occupations that will experience the most retirements are also the most difficult to replace. Our industry is coming to the realization that recruiting and retaining the best people is top priority.

For an interview with Wanda Reder and her vision for PES and its initiatives to tackle the power engineering brain drain, turn to p. 02.

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Unfortunately, the number of undergraduate engineering students in the United States continues to decline, and fewer graduating engineers have power backgrounds. Although hiring is underway across our industry, there are simply not enough qualified replacements.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION

Now is the time to plan for our future workforce needs—a job that requires the industry to work together to attract, develop, and retain this vital talent.

To attract talent, we need to promote the image of the power industry. Let's start at the middle school and high school levels, where employers can arrange speaker opportunities for engineers to eagerly share their experiences in the power field.

Adolescent awareness can be heightened by using National Engineers Week to showcase power engineering by sponsoring science fairs and technical "knowledge bowl" competitions and by recognizing student achievement through monetary awards, summer jobs, and scholarships.

"Take Your Kids to Work Day" is also an opportunity to showcase the industry and generate interest by providing tours and leading science projects. Employers can also participate in high school career days, job shadowing, mentoring, and mock interview sessions. To enhance student interest in power, employers can participate directly in one-on-one student mentorship, using, for example, www.mentornet.net, which pairs students with mentors for e-mail-based relationships.

With engineering enrollment declining, we are fiercely competing with other industries for talent, and power must become more visible to attract scarce engineering talent.

Industry employers can deliver presentations in engineering classrooms and at IEEE Power Engineering Society (PES) chapter meetings to highlight emerging technologies, industry changes, and the impact of a reliable power system on society.

Connecting with students is especially important in the first two collegiate years, when majors are determined and co-op/internship applications are initiated. For a predictable supply of talent, employers must hire year after year to establish an ongoing campus presence.

To encourage engineers to select the power industry, employers can work with faculty to convey hiring needs, develop research initiatives, influence curricula, sponsor internships, and offer scholarships. Our industry should also follow the lead of high-tech companies by donating equipment and making grants for research and laboratories.

Employers also need to strengthen relations with college educators. Employers should consider underwriting classes and creating research and consulting opportunities for professors. Employers can also become involved as industry advisors for universities.

Because of industry restructuring, the power-engineering curriculum must both impart solid engineering skills and address emerging needs in such areas as environment and public policy, power systems, power electronics and electric machines, renewable energy systems, basic maintenance, and distributive control systems.

We encourage your feedback on this or any PennEnergyJOBS Career Guide article.

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Biography

Wanda Reder is vice-president of S&C Electric Company's Power Systems Services Division, which offers engineering, field service, and project management capabilities to utilities, developers, and industrial customers through the US and Canada. Prior to S&C, she was vice-president of T&D Asset Management at Exelon, where she had responsibility for asset investment strategy, standards, engineering, planning, reliability, and work management in Chicago and Philadelphia. Prior to Exelon, Reder was vice-president of energy at Davies Consulting. Additional experience includes starting and leading a company that performed predictive diagnostics on underground cable and numerous leadership positions at Northern States Power, including justification and deployment of distribution automation, planning for long-range delivery system needs, and development of conservation and load management initiatives. She received a BS in engineering from South Dakota State University and an MBA from the College of St. Thomas. Reder has served on the IEEE Power Engineering Society Governing Board since 2002 and will be IEEE PES President starting in 2008. Since 2004, she has been researching, publishing, and presenting on the topic of the maturing power industry workforce and the challenge to attract and educate the necessary talent for the industry. To maintaining expertise for power system reliability within the context of a large, pending retirement attrition, Reder's efforts have resulted in collaborations to address the challenge with NERC, NRECA, EEL, PSERC, and IEEE (to name a few) to bolster the industry image, rebuild power-related curricula, and transfer necessary knowledge.

LET'S RETAIN WHAT WE HAVE

Demographic experts agree that Generation Xers typically are interested in upward mobility, are computer savvy, and expect training in a variety of job assignments.

Training and development efforts and backgrounds of newer employees will often need to include flexible schedules and rotational assignments.

