

Melody Meyer

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Linda [00:00:22] Welcome to our Voices Matter podcast. Our guest today is very, very special. She is a trailblazer for women in energy. She spent 37 years at Chevron, where she played a variety of leadership roles, including President Asia Pacific Exploration and Production, which was her last role there before she retired. She now serves on the boards of BP, pharma giant Adva and National Oilwell Varco A.V. She is a fierce advocate for women, a highly sought keynote speaker around the globe, and one of the nicest people you will ever meet and proud to call her a friend. Melody Meyer, welcome to the show.

Melody [00:01:03] Thank you, Linda. It's great to be here.

Linda [00:01:05] I'm so excited to have you here. We've had so many conversations about energy and all of the exciting things that you do. I want to start by asking you what drew you to the industry in the first place? Why did you decide to make the energy industry your professional career?

Melody [00:01:22] Well, I probably didn't have a lot of choice because I was literally born at an oil camp in North Dakota. So my father was a petroleum engineer and I grew up around the industry. Hearing the three P's at the dinner table, porosity, permeability, pore pressure my whole life. But as I went to college, I wanted to be a doctor. But I realized that, you know, just to go through and get out quickly and get into a career. I needed to do something that was a much shorter education. So I went into mechanical engineering. Absolutely loved it. And being here in Texas at that time, the energy industry was the place to be. So I hired on 40 years ago last year. So long, long, long career in this industry that I literally am passionate about.

Linda [00:02:07] What is it about the industry that drives your passion? Why are you so passionate about it?

Melody [00:02:11] We are an industry of incredibly talented people that have shared values working around the globe to deliver affordable energy to society and energy underpins economic growth. I've been in countries all over the world where I know the difference between energy, poverty and the energy that we enjoy every day. And we've through technology, evolution, smart people around the globe, we've been able to continuously deliver that affordable energy that we know. So I'm passionate about what we do in the in the world and the impact that we have and the responsible people that are behind it.

Linda [00:02:54] So, you know, one of the things that we talk about here on this podcast is how we tend to otherize each other or industries. And in this case, talking about the energy industry, I think the industry itself is otherized by many who either don't know or understand all the full scope of what the industry is about and how it operates. And certainly like any industry or any business there, you know, there are negatives and there are downfalls and there are things that happen. And in the energy industry, it's it's typically the negative headlines that get the most play. So what what is it that you think people don't know and understand about energy and why? And if they did know, they would maybe look at it a little bit differently and not tend to otherize it to the extent that that it is.

Melody [00:03:51] You know, as much as I love the industry, we have not done a good job explaining ourselves and the work that we do. And we have not been as open and about the about what we do and how we do it and what our technology does and what the benefits are to society. So I do think that we're always on our backfoot when it comes to expressing what we do. And we've also not been as good, in my opinion, in listening to societal expectations about our industry. So I think as we move in. I'm proud of what we've accomplished. We've we've done incredible things providing energy to the world. But I think as we move forward into this energy transition, we have a real opportunity to be much more on our front foot to describe the transition

in real terms so people can understand why, why the transition matters, what we're doing about it, why we're part of the solution as we listen more to societal expectations around reducing our carbon emissions throughout the world. The energy has a part to play and we can reduce carbon emissions throughout our entire value chain as well. So advancing low carbon, moving into the energy transition, I just feel like we have a real opportunity to be part of the solutions mentality and explain ourselves better. Historically, we haven't done very well yet.

Linda [00:05:15] Why do you think that is?

Melody [00:05:17] I know to some extent, you know, being a. A woman in a male dominated industry. I think that we could have done better listening to society had we had more women at parity in our industry. Who knows? I think that there is an opportunity for us to just be more open and transparent. And so I look forward with the energy transition that we're aggressively moving into and advancing more diversity throughout our operations and our organization. I think we have a real opportunity to be on our front foot here.

Linda [00:05:51] OK. So I'm going to come back to the woman in a male dominated industry. We're going to talk about that in just a minute. But since we're talking about energy transition and you are on the board of BP, BP recently announced a complete reorganization of the company. Net zero is the goal. I know you can't speak on behalf of the company, but can tell us a little bit about what BP is doing and how it is positioning itself in this energy transition. And what what it all really means.

