

A Place at the Table

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ABSTRACT

Escalating and erratic energy prices and the omnipresent threat of rolling brown-outs to black-outs have given us a new awareness of energy and its critical importance to everything we do. The impact of escalating motor fuel prices in 2006 offers one example as we assess the greater costs of getting products from producer to consumer. This awareness offers us an incredible opportunity to redefine what energy managers should do, and what they should be.

Energy managers and energy management have historically been short-changed. As noted in a companion article, "Revitalizing the Energy Management Industry," there was a mad scramble in the 1970s to figure out what energy conservation measures saved energy. Out of that chaos, we developed an equipment focus, which relegated energy managers to the boiler room. Too many are still there.

It is time they crawled out. Today, more than ever, organizations need energy managers at the management table. Every person in the energy community has a vested interest in having "energy" take its rightful place at the management table. From organizations' business needs and missions, to our economy and national security, it has become an imperative.

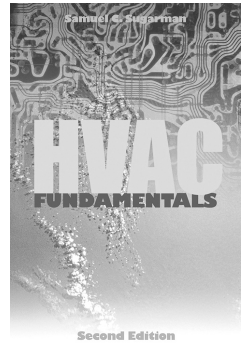
The place at the table will not be given to energy managers though; they will have to earn it. This article is designed to help energy managers take the necessary steps to gain that seat at the table.

INTRODUCTION

It is undoubtedly fair to say that every energy manager has experienced the frustration of knowing something needs to be done, but

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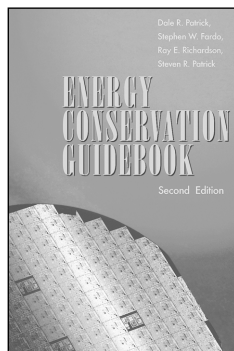


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has been unable to get the attention or the budget to make it happen. Frequently, they don't know how to make the internal sale, which is basic to gaining that attention and the needed funds.

It is time we put the *MANAGEMENT* in energy management. And give energy managers the tools to make that happen.

Energy managers have a key role to play in getting it done. This article speaks to energy managers and outlines seven steps every energy manager can take to get from the boiler room to the management table. We all have a great stake in helping those energy managers make the trip successfully.

SEVEN STEPS TO THE TABLE

Step #1. Gain Recognition

First, change the way you see your world. Start viewing the possibilities and opportunities to broaden the effective management of energy. Appreciate the huge importance of energy to your organization, and the absolutely vital role you play in making it happen.

Imagine for a moment that all energy resources in the United States were cut off for 24 hours... 48 hours... a week. What would it mean to your operation? In dollars lost? In mission aborted?

It's time we realized that effective management of this crucial resource is absolutely key to your organization's success. And you are at the heart of it.

Step #1, then, is for every energy manager (EM) to move toward the management table by truly internalizing what an important role he/she plays in making the organization operate more effectively. Energy permeates every corner of an operation. You cannot operate without it. *And it cannot operate effectively without you!*

All of us need to know what energy managers can do for us—and what we can do for them. A critical first step is to give “*manager*” equal or greater importance than “*energy*” every time we think *energy manager*.

Step #2. Rewrite the Job Description

Or write one. Organizations, which just “*sorta*” fell into a half-hearted effort to manage energy need to do some planning. Further, the job description integral to that planning should stress the management

aspects of the position.

The planning process is an excellent way for the EM to get his or her foot in the door. Write an energy master plan in which the text:

- a) identifies the energy manager position and directs a job description to be developed; or
- b) writes the job description into the plan.

Before I go on, notice I said energy *master* plan. There are two reasons our plan should be broader in scope than the old energy management plan. We have gone far beyond limiting our plans to building temperature ranges or instructions to buy a new boiler. In addition, if we are to give our audience a fresh perspective, we need a new title that alerts them that this is more than the same ol', same old.

Step #3. Develop an Energy Master Plan

This step should run concurrently with Step #2. The plan should not only establish the energy manager position, but offer direction to that office while creating a strong leadership component.

If we are starting from scratch, the preliminary step, in most cases, will be writing a one-pager emphasizing the critical need for an energy master plan (EMP). Or, to pull out the old plan, dust it off, and explain how things have changed—and the necessity of updating it.

The EMP should in part be a sales job regarding energy's crucial role in your organization's operations, meeting its goals, and its importance to the bottom line.[1]

Keep in mind that a well-written EMP, adopted by top management (preferably the board) paves the way for that trip to the management table. A major part of an EMP should be to define the critical role energy plays in every management decision. I have a good friend who puts it even stronger: "It's a license to steal." He's right! Before you are done carving out the energy role, others will definitely feel you are stealing—or at least encroaching on their territory. Expect a fight—subtle—but a fight nonetheless.