Employers can facilitate employee development by encouraging participation in industry meetings to accelerate learning and facilitate networking. IEEE PES is committed to being a resource for technical training and offers both traditional and online tutorials.

Many industries face challenges related to a maturing workforce. IEEE PES is committed to working with employers and academia alike, so that power will be an industry of choice and so that we can attract and retain the talent that's so crucial to our success.

In short, the industry's future depends on our ability to anticipate what lies ahead and respond effectively to these challenges. ♦



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HR experts: Career fairs add value to professional development

By Bob Williams, Managing Editor

Career fairs are a booming business today, and nowhere more so than in the energy industry.

That's because the energy industry seems to be afflicted with a growing shortage of skilled professionals to a greater degree than any other industry today. And qualified professionals in the power engineering industry in particular are hard to come by.

A handful of top human resources executives with some of the world's biggest power producing and power engineering and construction firms offered their perspective on the value of career fairs to the power engineering professional. The consensus is that career fairs are a key part of power engineering firms' recruitment strategy and that power engineering professionals can find great value in them for a wide variety of reasons that go beyond job-hunting.



Career fairs are a "key component of our recruiting strategy. In addition to providing us with the opportunity to connect with many potential candidates at one time, career fairs are also a good way for us to network with colleagues in the industry and expand our contacts."

*– Ryan Seleznov,
Dynege*

MAJOR EVENTS

Career fairs are burgeoning into major events across the energy industry.

Jamie Matlin, director, recruitment advertising, for PennWell Publishing, notes that attendance at PennWell events that include career fairs can range from a few thousand industry professionals to the more than 17,000 who attend POWER-GEN International, the world's largest power generation event. (PennWell is the publisher of Power Engineering and Power Engineering International magazines and owner/organizer of the POWER-GEN conferences.)

Matlin, who oversees the sales, marketing, and operations of PennWell's recruitment advertising business, which includes the company's career fair activities, says that part of his job is to identify markets and locations for PennWell career fairs. And linking a career fair to a technical conference or trade show creates a valuable synergy for both, according to Matlin.

"To date, we have been co-locating our career fairs within well-established PennWell events, so that our traffic and attendance is closely tied to the main event's," he says.

COMPANY SIGNIFICANCE

All of the HR executives interviewed for this article say they place a high value on career fairs as part of their recruiting strategies.

"We regularly participate in career fairs and have been successful in recruiting qualified candidates through these events," says Dianne Mills, human resources manager, Bechtel Power Corp. "For college recruiting, we engage in college career fairs in both fall and spring semesters across the United States. We also participate in professional career fairs organized by power industry and professional organizations throughout the year.

"Not only do we attend these fairs, but we also have been sponsors at the national conferences within the power industry and recently began to spon-

sor college students to attend these events. We have also hosted our own career events—open houses strategically located near our projects or at our own corporate offices—to attract qualified candidates.”

Larry Whittet, staffing director, The Shaw Group Inc., says his company gets very involved with career fairs in two ways: “Our professional career fairs at our hub office locations, and, most importantly, 2) our college career fairs, where we try to ascertain the good young talent that is available at the various engineering schools we visit each year in both the fall and spring semesters.

“We place a very high value on career fairs as they—along with our Employee Referral Program and along with networking—are extremely important for us to remain competitive in the market place.”

Ryan Seleznov, director, workforce planning, staffing, and recruiting, for Dynegy Inc., says that career fairs are a “key component of our recruiting strategy. In addition to providing us with the opportunity to connect with many potential candidates at one time, career fairs are also a good way for us to network with colleagues in the industry and expand our contacts.”

Entergy Services, Inc. views career fairs as one of its largest investments in terms of options for recruitment of top talent, according to Schuyler Gordon, Entergy manager of school relations.

“We currently have a systemwide tiered target model that has identified the critical needs of the organization, as well as the targeted curriculum that will assist us in meeting our hiring needs,” she says. “Through this targeted model we are now able to focus our resources on those university campuses



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"Even if one is satisfied with their current position and organization, [a career fair] is still an opportunity to identify organizations that may match the candidate's critical values. More so, it is an opportunity to network and make contacts with industry professionals that may be needed in the future, as well as [being] leveraged should changes in their career be needed down the road."