Melody [00:06:23] So my my views today are really my own views and not necessarily those of my affiliated companies. But I will say that all companies today are looking very public companies for sure, or looking at environmental, social, government, governance issues, ESG. And so I would say in every boardroom in America, across the board, we're looking at our position on environmental, social governance issues. And with respect to BP and many of our colleagues in the industry, we're looking hard to see how do we how do we accelerate the energy transition and reduce our reduce emissions and costs the entire value chain. So what we what we know about energy is that there is and will be a continued increased demand for energy. But with that increased demand, we will be looking to reduce carbon emissions across the entire energy mix and meeting. You know, the biggest change, I guess, is there's more societal expectations around meeting that. So BP looked hard at how to progress a net zero carbon ambition and has communicated recently some aims within the company and within the world where we are working to meet some net zero carbon expectations across the board. And I'm just I'm pleased that we're doing it. And BP, I'm encouraged that other companies are looking to do the same thing across the board. But it's all about how do we provide more energy with fewer emissions and and more energy options. So that, you know, I kind of want to define the energy trends.

Linda [00:08:07] I want to ask you, because it's a term that we use the energy transition. So, OK, what does that really mean? Yeah. So go ahead. Define it for us.

Melody [00:08:15] For me, what it means and many of my colleagues in the industry probably share this. It's not off hydrocarbons to renewable forms of energy because there are no solar or wind or energy solutions that satisfy the need for the products that we use everyday in everyday life. For example, we will continue to need oil and natural gas, particularly oil, in terms of feedstock for materials. So if you look around this room, probably I've heard a statistic 87 percent of the things in the room are derived from hydrocarbons, the materials in our phones, the materials in our laptops, the materials and our clothes, our cars. And we need hydro. We need oil to be that feedstock, essential feedstock for materials that are essential to our quality of life every day. Natural gas will continue to need natural gas. Now, a lot of people talk about natural gas as a bridge fuel from hydrocarbons to other alternatives. But natural gas is a clean burning, cleaner burning alternative to different fuels. Oil combusted oil and coal particularly. And I just think that natural gas will continue to have a large role. But what will happen with the energy transition is we're going to be moving much more aggressively into wind, solar, hydrogen, biofuels, every form of opportunity, energy, alternative, which I don't like, that we're like energy renewables because they're not it's not either or it's. And and I think over time, with more choices, our consumers will move more towards the lower emission products. So companies like BP and others are working hard to provide much broader range of choices so that consumers can make a choice on a

broader mix. And then we can continue to use hydrocarbons for fuel stocks and that sort of thing. So the energy transition is a broader range, but many, many. Choices and alternatives in the mix.

Linda [00:10:22] And as you said, it's not an either or it's an and so it's not a zero sum game. It's not one or the other. Right. Right. Yeah. So from a consumer perspective, what is it that we as consumers can be doing? What is the role that we have to play in this energy transition? That is kind of a learning curve for all of us, because it's it's learning new ways of adapting.

Melody [00:10:48] Right. So to achieve net zero carbon or a net zero greenhouse gas emission world society has to be part of the equation. We have to adopt behaviors that are much more conservation minded and efficiency minded. There's countries in the world that are going to have to play a huge role in achieving net zero carbon emissions. We can't do it as a single country alone. It has to be all countries focused and on the on this. So conservation play a big role. I would say education plays a big role because I think with respect to climate, I think the climate crisis mentality can have some unintended consequences. But if we can all work towards the climate solutions mentality, I think we can drive real solutions. And part of it is getting educated and learning about energy, learning about the energy that you consume, how you conserve it. What are real changes you can make in your day to day life that could help how all countries will play a part in this. And so I just think it's a process of also being educated.

Linda [00:11:54] Yeah, I like that. Not climate crisis, but a climate solutions mentality. It's a completely different way of looking at it. It is, yeah. Yeah.

[00:12:08] Going want to take a moment to welcome our newest sponsor, BMW of West Houston. Full disclosure, I'm a customer and have been for the last several years switched from another brand which shall remain nameless. And I've never looked back from the Sudans to the s._u._v.s BMW of West Houston. We'll put you in the ultimate driving machine of your dreams. The X5 and the X 7. They're both on my wish list for when this podcast hits a million listeners. So please share away. Share away. A girl can dream. Check out this month's deals at BMWwest.com.

Linda [00:12:51] OK. So let's let's go back to more of your personal story and what it was like for you being one of the only women when you first started out, what was your first job in the industry?

Melody [00:13:03] By the way, I started with Gulf Oil, which was eventually bought by Chevron, designing offshore platforms and pipelines in that to be installed in West Africa. Wow. So from a very early age, I started traveling over to work with our contractors in France and then working in Angola and Nigeria and the Congo or Zaire at the time.

Linda [00:13:23] Oh, my goodness. OK, so how many other women were were with you? None.

