

Cindy Yeilding Shows Us How STEM Careers Rock - Forbes of course!



Lisa Quast, Contributor

I write about career topics, helping people maximize their potential.

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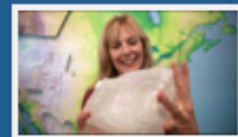
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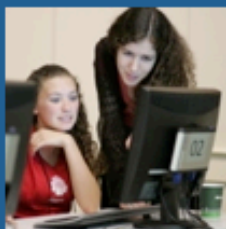
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As you've read in my past blog entries, I am a big proponent of women pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers, an area in which women are hugely under-represented. Cindy Yeilding, a senior geologist in the oil and gas industry, shares those same values.



(Photo: Courtesy of Cindy Yeilding)

She is the Vice President of Exploration & Appraisal at BP and is an example of a woman who has risen near the top of her company through a science track in an industry that is historically male-dominated. Read my interview with Cindy below where she discusses how her love of geology developed, what it's like working on an offshore rig with an all-male crew and how she volunteers her time to inspire students to consider careers in science and technology.



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Lisa Quast: *Cindy, can you tell us about the path you followed to reach your current position? I'm particularly interested in how your love of geology developed.*

Cindy Yeilding: The path to my current career in geology was seeded by my mom, who took me rock and fossil hunting as a young child. In high school I was tagged as being good at math. My strength in this area led me to focus on math as a major in college, but my true love was art history and architecture. After a few college-level math courses, I discovered that I was not interested in making a career out of it and re-focused on geology, the perfect melding of art and science.

Studying geology provided opportunities to work outdoors in gorgeous settings, to learn more about the Earth and to be part of a team that worked to solve unique problems. The thing that excited me the most was playing the role of sleuth. In geology, you interpret clues from the Earth to create models revealing the structure, history and layers of rocks.





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Shortly after receiving my master's degree in the field, I began my career with BP. I've been here ever since, and have never wanted to go anywhere else.

Quast: *What are some of the difficulties you've faced from being in a male-dominated industry and how did you overcome them?*

Yeilding: I spent much of my early career working offshore on rigs. I eventually realized that my being a geologist, not my being a woman, was what primarily bothered the all-male rig crew. The crew of engineers assumed that I did not understand drilling and would interrupt the well constantly to stop to look at samples. In short, they believed that I would just get in the way. I built relationships with the team and shared my understanding of each well's objectives and geology. They soon began understanding the value and insights I brought to the well. When the men on the rig started throwing around terms like "stacked channel complex" and "Miocene nannofossils," I knew I had become a part of the team. That I was the only woman for hundreds of miles didn't matter.

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to have my share of successes, mixed in with a few failures. But one of the biggest lessons I've taken away is that in our industry, it isn't race or gender that defines us: it is our brains. And while there are some massively brilliant brains around, we get the most value via the 'Bigger Brain': applying and including everyone's experience, insights and know-how to create solutions to complex problems. And when you use that 'Bigger Brain' to start busting accepted dogmas, amazing things can happen.

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