

**Marty:** Hi, everyone. And welcome. I'm Marty Stetzer, President of EKT Interactive in Houston. We're proud to be the podcast sponsor with the Society of Petroleum Engineers Gulf Coast Section. The SPE section was founded in 1935 and now has over 11,000 members. It is a volunteer organization that provides member forums to upgrade and maintain professional competency. This podcast is one of the learning resources available to the members, numerous on-demand webinars can be accessed at [www.spegcs.org](http://www.spegcs.org).

Today, our topic is the right leadership style for the right occasion. And I'll be speaking with Molly Laegeler, with over 20 years of petroleum engineering experience. Molly has worked with Chevron in locations as diverse as Indonesia and Midland. We're really happy to have her input on this topic, especially at this time of unprecedented developments in our industry. Molly, thanks so much for taking the time today.

**Molly:** Thanks, Marty. I'm really happy to be here.

**Marty:** Before we get started, can you give us a summary of your career, especially your time in Indonesia? How did you and your family adjust?

**Molly:** Thanks, Marty. Yes. So as you mentioned, I've been in the industry for a little over 20 years. I started in 2001 after graduating with a petroleum engineering degree from Missouri University of Science and Technology. I started in reservoir engineering, supporting fields in Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea, and that's really where I began my international travel. So I was very excited, especially right out of school to be able to go overseas, working in Houston, but a lot of visits. Then I continued moving down the west coast of Africa. So I did various reservoir in production engineering jobs, supporting both Angola and Congo.

Molly:

I also got interested in the economic side, the business side of things and received my MBA from Tulane University during this time. In 2009, I moved to our Deepwater Gulf of Mexico business unit, this limited the international travel that I loved, but did allow me to have my two boys during this time. And I also had my first supervisor position as a subsurface engineering lead for our Jack St. Malo Project. When our boys were three and five years old, we got the opportunity to move to Jakarta. So up until then, I traveled a lot, was always based in Houston and this allowed my husband, who is a hospital pharmacist to work in the Houston Medical Center.

Molly:

So looking at a significant change with him pausing his work and us moving the two only grandchildren on both sides of the family halfway across the world. Luckily, we found that not only our immediate family, but the rest of our family has an adventurous spirit as well. So we spent a year and a half in Jakarta, I was planning manager at that time. Then after that, we moved to the Island of Sumatra. We lived in a camp, the Duri Camp in the jungle for about a year and then moved to another part of the jungle also in Sumatra, in Rumbai Camp. This really taught us how to adjust to our surroundings and appreciate the difference in others.

Molly:

Then after four and a half years overseas, we moved back to the state. And I must submit, Marty, you talked about transition, and really the transition back to the states was harder than the transition overseas. When you come back, you expect everything to be the same and smooth, and of course, it's never quite like that. But after three years in Midland, I must admit we're really enjoying it here, transitioned back and feel good about being back and really enjoying my current job. I'm General Manager of Asset Development for Chevron's Permian acreage. And it's been great apply the leadership skills that I've learned from the states and what I've learned from abroad into the challenges we have here in the Permian.

Marty:

Molly, I was lucky enough to have a similar start to my career with Exxon. Fortunately though, we were not in the jungle. We moved to Singapore, which a lot of people consider Asia lite. But it was a new wife, a new baby, a new job, and a new country, I had never worked overseas before. And my first leadership assignment with the Singaporean was definitely a real experience. So let's discuss some of the leadership challenges that you've seen as you've progressed in these roles around the world, what is the first or most important thing that comes to mind?

Molly:

The first thing that comes to mind, especially when thinking about working overseas is how we navigate different perspectives, I imagine you saw that in Singapore too. We have different perspectives here in the United States, anywhere you go, but when you're overseas, at least they're perceived to be a lot different. And so what I found is that there's a couple things we can do to navigate between these differences, and the reasons we want to do that if we think about how we get the best most unique, most promising ideas, it's because of those different perspectives. And so if we don't let those different perspectives come out and people bring different experiences and ideas to the table, we'll never get to the most valuable decision or opportunity. So I think this one's really important for us where we're at in the world and wherever we're working.

Molly:

And so the few things I found there's four steps that I think make a difference. The first one is to make space for alternate views. That may sound easy, but I found it really doesn't happen naturally. You really have to make a concerted effort to ensure that all ideas are heard and that you actually celebrate the differences when people come up with different opinions. So it's the first thing you must do because if you don't do that, you don't have that environment, you'll never get those ideas out there.

Molly:

The second one I found is around positive intent and that may be a little different than other things that we've talked about in the past. But what I've found is that if we can get everyone to really understand that we're all here with some stated goal, with some stated reason that we're working for, and we're all responsible to achieve that goal then when someone asks a question or challenges someone their technical interpretation, whatever it may be, we can all realize they're asking that question because they really want to understand the answer and they really want to work together to achieve this goal, they're not just being a jerk.