Melody [00:13:29] I was the only woman engineer in the group. And to be honest, I was one of the very few in university in mechanical engineering. So one day I actually later in my career as I was working in Angola, one of my offshore superintendents came in to meet me new in the job. And he says, well, I've never worked for a woman before. So how is it? And I said, well, I've never worked for a woman before. So I don't know. And he said, OK, we'll get along great. And we did. But, you know, it it was not that unusual because it was all I knew. But over time, my expectations for more women in our industry grew. I think in Kazakhstan, I had a somewhat of an epiphany where I realized that my my team, many Kazakh and Russian women were looking to me as a role model. And I had never thought about that. I was a role model. I was always so focused head down on my job, my career, how I could create value. So then I started taking that job as a role model much more seriously. And I've been a huge advocate for the advancement of women in this industry. Ever since then. So it's been 40 years of at least 25 or 30 of that pushing very hard for the advancement of women.

Linda [00:14:48] Did you ever a time in your career, maybe in the early days when you you you felt like, I'm not sure if I can can get through this? Describe describe something like that for us.

Melody [00:15:02] You know, many obstacles. And but I would say no roadblocks because I always felt confident in my ability as an engineer, confident in my ability to add value to the

company. And when there were a lot of biases that I saw and experienced, you know, just blatant bias. Unconscious bias many, many times, you know, I would let that roll off. You know, I kind of had to accept the bias and silence and just decided that as long as I was very professional, got my work done, created value for the company. That that that would be recognized and rewarded. And it was I worked with fantastic male colleagues who were tremendous role models for me. And I would trust with some colleagues that were role models on the other side, you know, that I learned not to do. And particularly early in my career, it was kind of the good old boy system. And over time, we we could transition out to a much more professional development company.

Linda [00:16:08] So did you ever find yourself in a position where you had to put someone in his place for the way he treated you?

Melody [00:16:15] I have been in a very respectful way, because I think that you have to be constructive and people have to embrace the challenge. And I tried to be constructive to point out things to people that, you know, maybe they could have said something or done something a bit differently. And, you know, over time, as other women or underrepresented groups experienced more bias, I was much more vocal as a leader to ensure that we were being balanced and developing everyone to their fullest ability. I mean, the the business case for diversity was not proven. When I was young in my career, as I progressed in my career, that business case for the value that the company will have by being diverse is absolutely proven. And we know that. And so I no longer have to fight the uphill battle about the value. It's just how do we get there? And we're still one of the industries that's furthest behind in oil and gas. With respect to women and underrepresented groups and we have a lot more a lot further to go. And I am working hard in my current phase two of my career to continue to advance women in this industry because I know this industry can be so much better when we get to parity in the industry.

Linda [00:17:43] What do you what are you saying to young women today who come to you? As you say, you're doing so much work. Vacating four women, mentoring women in the industry and also outside of the industry. What what is your your best advice to women who find themselves in a position where they are not being there experiencing bias or whether it's conscious or unconscious? What is your best advice to them?

Melody [00:18:14] Well, my best advice to them from a career standpoint is to stay in line management, because I think to progress in this industry. There's you know, there's the profit and loss loss line management tap tracked and their staff and functional jobs. And I think it's very important for women leaders to stay in line management, because that's where you can make the biggest impact. And if you're a good leader, which means many, many women I know are very good leaders, we have good and bad, both men and women, but very good leaders. But if you stay in line management, I think you have the opportunity to create the most value and help more women and underrepresented employees behind you. So when you're in those line jobs, you have more ability. But when it comes to bias, I you know, I would just say, look, don't have a chip on your shoulder. Choose your battles wisely. Be respectful. Stay professional when others have bias. It's not your problem. It's theirs. And I always tried to to just rise above it and create value to me. My my biggest focus on the company was that if I could create value every day for the company, that I would be creating value for myself and my family as well. And it's just something that you can focus on every day in your life.

Linda [00:19:38] As you as you say in this phase two of your career as you're on the boards and you have your company, Melody Meyer Energy, to tell me more about what Melody Meyer Energy is is doing to advance the cause of the causes that you care about.