*- Schuyler Gordon,
Entergy*

as well as professional career fairs that will bring Entergy the highest return on its investment as well as the largest pool of top-quality candidates."

Gordon notes that Entergy's recruitment group attends 33-40 career fair events across the United States and is currently expanding this model to now include technical colleges within its service territories to further capitalize on the recruitment of craft personnel.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT SIGNIFICANCE

Because of ever-rising demand for electricity—and with it an urgent need to replace talent in an ever-tightening job market, career fairs are becoming more important than ever.

"The power industry is slowly becoming one of the most lucrative industries within the labor market due to the anticipated increased construction as well as the necessity of the product we produce," says Gordon. "As a power engineer, it is even more critical that one capitalizes on the opportunities that are available to further grow their career within their respective area as well as geographic location."

She contends that career fairs are an optimal opportunity for professionals to investigate the many career options that are present within the industry, as well as to identify best-in-class companies that are making forward strides in some of the areas that mean the most to employees.

"For example," she says, "some organizations are establishing themselves as 'green' organizations as they seek to reduce their emissions as well as be recognized for their efforts to protect, preserve, and enhance the environment, like Entergy. These philosophies, as well as those of diversity and social responsibility, are areas that distinguish one company from the next and are critical in employee decisions regarding the organizations where they will grow their careers."

With corporate responsibility taking on an increasingly important aspect of a company's appeal to prospective recruits, more companies—in particular company leaders—are discussing it more and demonstrating it through their interactions with career fair attendee.

"If candidates are absent from these events, they have lost a important opportunity to learn about the organization, speak with its leaders, as well as identify opportunities that may be a fit for their career aspirations," Gordon contends.

And career fairs have value even for established professionals who aren't necessarily looking for greener pastures.

"Even if one is satisfied with their current position and organization, it is still an opportunity to identify organizations that may match the candidate's critical values," Gordon points out. "More so, it is an opportunity to network and make contacts with industry professionals that may be needed in the future, as well as [being] leveraged should changes in their career be needed down the road."

That tracks with Matlin's view: "The career fair is as much about seeing what else is out there as it is about landing that next opportunity. It is a showcase for industry employers to attract skilled industry professionals and promote their recruitment initiatives. Every career-minded professional needs to keep his or her ear to the ground and their options open. Career fairs facili-

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tate that in a non-threatening environment right on the trade show floor.”

However, career fairs aren’t just about job hunting today or scoping out potential employers for the future. They offer other career development benefits as well. Mills is especially keen on the networking opportunities at career fairs.

“One of the advantages for engineering professionals to attend a professional career fair, besides gaining a better understanding of the current job market, is the opportunity to interface with other professionals in their field,” she says. “This can help the engineering professionals build communications skills.”

Attending career fairs also helps engineering professionals gauge the latest technology and skills required to apply that technology, as well as learn who some of the major players are in the industry, Mills adds.

“Therefore, we recommend that engineering professionals attend career fairs from time to time, even if they are comfortable in their current situation, as they can gain additional perspectives about the industry.”

Seleznov concurs: “Career fairs continue to be important for professionals regardless of their stage of career or level of job satisfaction. They offer a great opportunity to explore career options, even if it’s not for an immediate job change but for sometime in the future. Also, career fairs are a good place to sharpen interview skills as well network with other industry professionals. Plus, they’re a good way to gain additional industry knowledge and learn the latest ‘buzz.’”

It’s never too soon to get started in gleaning value from a career fair, according to Whittet: “If you are talking about a college hire candidate, it is very important for them to attend [a career fair] at their local university, even during their sophomore and junior years, not just their senior year. We try to maintain a goal of hiring 80% of our interns/summer hires and co-ops as college hires once they graduate.”

As far as an experienced professional is concerned, career fairs can provide candidates feedback on what their value is to a company and what career opportunities are available at other companies, he adds.

RESUME TIPS

Many job-seeking candidates obsess over resumes, and the large number of prospective recruiters viewing them at career fairs simply multiplies the anxiety.

Matlin notes that although a resume is not required to attend the career fair, it is always suggested to have one available.

