

Continuing education in large companies: A HIGH-PERFORMANCE MODE



No matter whether they work for themselves, an SME or a large employer, engineers gain in many ways by taking professional training throughout their careers. This is the first of a series of two articles discussing engineers who work at large companies that incorporate continuing education into their organizational culture.

EMPLOYERS THAT VALUE EXCELLENCE

Upon completing her engineering studies, Geneviève Gauthier, Eng., was first hired as a research engineer by Paprican (now FPInnovations), but on condition that she earn a master's degree! "That condition totally suited me," she says, "because I wanted to refine my analytical skills and concentrate more on my field of practice. During the

five years I worked there, I had the opportunity to spend a year in Atlanta, where I finished my master's degree in the science of manufacturing paper."

Geneviève Gauthier took many other training activities during her time at Paprican: a pulp and paper specialization course, a business plan preparation and negotiation course, and many others. "My employer encouraged its employees to continue their education and invested in their desire to improve. Three and a half years after I was hired, I was promoted to head of the business units."

In 2005, this engineer joined the Natural Gas Technologies Centre and found that the organization valued continuing education just as much. "Once again, training was an integral part of my job. I was able to improve my English and learn the techniques that we were trying to develop."

She worked first as a project engineer and was later appointed to the position of director of business development, where she took training activities concerning various aspects of management.

"I like to learn," she explains. "Not only did I find personal satisfaction in learning, it allowed me to become a resource person in specific areas."

"IN MY VIEW, CONTINUING EDUCATION OPENS DOORS AND HELPS US BE MORE COMPETITIVE AT A TIME WHEN EVERYTHING IS CHANGING RAPIDLY."

"As for the employers, continuing education assures them that their employees stay 'ahead of the game.'"

Now the national director of Econoler, this seasoned manager is often asked to provide training herself. "I provide more and more training, which is in itself a challenge. I have to be sure that I perfectly understand my subject, which forces me to perfect my knowledge." Geneviève Gauthier points out that the continuing education of employees is an integral part of Econoler's strategy. "An annual budget is planned for each expert, based on individual aspects that need to be worked on and the company's goals. Professionals appreciate this approach, which helps them develop themselves and go further. It's good for both the employee and the employer."

OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK

Sigrid-Audrey Richard, Eng., always believed in continuing education. "In my view, it broadens horizons and opens doors," she says. "It also helps us be more competitive at a time when everything is changing rapidly."

Now a Senior Process Safety Engineer at Rio Tinto Kennecott Copper, Sigrid-Audrey Richard attributes the beginning of her professional development to exceptional circumstances: "I was a chemical engineer by training and worked for Tetra Tech for seven years. During that period, I was 'loaned' to Ultramar, which offered me a training opportunity in the

United States that would enable me to become a process safety auditor. This type of position was unusual ten years ago. That is how I became a leader in risk analysis, change management and petrochemical accident investigation." She continues: "I got my current job thanks to this expertise." At Kennecott, which is based in Salt Lake City, Utah, Sigrid-Audrey Richard is required to take dozens of occupational health and safety-related training activities every year. On her own initiative, she has taken 14 additional training activities since 2011, which have covered various fields - risk analysis, mechanical integrity of equipment, etc. - and helped her develop herself even more. Not to mention her MBA, which she earned in 2013.

"I am learning new investigation techniques and discovering tools that are often better than the ones that are recommended. All of this training may also come in handy one day if I ever change positions because they allow me to create useful professional contacts."

"Occupational health and safety is a priority for my employer," she adds. "Related training activities are given on site or at an outside location. My boss also encourages cross-training activities for greater complementarity: We create training opportunities for our colleagues on certain subjects involved in our work, which lets us pool our knowledge."

Sigrid-Audrey Richard has been a trainer for a few years and likes to pass on what she has learned. "Training is an undeniable asset. However, developing expertise requires a long-term vision, from both the employer and the employee. You have to believe in it and nurture it."

In the next issue of PLAN, this column will discuss the similarly important role of continuing education for engineers working at SMEs.