Melody [00:19:54] So Melody Meyer Energy is consulting. So I have been doing some consulting for a number of companies and that kind of entity that does that. I also formed a company that is not really fully stood up, but it's a company called Women With Energy. I do a lot of speaking, as you know, Linda, in the industry and you do too. But I speak a lot around the energy transition and also the advancement of women. And I'm writing a bit of a book around leadership because I feel like some of my experiences could help others. You know, if I can help anyone else. I actually was at a session recently where we had a panel of women talking about women on boards and what our experience was moving through our career, but also positioning ourselves for board work. And I thought how valuable it would have been for me five to 10 years ago if I'd had an

opportunity to sit in a session like that and hear from other women, particularly that had made this change. And so I'm doing what I can to just communicate my own experiences and see. And I know that not everyone is the same. But if we can learn from each other, then we should. And I will tell you, the very best thing in this industry that I have experienced, although we haven't made the progression towards parity as fast as I'd like and I'd like to see that accelerate. What I love about the industry is to see the women in our industry helping each other and really sharing their experiences and helping to advocate for each other. And that's been a tremendous positive over my 40 years.

Linda [00:21:34] Well, that's really that's really wonderful to hear because, you know, sometimes we hear stories about women not working well together and women not supporting each other. And and, you know, some women will say, you know, what are some of some of my worst bosses were were other women. But to hear you say that you are seeing more of the camaraderie, more of the mentoring and the let's kind of work this together. Where do you think that's coming from?

Melody [00:22:03] I just think that, you know, we're just we're generous to each other. And we we know the value of accelerating the women towards parity in our industry. So I think that we need to help each other get there. And I think it's. I don't know why there was a bit of competitiveness early in my career, but there were so few of us when we didn't even know each other. I think another big opportunity is that we're as an industry, we're much more connected with our men and women colleagues and the women in the industry that have networked quite well, which has been great for all of us.

Linda [00:22:45] What have you not done yet? That is on your your bucket. Either professionally or personally.

Melody [00:22:54] You know, I I think everything is on my bucket list, as is in the industry. I'm I'm very passionate around advancing low carbon and the energy transition and communicating that more effectively. So one of my bucket list opportunities really is to, you know, to help help communicate what we do and how we do it and our values and our people and why it's important that we all work towards a solutions mentality and provide energy, because it is we have to have both. We have to have energy for the quality of our lives. And we have to meet societal expectations for a very diverse set of fuel mixes that we all can benefit from. So I to me about I guess my bucket list is communicating more effectively and better over time.

Linda [00:23:48] Yeah. And I think it's it's so important for us to be having these these kinds of conversations about energy, particularly with, you know, climate being so front and center on everyone's mind. And and I like the way that you frame it as more talking about solutions as opposed to crisis. But I think it starts with recognizing that, you know, this is this is all our planet. You know, this is this is it. We've got to do something here. And it's heartening to hear that people within the industry recognize and understand that they're actually moving to do something about it.

Melody [00:24:25] We're passionate about what we do. Like I said earlier, fantastic people using technology and very, very creative ways to provide affordable energy with lower carbon emissions, lower methane emissions. And we're definitely part of the solution. And I think as we continue to get more diverse and move more aggressively into this transition, that will you know, we're just part of that that solution and the world. So I'm glad to see that we're communicating more effectively in this area.

Linda [00:25:01] Yes, absolutely. So as we wrap up, I wanted to ask you to just sort of leave us with some general words of hope, which is what I ask of all of our guests. We're living in such a crazy, contentious time right now. We seem to be divided on so many different issues. And yet there's so much more that we have in common than what divides us. So from your perspective, as a leader in an industry that is vital to our very existence, what are your words of hope for our our fellow human beings?

Melody [00:25:39] You know, I think I think dialog and even disagreement is healthy as long as we listen and we're constructive and we're not offended by the differences that we're actually seeking to find the opportunities. So I I welcome dialog. I think there's opportunities. You know,

when when a question comes up, there's opportunity to discuss it respectfully. But I think the most important thing for all of us is to listen and to not only listen, but take that listening and be constructive and see how we can bridge through into a constructive solution versus highlight the differences and walk away. And that's where I want to be. I want to be in the solutions and the solutions mentality. And in the solutions for the industry and for women.

Linda [00:26:28] And that's why I love you so much, because I'm right there with you, OK, in the solutions side of it. And and when you say, listen, I'm, It literally gives me chills to hear you say that, because I think that's the key as well. And that is actually one of the taglines of this podcast. It's permission to speak. It's giving people the permission to speak, but also having the courage to listen with an open mind, because that's really where where I think we can begin to come together.

Melody [00:26:59] I agree.

Linda [00:27:00] Yeah. So thank you, Melody. I really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughtful perspective with our audience. And thank you for giving her permission to speak and for having the courage to listen. And by the way, if you like what you see and hear on this podcast, please go to all those different platforms, the platform of your choice and subscribe and leave us a good review and let us know what you think about what we're doing and engage with us. We want to know what you're thinking out there. So thanks for joining us. And we'll see you next.