The NEW energy manager should definitely be on a level with his/her current boss, or above, on the organization chart. There are folks who won't like this. We are talking about a power shift and a budget battle.

This move, however, is not just to puff up the job or get the EM more money; it is a vital part of getting the job done. One cannot cause

an operation to run more energy efficiently without making changes. The energy manager cannot effect those changes buried in the boiler room—or buried at the bottom of the organization chart. If someone is to effect change, that person must be in a position to do so. Effective change does not come from wishes in the boiler room; it comes from knowledgeable contributions at the management table.

Which leads us to the next step, becoming knowledgeable.

Step #4. Do your Homework

No one is going to give you more responsibility or more respect. You have to earn it.

Every facet of an EMP underscores the critical need for knowledge an energy manager must have to do his/her job effectively. And it's more than knowing about new equipment, new systems, and other techie stuff. Energy efficiency measures, for example, must use the necessary energy, but must also protect the work environment. [2] Other EMP areas need to include supply purchasing, energy security, water and waste water management, transportation efficiency, environmental considerations (including emission reduction measurements), etc.

The new energy manager cannot be all things to all people, so an early responsibility will be to assess what your division can do in-house, what to delegate, what training might be needed, and what tasks can, and should, be outsourced. [3]

As suggested in my book, *Manual for Intelligent Energy Services*, this might be the perfect time to change the position title to "resource manager," as it is more indicative of the new range of responsibilities the EM holds. It could also serve to change the perspective of how people perceive you, your work, and your position in the organization.

Step #5. Build a Support Base

We are talking about a lot bigger job than the old EM job of picking the right new equipment/system/software. That's still important, but there is so much more to know—and people you can call on to help you. Consider how energy affects every aspect of the operation, where and how to buy energy most economically, when cogeneration, distributed generation or renewables should be part of the supply mix, and when availability/security becomes more important than price. It's all part of the new energy manager's knowledge portfolio and lexicon.

The last time I looked, energy managers were only human and

did not have more than 24 hours in their days, so they need to build a trusted cadre of support—internally and externally. That network, its quality and responsiveness, can make or break an energy manager—especially with the expanding EM responsibilities.

Step #6. Establish a Communications Strategy

There is an old saying that no one knows you can play if you don't toot your own horn. To paraphrase, no one knows what you are doing, can do, or even should do, if you don't have a systematic way of letting "them" know what's happening in your world.

The "them," the key audiences an EM has, includes: 1) top management, 2) middle management, 3) employees, 4) occupants, and 5) the public. Each audience requires a tailored message, sometimes a different means of communicating and even different timing. Be prepared for them to judge your message in a "What's in it for me" frame of mind, and present it accordingly.

We must not lose sight that a major purpose of the message is to help make the sale. Providing valuable information in a useable format is essential to opening communication conduits and keeping them open. [4]

Developing a quality communications strategy is basic to effective energy management. And to job preservation!

Step #7. Be a Leader

To manage is to lead. Demonstrated leadership is a key step. Creating or updating an energy emergency plan is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate that leadership. The specter of paralysis prompted by uncertainty is sufficient reason to create or update an energy emergency plan.

A sudden shortage of energy affects everyone, so a committee to review/build the plan should have strong across-the-board representation—and the clear backing of the administration. Such a plan needs clear lines of authority—with the energy manager in a key role. (While the plan may become essential to getting the job done, the process offers the EM an opportunity to reinforce his/her leadership position—a critical time to prove yourself as a leader.)

This step may be the toughest of all, but if you don't think of yourself as a manager, nobody else will. Managing time, budget, paperwork, and most of all *managing* people requires special talents and

concerted efforts. An EM's own job plan should include assessing what needs to be done, assigning priorities, determining who can best handle the tasks, and delegating authority. It's a tall order, and it won't happen overnight, but it must happen.

Your resources are broad: books, periodicals, conferences such as WEEC, workshops, consultants, and/or just perhaps your boss. Seek out your best resources and use them.

The time has never been better, and may not come again. Today, that place at the table has your name on it. *Carpe diem!*

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Dr. Shirley Hansen has been a recognized national and international leader in energy management, finance, and performance contracting since the 1970s. She received her doctorate from Michigan State University. Of the honors she has received, she is most proud of the university's distinguished alumni award and her selection by AEE for its Hall of Fame.