

It is important to remember that it's hard for individuals to be well-rounded but it's not hard for teams to be – if you do it right



Rebecca Boudreaux President Oberon Fuels

Rebecca Boudreaux, Ph.D., President Oberon Fuels. Trained as a chemist, Rebecca is an entrepreneurial technology executive with a unique blend of technical skills and business development expertise. She has served on the management team or Board of Directors of various startup companies in the clean tech, life sciences, high tech, and non-profit sectors. Presently, she is President and Director of Oberon Fuels, a California-based company making DME

(dimethyl ether) as pathway to zero-emission mobility and carbon neutrality. As one of the top executives of the company, she gets the final say in recruiting the right person for the job and securing a diversity-driven workplace. Chris Barrett, Client Partner with Pedersen & Partners' Houston office, interviews Rebecca for the "Women Leaders – Driving Change" series. ▶

Chris: What are some key issues that need to be addressed in order to encourage more women to work in the renewable energy/cleantech industry?

Rebecca: Speaking of the key issues, I think more broadly about recruiting the most talented people, male or female, for your team, not just about recruiting women. Particularly now, I think that employees are really thinking about working conditions and perhaps the future of work. One thing that I think is a key issue for women, but also anyone who is the primary caregiver in their family, is the work schedule. In the COVID reality, we are obviously seeing people redefine how, when, and where we work. Children are unable to go to school. People are unable to get additional help to support their aging parents. This is not just a challenge for women, but for all caregivers. Balancing work and home has always been a challenge, but balancing work and home, from home, is the challenge of our day.

What does the future look like? Is it a hybrid of going to the office and working from home? What works for one person may not work for someone else. It's unlikely that every

remote worker can predictably be online from 8 to 5 every day now, but you have to trust the employees to get their work done. The details – how, when, and where they work – are less important. What is important is that everyone is on the same page with their expectations, workforce processes, and communication channels for their teams.

Flexibility is very important for everyone – not just for recruiting women in the renewable energy industry. Flexible working arrangements enable companies to include people who are single caregivers for their children or parents, or who are in similar situations. At the end of the day, we want the most diverse workforce. We want the best talent out there, and having the most options to get the work done is one way to do it. ▶



Interviewed by:

Chris Barrett is a Client Partner at Pedersen & Partners, based in Houston, U.S. With almost 20 years of Executive Search and recruitment experience, he has executed numerous senior leadership & technical leadership search mandates in the Oil & Gas, Renewable Energy, Energy Storage, Global Logistics, Supply Chain, Distribution & Transportation, Banking-Internet Security & Fraud, and FMCG sectors including Board Search & Review. Prior to joining Pedersen & Partners, he founded and successfully managed a full service Oil & Gas, Financial Services and IT recruitment company. A significant portion of his work has been focused on cross-border Executive Search assignments for senior executives with an emphasis at C-level, senior management and senior technical leadership. Chris holds a Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) in Finance and Financial Management Services from the University of Utah.

Chris: Will Oberon Fuels follow a deliberate strategy with regards to gender diversity, or is it more about just hiring the best person for the position? Is there any differentiation between them?

Rebecca: We will always look for the best talent out there, but we are simultaneously committed to a diverse workforce. Why? Because diverse workforces perform better. According to McKinsey, companies with a diverse workforce are 35% more likely to outperform those without diversity initiatives. Boston Consulting Group found that companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenue. Cloverpop discovered that when diverse teams make a business decision, they outperform individual decision-makers up to 87% of the time.

Diversity for us is not just gender, race or creed. It's diversity

of experiences. We look for people that bring a new element to the team – whether that is work experience, academic training, time in a different geographical location, etc. We want the most talented people out there and we want people who offer a unique perspective. It is important to remember that while it's hard for individuals to be well-rounded it's not hard for teams to be – if you do it right. People who have different life experiences, different workforce experiences, and who come from different places each offer a different perspective. There's a saying – “All of us are smarter than one of us” which I think captures this sentiment. ▶

Chris: What are some good examples, initiatives and/or policies that you have seen in your career, that may not be implemented in certain organisations, but that can help women become more influential within the market or within a specific industry?