According to Whittet, it’s “extremely important” for a candidate to have an updated resume and to have researched companies prior to attending a career fair in order to “walk the talk.”

“Be very specific in terms of roles and responsibilities along with the company name and years of service with that firm,” he advises.

Mills says it is “imperative” that candidates not only update their resumes before attending a career fair, they should come prepared with an electronic copy to upload onto a company’s website.

“People don’t read resumes, they scan them,” Seleznov asserts. “So make



It’s “extremely important” for a candidate to have an updated resume and to have researched companies prior to attending a career fair in order to “walk the talk.”

*– Larry Whittet,
The Shaw Group*

sure your resume is scannable, concise, and professional. Steer clear of graphics, photos, unique font styles, and colored paper. I encourage people to take advantage of free resume resources that can be found on the internet and workshops offered through local employment agencies.”

One such resource for writing resumes and cover letters is Resume Edge (www.ResumeEdge.com), Matlin suggests.

There are plenty of good resources available in libraries, at career centers, and on the internet, Mills points out.

“While it is helpful for candidates, particularly engineering professionals, to prepare resumes that emphasize their transferable skills, it is also important for them to provide dates of employment, the positions they’ve held, and their level of responsibility,” she adds. “By doing so, the hiring manager can better evaluate the level of technical and management skills the candidates possess.”

Gordon offers this advice: “Review your resume to ensure there aren’t any punctuation, grammar, or sentence structure errors in the document. Also, ensure that all information is accurate and up to date. When possible, limit your resume to two pages, especially if your experience does not warrant any overage. Ensure that your resume is customized and targeted to the position that you are applying for, such that your skills show alignment with the job posting and demonstrate that you meet the minimum requirements for the position.”

Gordon notes there are many online “resume shops” that offer feedback on resumes, but she also recommends that a professional use internal resources to get additional feedback.

“For example, you can probably use your staffing and or field HR representative to review and provide critical comments regarding your resume,” she says. “If there is some discomfort in using these resources, reach out to technical writers for their assistance.”

RESEARCHING COMPANIES

There was a clear consensus among the executives interviewed regarding the importance of researching companies that a professional wants to approach at a career fair: Do your “homework.”

Seleznov says that to get the most out of a career fair, “it’s very important for attendees to do their homework ahead of time. You can often determine which companies will be attending and do some research on them. Spend some time looking at the company’s website, and check out Google News or Yahoo News for recent news articles about them. This will help you determine which companies you want to visit with during the career fair.”

Matlin contends that the more a candidate knows about any company before engaging its recruiters, the better an impression he or she will make. And the physical layout shouldn’t be daunting: “The career fair is set up in such a way that it generally flows with the rest of the trade show, so visiting all of the booths is very possible,” he says. “One should certainly have a short list on hand for those employers that they don’t want to miss.”

Mills thinks it is critical that candidates learn as much about the companies presenting at the career fair as possible, so they can focus on those in

which they are most interested. “Company recruiters value candidates who have taken the initiative to learn about a company, as it reflects a level of interest and seriousness in contemplating a career move,” she adds.

Mills also recommends, in addition to researching a company’s background, that candidates should learn about the job openings posted on the company’s website—as most companies now do—before attending the career fair and identify the positions for which they are best suited to apply: “They should communicate their interests to the recruiter—in other words, they should help the recruiter help them.”

Gordon also deems it critical that a candidate use all the information that’s available prior to a career fair to research and identify the companies that align with his or her overall career goals.

“Only through your research can you identify the industry the company represents, the critical values and competencies of the organization, the targeted careers within the company, as well as other variables that may influence your decision regarding the organization (i.e., benefits, career growth opportunities, stability, etc.),” she explains. “Once your preliminary research is completed, you should prioritize your companies from highest to lowest in their correlation with your career aspirations. The companies that are identified in your top five should be the organizations that you familiarize yourself with and spend the most time during the career fair speaking with its representatives.”

If a candidate has a lot of free time, it’s an acceptable strategy to visit other organizations outside the top five, but even this effort should be limited to only those organizations that match the candidate’s needs in terms of jobs available, geographical preference, targeted industry, etc., according to Gordon.

