Leaders to Learn From

Cynthia Murphy-Ortega
Manager of University Partnerships and Association Relations
Chevron Corporation

“When I graduated college, ‘I told myself, I am going to work as an engineer at Chevron for five years and then go to graduate school’. However, I found myself challenged every day and I really enjoyed the work. So, I said, ‘give me another five years.’ And then when graduate school came calling at the five-year mark, I again thought, ‘I’m still having fun, being challenged every day and developing my skills as a leader, give me another five years.’ At some point the writing was on the wall and I knew this is where I was supposed to be. My career has taken many turns along the way allowing me to try new positions and develop my style as a leader. If I ever wanted to pursue graduate school, I am sure I still can, though I find my work to be thoroughly enjoyable and I have not looked back.”

Her Pathway to a Fulfilling Career

Cynthia Murphy-Ortega grew up in a small farming town in California as part of a large Hispanic family. Her parents did not have the option to go to college though they instilled in their children the importance of education as a means to open doors for yourself for the future and to achieve your dreams. “Growing up I did not have technical role models, certainly none in engineering or technology roles, and I am not sure I understood what engineering/engineers were other than they solved societal problems. As I went through school, I discovered I was a very good student in math and science, and I could solve problems, so I thought maybe engineering is for me.” Murphy-Ortega attended UC Davis and while there, navigated the curriculum, community, and had the opportunity to push herself to participate in many different experiences. This included research, leadership roles, technical clubs and Greek life, in order to achieve the full ‘college experience’ and set herself up for what she may want to do as a career. While in school she also had the privilege of securing two summer internships with Chevron and at the 11th hour instead of going to graduate school she decided she would take a full-time position with Chevron. To say she has worked her way up a straight ladder to her position today is an understatement — it’s more like a lattice.

Cynthia joined Chevron Corporation in 1991 as an engineer in the Richmond Refinery. She has held various engineering, maintenance, operations, business, and process safety positions within the refinery.
Cynthia then went on to work in the Chevron Energy Technology Company in 1998 where she developed and managed Chevron’s new hire competency development programs for refining and exploration & production roles. She also worked in the Process Planning group performing process modeling on large scale projects as well as in the Process, Analytical and Catalysts Dept supporting competency management, staffing, and business planning. She currently is a Manager of University Partnerships and Association Relations with Chevron Corporation. Her organization manages strategic partnerships with organizations throughout the world.

The Qualities that Make a Great Leader

“Leadership encompasses many attributes, and I think it also is not one size fits all; there are many ways to be a great and inspirational leader. You have to figure out what will work for you and what will work within the company/position you are in, each environment brings the need for its’ own leadership style. In no order and to just name a few (there are many!):”

- **Authenticity**: I believe that you have to ensure that your actions align with your words; you have to be trustworthy, honest and forth right in order to be authentic. Meaning, you are the same person whether talking to a suite of executives, a girl scout troop or while mentoring someone; people can see that and will respect you more if you can achieve it.

- **Have good communication skills**: This was taught to me very early on, being able to explain the ‘why’ we are doing something not just taking action and executing. The ability to answer questions like, ‘Why are we doing this? What is the goal or objective?’ By taking the time to explain the background on a task or project as well as receive any input from others to improve the results, people will not only want to follow you as a leader, they will also feel positive as a true contributor and more fulfilled moving forward.”

- **Embracing diversity and inclusion**: I have found it has been extremely beneficial to bring people to the table that have different perspectives. It can be challenging at times because we often surround ourselves with others who have similar backgrounds or thought processes, though by including a diversity of people this leads to richer discussions and ultimately better and more innovative solutions.”

- **Passion**: Be passionate about what you do, always; people can feel this in you and it only makes you and the work better. I really am a passionate person, I thoroughly enjoy my work and engaging with other people, and when others see that passion, they want to be part of it because they know it will also bring out their best.”

Advice for Future Leaders

“Ask questions and get involved. Let’s use engineering as an example. Many people may not have a full understanding of what engineers do, and I think back to why I pursued engineering. I did not have engineering/STEM role models while I was growing up so becoming an engineer wasn’t initially an option I understood much less considered. However, I was good at math and chemistry, good at solving problems and very analytical which led to engineering as a perfect option. I’m an underrepresented minority, it’s challenging to become something you can envision for yourself, though by asking questions, seeking out mentors, and engaging with as many different people as you can – so you can speak with them to learn from their choices and sometimes mistakes, you can shape your own future into something you will ultimately benefit from and enjoy!”