Rebecca: The importance of having role models, mentors, guides, etc. can't be overstated. For example, many children start out interested in STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math – but lose interest or hope when they don't see adults who look like them, or who come from their backgrounds, in these industries.

In particular, it is important for young women to see other women further along in their careers in the renewable energy industry. It should not seem out of the ordinary to see a woman keynoting at an energy conference... but yet sometimes it still is. I think that getting out there, speaking at various conferences and being a role model as I do is important.

Progress is happening. Trucks, a venture capital firm in the Bay Area, has a policy – they will not allow any of their venture partners to participate on a speaking panel unless there is at least one other female panellist present. Event producers are making greater efforts to prioritise people of colour and women when slotting speakers, in a push for more diversity.

It is also important for young female professionals to continuously work on their professional development, becoming the best version of themselves. Different genders often ask for different things in their professional development, but what is important is that everyone has an opportunity to grow. ▶

Chris: What advice would you give to women who want to study or work in STEM, or who are either on the fence or wanting to enter an energy career or a STEM environment?

Rebecca: STEM can lead a whole variety of different careers. I am trained as a polymer chemist with a B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. in Polymer Science and Engineering. What I love about being trained as a scientist is that my education taught me how to solve complicated problems, and that translates across countless industries.

During my graduate studies, I was synthesising new polymers for applications in gene therapy, an area which uses DNA to treat genetic diseases. After spending several years making these materials, I then had to learn a new discipline – microbiology – to test them and see if they worked. I had to learn a new area of science, new terminology, and a new way of thinking. But most importantly, I learned to adapt quickly, understand new areas, and solve complicated problems with a limited amount of information.

For the past fifteen years, I have worked in early stage companies solving different problems. From the biotechnology sector during my time at Intezyne Technologies to the renewable fuels sector at Oberon Fuels... very different problems, but, at the end of the day, it's about unwinding complicated issues and figuring out how to address them one step at a time.

I think a STEM educational path is extraordinarily valuable, and can be used in numerous ways. Traditionally, scientists become professors or enter R&D for large corporations. However, more and more, you are seeing scientists using those same analytical skills they have developed over the years and branching out to develop policy for governments, launch or support early stage companies, become investment bankers and patent attorneys... applying their skills in different ways. ▶

Chris: When recruitment or hiring isn't a priority, do you ever maintain an emphasis on identifying female candidates in particular, for potential future roles and/or networking for future positions? Do you look at that as an emphasis? There is something of a lack of talent, especially within the renewable sector.

Rebecca: Even when we are not actually hiring at our company, we always keep our eyes open for the best talent, whether male or female. We really want the most talented people on our team. Diversity on multiple levels is most important to us. We want to find the best people to

help us solve complicated problems. It is important to build and maintain a network, but you never know when you can collaborate with someone who is in a different role today to help you solve a new problem for your company tomorrow. ►

Chris: Lastly, are you currently involved in any mentorship programs? You have had a successful career to date, so are you able to mentor other women right now?

Rebecca: The main organisation with which I have remained involved over the years is called **WOMEN in America, originally as a mentee over 10 years ago and now as an alumna.** The organisation is based out of New York City, and it was started by a group of women who met at the Forbes Most Powerful Women Conference. They recognised the need for women in the earlier stages of their career to have access to high-level female mentors and development opportunities outside of their companies. So they started the organisation, and I was a member of their first mentee class. For three years, I flew from San Diego to NYC three to four times per year on my own dime to learn from my mentors and to continue to develop professionally. At that time, I was transitioning from my first biotech startup, where I had sold my stake in my company, and I was determining what was next for me. This organisation was a game-changer for me! My mentors helped me clarify my vision, and translate my training as a scientist and my experience as a startup co-founder and executive to a new industry and the role I am in today. ■