“Through your preliminary research, you will be able to craft thought-provoking questions to further identify the ‘fit’ of the organization to your desires,” she says. “This will also give you an opportunity to engage the representatives in discussion regarding your critical skills and how they match current openings within the organization.”

Gordon also notes that hiring managers are often present at a career fair to make initial screenings as well as identify candidates they would like to bring forward in the hiring process: “This is a critical chance to engage the manager in one-on-one dialogue and emphasize your match to their opportunities.”

Is it more important to “spread out” or stay focused on a select few while engaging companies at career fairs? Focus seems to win out, generally, but not always.

“It depends on the candidate’s objective,” Mills says. “Our suggestion is that the candidate be selective about the companies with whom he or she seeks employment and focus his or her efforts on spending time speaking with those companies to learn more about opportunities available that align with his or her experience and qualifications.”

If a candidate has done his or her homework on selected companies, it may be best to just contact the few that seem most interesting, according to Seleznov: “If you’re looking to network and learn more about what’s new



“Company recruiters value candidates who have taken the initiative to learn about a company, as it reflects a level of interest and seriousness in contemplating a career move.”

*– Dianne Mills,
Bechtel Power Corp.*

in the industry, then more may be better. It depends on what you're trying to accomplish."

Gordon holds that it is more beneficial to make contact with a select few recruiters who are targeted to the organizations that a candidate has identified as matching career needs.

"You can supplement organizational recruiters with recruitment firms that can be used to reach many organizations that match your career criteria," she notes. "Therefore, I think it's important that you meet the selected recruiters from the organizations that most interest you as well as network and make contact with recruitment firms that will expand your outreach to your targeted industry."

Whittet contends that it's best to spend more time with a select few recruiters than to try to contact as many recruiters as possible, but high-grading companies should depend on whether the individual is a "forced-ranking type" wishing to be with only elite companies or if he or she wants to explore all possibilities from several different firms.

It's important to know that third party-recruiters (i.e., "headhunters") work for the employers, Matlin points out. "In other words, they are programmed to fill job requirements, not place individuals," he says. "With that said, if someone is in the market for an opportunity, it is important to ensure that all of the top recruiters in the industry have a copy of the resume. However, candidates should continue pursuing the search for opportunities on their own, as the leading sources for finding a new job is networking, followed by employment job sites."

QUIZZING RECRUITERS

One critical way that recruiters assess prospective candidates is by the kinds of questions the candidates ask. By the same token, asking the right questions gives the candidate insight into whether a company is a good fit.

Seleznov boils the approach down to a short list: "Ask [recruiters] about current job openings, career and advancement opportunities, corporate culture, benefits, diversity, and community involvement. They can also tell you what it's like to work at the company."

Matlin notes that everyone has different priorities when looking for a new opportunity, "so it is important to understand your own and make sure that your next employer is a good match. Questions that employers typically like prospective candidates to ask are related to career advancement and professional growth."

Mills thinks that candidates should ask questions that reflect their research on the company.

"They should get a perspective on the company structure, values, and what the company does to take care of its employees," she says. "At Bechtel, for example, we offer both formal and informal opportunities to build our employees' skills in their role, and enhance their experience and leadership skills for future advancement. These opportunities include company-sponsored educational programs, online and instructor-led courses, professional certification and licenses support, tuition reimbursement, coaching, job shadowing, mentoring, and international assignments."

Whittet suggests these questions should be put to a company recruiter:

- What business units are you looking for personnel in?
- What positions are you looking to fill?
- How would I review the job descriptions of those positions?
- Are there opportunities for career development with your company, and what are they?
- What are the salary ranges for those positions?
- Is relocation involved, or are there positions for temporary assignments or business trips?
- Do you have a “rotational program” available?
- Is there a required start date for these positions?