Molly:

The third one is to listen for areas of agreement. Whenever we're in a debate whether it's a technical debate, more of a behavioral discussion, there's always some level of agreement there. Sometimes you have to look harder, but you can always find something. And if you're able to point this out, it does two things. It allows the conflicting views or people who have those conflicting views to realize, hey, we can't agree on something sometimes that's important, but it also helps clearly identify what the conflict is. So you can say these pieces, we agree on it's these one or two things that we disagree on and how can we work through those together?

Molly:

Then the last one is to pose non-judgmental questions. So as you get into, okay, this is where we have that conflict, making sure that you're asking questions around the data that you're asking questions around understanding the logic, and you're not putting judgment into any of those questions. So while you're doing that fourth one, you have to do all the others as well. So it's not sequential thing, it's that you have to have all four of those pieces, and I really saw this in my current organization, actually. And so as I was coming into this position in various different meetings, I would sense these currents of conflict in the background. Just you got a feeling that people weren't saying exactly what they thought about something, and I think we were sub optimizing some of our decisions. And so I worked really hard to celebrate when there were alternate views, I openly discussed the common goals and how we were all responsible for meeting those goals.

Molly:

I found areas where we did agree and then tried to really focus on asking those non judgmental questions to get out more information and understand people's logic. We recently had a discussion where we were comparing the performance from our non-operated developments and our operated development. The data was presented in a very transparent way, which was great. That's an important step as well, to make sure that everyone can see and understand the data. It didn't lean one way or another, it was just the true data. And what that led to was a really in-depth conversation around conclusions of why performance was different in different areas.

Molly:

I can't say that that meeting didn't have any tension, it did have tension. But is they had the tension between people that were all striving for an answer and they didn't see it the same way yet. But we worked through that tension and it was amazing because at the end of the meeting, which had a fair amount of in it. We didn't leave exhausted and drawn down, we actually left really excited because through that tension, I think we got to some really good conclusions that we could action.

Marty :

Molly, that was a great example. Let's move forward after allowing for diversity and your especially good comment on focusing on agreement, how do you build an effective team in this era of energy transition?

Molly:

That's a great question, Marty. As we look at energy transition, I think we all get a little nervous because we know that through the energy transition, there's going to be a lot of change and there's going to be a lot of change in a bunch of areas. So when I think about the energy transition, I think about how we lead through change and that's a super hefty topic, right? But I was enlightened a bit recently in Chevron, as in many of the companies right now, I believe we're going through a digital transformation. So a lot of things changing in the workflows and the way we're doing work. We have a very significant change in one of the workflows that impacts a lot of our petroleum engineers and our scientists within the organization.

Molly:

And so within that change, we explain the business case, the vast majority of people could logically understand the business case and we're in agreement with it. But we still just had a lot of people who weren't embracing the change, who real still fighting it a bit. And I was talking to one of the leaders in my organization about this and I was brainstorming, what do we need to do to get everyone aligned with this change? And do we need to talk about the business case again? And she stopped me and she said, "Molly, what we're really seeing is the grief cycle." And I have to admit, I looked at her for a bit and was like, "What in the world are you talking about?" It's just not something we talk about at work, right? It just doesn't make sense to me, but when she step broke it down for me, I think she's really onto something.

Molly:

So if we think about the grief cycle, it's denial, anger, bargaining, depression, finally acceptance where we'd want everyone to get to. And we had it all, we had people in denial who were still just pretending this wasn't going to happen even though we knew it was. We had some people who were just flat out mad. We had other people who were bargaining that said, "Okay, if I make this change in this little part, do I really have to change with the rest?" Or, "If I make this change instead, can we move forward?" And we had some people who were just pretty gloom about the whole thing. And then we have small percentage who are really accepting the change that we were in.

Molly:

And thinking about it through the grace cycle, just changes your lens at looking at your organization and what they're going through. And it really helped us at all different levels within the organization recognize the feelings that people were having, and most important, it helped us help them move faster through that cycle. And so what we saw is a lot more people moving through those stages and getting to that acceptance stages we were helping them instead of bombarding them with more and more and more business cases of why we needed to make the change. So I don't think we're 100% there yet Marty, but we're definitely getting closer. And as we go through the energy transition, maybe this mindset will just help us within our organizations, because we are going to see a lot of change.

Marty:

Your grief cycle comments are unbelievably interesting. And it seems to me now that employee motivation through that cycle might also be at the top of your list as a challenge today, is that true?

