

Women in energy

Spotlight: Christi Gell, SafeWells Product Line Manager, North America, Expro

I started my career in 1998 as an exploration geologist at Marathon Oil Company and worked offshore Gulf of Mexico (GoM) in the Lease Group. My primary role was undertaking seismic and geologic interpretations in order to determine what leases we were going to bid on at the next GoM lease round. It was not a great time in the oil and gas industry, as oil was around \$9-10/barrel, therefore expensive GoM exploration wells were being drilled, primarily only on prospects that were already in our portfolio. Subsequently, I decided it would be a good time to make a switch in my career.

My next role was a technical consultant for Landmark Graphics, bought over by Halliburton. Here, I worked with oil and gas companies on learning what software they had, mentoring users and giving presentations. During this time, I worked closely with geologists and geophysicists to help them create accurate maps, correlate logs and make seismic interpretations. It was a great role for me because I still used my technical skills daily, but gained experience on a wide range of projects.

One of my most impactful work experiences to date was working in business development for Landmark's geoscience applications in Asia Pacific. Again, it meant I could apply my technical skills when explaining the software across many cultures, countries, and resource plays. There were regions such as Australia where Coal Bed Methane (CBM) was dominant, which I had not encountered previously in the U.S. It is not straight-forward to give an offshore deepwater overview of software to a geologist who is working CBM. You have to be specific in what types of properties they look for in a reservoir, how they produce wells and how the rocks behave differently than unconsolidated sandstone.

Landmark had also acquired a company that had a 3D visualization and interpretation application, which was very cutting edge. Companies were building large visualization centers in order to get 'in' to their data in 3D. This meant I could expand my technical skills because not only was I helping geoscientists use the 3D world to find better prospects and look at larger amounts of data, I was now working on the technical computing side in designing and building these visualization centers in which the 3D applications would work. There is a whole other area around understanding graphics pipes, CPU usage, different types of projectors and the benefits and pitfalls of each; passive v. active seismic, rear projection v. front projection and curved or flat screens.

Returning from Asia, I spent three years in Halliburton's production optimization global business development and marketing group, learning a completely new set of products. Instead of software, I worked with chemicals and production enhancement techniques such as fracturing, acidizing, and completion tools. I was giving presentations on asphaltene and paraffin control, and surfactants for increasing regained permeability after a frac. This was not far from my technical realm because my master's degree in Geology was focused on hydrogeology and hydrochemistry. From this I was able to grow my knowledge of the industry from geoscience, to production and engineering.

Prior to joining Expro, I was again involved more in business development and sales for Landmark (back to software). I worked a project that required quite a bit of research and development (R&D) and was able to learn about the R&D process of software. It is a totally different skillset than being a geologist, but the R&D people need the technical support to help them understand how the software should work - they cannot be separated.

Therefore, when I joined Expro in 2013 as a product line manager for SafeWells in North America, it almost seemed like a natural progression to what I had done in the past. SafeWells is a software solution specifically developed by Expro as an effective well integrity data management system. It

monitors and reports on well integrity performance and has been successfully deployed by major operators globally.

My role in SafeWells is to set up and grow the business within my region. By taking a strategic approach and combining other Expro PLs/services, we can sell more holistically into a customer rather than just as a point product. I spend a lot of my time understanding well integrity regulations and how those can be incorporated into our software. These can differ from country to country, region to region, and even state to state.

Although having a successful career in oil and gas is dependent on your skill and attitude, and not necessarily whether or not you are male or female, I believe being a female has had a positive impact on my career. There have been many occasions when I have not needed to work around the gender issue.

For instance, on a past project we were drilling an offshore well using a drill ship. It is tight quarters on any offshore rig, so getting the experience of being on the rig meant waiting until we could get an open spot for me and one other female in order to share a room. It was a logistics thing; a female would not be put in a room with three males, sharing bunk beds. That said, once we were out there, it was just learn, learn, learn. Ask questions. See everything. I was in awe the first time I was on a rig – and I am still often gobsmacked by what we do in this industry because it is just so technically complicated.

Another instance of when the gender issue came to the fore, was when I had my two children, as I was anxious about taking time off after they were born. I questioned what kind of traction I would lose at work and whether or not the value I brought to the group would be lost when other people started picking up the slack. Some team members were also anxious about it, which did not help my situation. But after children comes the whole 'work-life balance'. The hard part is making sure that one does not dominate the other overall. I was fortunate to have a job at the time that did not require much travel so I was able to work and be a new parent fairly stress-free. Now that my kids are a

little older and a more self-sufficient, I am able to have a job that I can travel a few days out of the month.

I have worked in cultures where it was obvious that a more male-dominated approach was upheld and I had to figure out creative ways to be effective in my job and have my voice heard. But then, there have also been times when being a female has worked in my favor.

At the end of the day, I rely on my technical skills, business expertise, and positivity to get things done and progress my career. I think that's what everyone should do, whether male or female.