Gordon also offers a list of sample questions, typically asked of Entergy’s recruiters:

- What kinds of skills and experience do you look for in the employees you hire?
- What are the characteristics of your most successful employees?
- Does your company hire on a continual basis or just at certain times of the year?
- How long does the hiring process take? What does it consist of?
- What percentage of applicants are eventually hired? What is the retention rate?
- Are there specific career tracks within the organization? In other words, what can a typical employee (for the position I am seeking) hired in your division expect to be doing 2, 5, or 10 years after hiring?
- What is your organization’s culture like?
- For how many years does the typical employee stay with the company?
- Are there opportunities for ongoing training through your organization?
- Do you expect your employees to relocate? How much travel is involved?
- What made you choose this company, and why do you stay?
- How long have you been with the company?
- What’s the one thing that most surprised you about this company?

TURNOFFS

The biggest turnoffs for recruiters assessing candidates center on lack of preparation.

Mills warns against a lack of preparation and focus.

“We recommend that candidates take some time before the career fair to review the posted positions on a company’s website to see if the type of jobs it has open are of interest to them, but more importantly, if they have the qualifications and experience necessary to meet the open positions’ requirements,” she says. “This will help candidates communicate more effectively with the company’s recruiter.”

Seleznov concurs, adding that “recruiters really want to speak with energetic individuals who have taken the time to do their homework (review the company website, etc.) and have come prepared with questions as well as the ability to concisely present their background and skills.”

Although it may seem obvious, there are two considerations that always indicate a lack of preparation by a candidate, according to Whittet: “1) If the



"As a general rule, anytime an individual is engaging a company representative on the topic of employment, they need to be on their game. What that means is they should give a firm handshake, look them straight in the eye, and be direct yet polite and eloquent in your questions and answers. Impressions are long-lasting and can certainly add a significant boost to one's job search."

*– Jamie Matlin,
PennWell Publishing*

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candidate does not possess an updated resume that they can talk to, and 2) if the candidate has not completed research on the firm to know who the company is, what industry the company works in, and what the attributes of the company are."

The surest turnoff, says Gordon, is a candidate who is not dressed appropriately for the event, does not demonstrate knowledge of the organization, and only comes to the table to receive some of the giveaways from the company (i.e., does not want or request organizational information/literature).

ATTIRE AND BEARING

First impressions count for everything in the charged atmosphere of a career fair.

"As a general rule, anytime an individual is engaging a company representative on the topic of employment, they need to be on their game," says Matlin. "What that means is they should give a firm handshake, look them straight in the eye, and be direct yet polite and eloquent in your questions and answers. Impressions are long-lasting and can certainly add a significant boost to one's job search."

Candidates need to understand that today's job market is very competitive and first impressions are still important, says Mills: "While demonstrating the right technical and communication skills is essential, demonstrating one's professionalism through appearance and demeanor can enhance a candidate's ability to get the job he or she desires."

Whittet believes candidates "should be forthright from start to finish and be in business attire."

Appropriate attire for a career fair is especially critical for a candidate, according to Gordon.

"Ensure that you are dressed appropriately for the career fair," she says. "While a suit is not needed, at least a jacket and/or tie for a male is, as well as a nice, appropriate suit for a woman. The outfit should be clean-cut, well-fitting, and a conservative, preferably darker color (such as navy, black, slate).

"Sometimes younger job-seekers make the mistake of wearing something that looks more suited for a social event instead of an interview. It is always safer to err on the side of dressing too conservatively. For women, this means keeping skirt length to around the knee. Keep jewelry to a minimum."

Matlin also thinks that attire is an important part of a candidate's physical appearance and demeanor.

"I would suggest always dressing the part, which does not necessarily mean wearing one's best outfit," he says. "However, it does mean dressing appropriately—which is generally business casual on a trade show floor—and essentially looking like a professional."

In the end, candidates must consider their appearance and preparation for a career fair in the same way they would for a job interview, says Seleznov: "Do your research, wear appropriate business attire, and come to career fair prepared. You can't take back or change first impressions." ♦

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Hitachi America
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Plant Engineer

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Plant Engineer

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Power Electronics Consultant

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AD INDEX

Advertiser	Page #
Arizona Public Service.....	13
Duke Energy.....	3
ESRI	5
Fluor Enterprises.....	9
MidAmerican Energy.....	11
PennWell Corporation ...	Inside Back Cover
RMT Inc.....	7
Shaw Group Inc	Back Cover
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SALES INDEX

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