Molly:

Oh, that's very, very true. With energy transition, with COVID with working virtually, I think all of us even look at ourselves sometimes and have a problem to get motivated. So when you think about motivating a whole entire workforce, it's hugely important. And I won't pretend that I have all the answers, but I have to admit one of the best lessons I learned was when I was in Indonesia. And what we were doing at that time is we were going through our annual business plan cycle. And so you mentioned you work for Exxon Mobil, I'm at Chevron, I'm sure many listening are at the big companies and know that the business cycle is its own monster in itself. I'm hoping that you in the smaller companies don't have quite the monster, but I imagine you have your version of the monster as well.

Molly:

And we were going through that and I could tell right at the beginning, working with the team, they were struggling, they were stressed out and they really just weren't excited about starting the cycle again. And so I set them down and we walked through the work. And since I just had the planning manager job before it, I understood what the planning team really needed. And so what my team was putting together, yes, it was meeting those deliverables, but there were some things that we didn't have to do and weren't adding that much value, but adding a lot of work. So we worked through that, we were able to eliminate a few things.

Molly:

And then as we were going through this process, they set up a war room of types. And so it was a small room, it had three or four working stations in it. And they worked there together through most of the day as they were going through the business plan, work that our team needed to provide. And so every day I would stop by and just kind of touch base with them, see where they're at. See if there are any barriers I could remove or any questions that I could answer that would give them clarity. And at the end of the day, I would always stop by before I left and tell them, "Hey, it's about time to wrap it up. It's the end of the day, I know what you're working on is important, but we can come back and we can finish this and work on some more of it tomorrow."

Molly:

So we get through that whole business plan process and that's when the neatest thing happened. We had a little celebration after everybody was feeling good about it. And one of the main team members, he was kind of leading that group, he stopped me towards the end and he said, "Molly, when you would come by at the end of the day and talk about how we could wrap up where we were at and maybe even talk through that with us a bit, we stayed a lot later sometimes." And I was like, "Really [inaudible 00:16:07] let's talk through that, how can we change that next time? He goes, "No, no, we did even some of the extra QA and QC that you said we didn't need to do, but we wanted to do it because we wanted to have the best quality product so that we could all be proud of it in the end." And that's what motivation's about, right?

Molly:

That's what motivating our people is about, is ensuring that they want to do it, it's not anyone tell someone to do something, but having them take ownership in that work. And so after that, I really thought about how that environment was created because I'll admit it wasn't anything on purpose, I wanted to just make sure we turned in the information that we needed to turn in. But I think it was a couple things. One, it was finding meaning in their work. And so really sitting down in the beginning saying, you know what? If we give them this information from our field and they understand the

engineering behind it and our science behind it, it's going to help them make better decisions. And also identifying what's not going to help make a better decision and remove that so that they really felt what they had left to work was impactful and was going to make something happen.

Molly:

The second that was important was letting them know that I cared. By stopping by, part of it during the day for me, was to make sure that it was on track and that it was finished. But I realized, stopping by also helped them see that I did care about what they were and some of our conversations that maybe hit on kids or pets or sports also just show that I cared about their interests. And then the last thing I realized goes back to really our different perspectives conversation and that's at everyone's unique, and so what motivates them is going to be different for everyone.

Molly:

In our industry, some people are really motivated by the fact that we bring energy to the world. That's amazing when you think about it and that's really what we do. And that high level idea can be really motivating for some, where others that seems just too farfetched out there, it doesn't speak to them. And so maybe they really need to understand how if we have the best technical analysis here, it's going to impact what well pad we drill or what the length of that lateral's going to be for this area. And so they can get that immediate satisfaction as we develop that pattern, those wells, and we see the production that comes from them. So everybody's going to have different pieces of it that motivates them and finding that's important, but it was great hearing that and understanding what we do can really help motivate others around us.

Marty :

Molly, thanks so much especially for that last insight. It will definitely be valuable to the global SPE GCS audience and our own community of 10,000 EKT Interactive listeners. Do you have any recent events or webinars that you recommend for our communities so they can learn more about how to overcome common leadership challenges?

Molly:

Well, Marty, this one isn't a recent one, so I apologize for that, but it's one I continue to come back to, it's the Ted talk by Margaret Heiferman and it's called Super Chickens. It has a funny title and actually has some interest in ways at looking at things. Every time I listen to it, I pick out different pieces. And really when I started in this most recent job, I had my whole organization listen to it, because I think it sets the stage for how you feel about working together, creating teams, creating that motivation, creating that positive tension within your workforce.

Marty :

Molly, thanks again. If you want to learn more about the SPE GCs upcoming or on demand events go to [www.spegcs.org](http://www.spegcs.org). I'd like to thank everyone for listening. Our company name EKT Interactive stands for energy knowledge transfer, digitally capturing the extensive knowledge of industry experts like Molly. So if you are new to the oil and gas industry and want to quickly learn how this industry works, please check us out at [www.ektinteractive.com](http://www.ektinteractive.com).