

Interview series.

Leaders making a difference, 2024

International Women's Day Edition



Brenda Allen

VP, Health, Safety, Security & Environmental,
Motiva Enterprises

Brenda Allen has spent her career advocating for safety, security, and environmental best practices within the oil and gas industry. After receiving her MS in Hydrogeology, Brenda worked as a Geologist before holding a global leadership role at Shell where she was responsible for environmental management across all Shell sites throughout the world.

Brenda now heads the health, safety, security, and environmental operations at Motiva Enterprises, a Houston-based company that refines, distributes, and markets petroleum products. She recently spoke with dss+ about supporting the experts on her team, allowing equal opportunity for everyone to flourish, keeping her values in generosity and how these ideas can benefit anyone in a leadership role.

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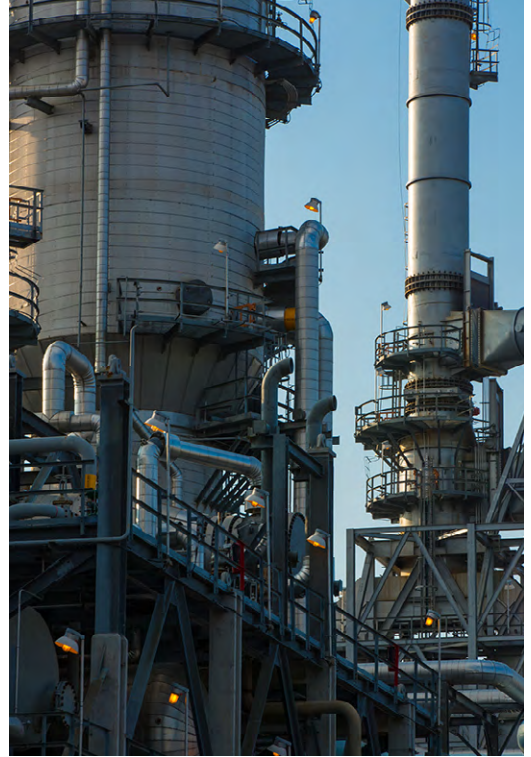
You have a background in geology. What influenced your early career and how did it lead to your career in petroleum?

I always wanted to go into the soil and groundwater remediation field and focus on groundwater clean-up to really clean up our Earth. I spent a few years consulting before joining Motiva and I will tell you that that was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I've seen how the petroleum industry has really progressed both in environmental and safety performance which has been very rewarding.



You bring nearly 30 years of experience in safety, security, and environmental management to your position. What elements of the more recent part of your career journey are you most proud of?

Reflecting on where we were 30 years ago, to where we are today is powerful and I'm very proud of it. At the same time, I'm part of an organization that still sees that it can do better and now, we're on this journey for improving our safety culture. Even though we had our best safety performance last year to date, people are still risking getting hurt in our facilities. Our recent efforts have been around driving communications between the contractors doing the work and our operators that are permitting the work. It's those conversations that can make changes in the way we do work. We have all the rules in place, we have the engineered systems, and now it's really focusing on people making the right decisions, not because it's a rule but because they're committed to working safely.



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Describe your leadership style and how you stay motivated and inspired as a leader.

I'm more of a democratic coaching collaborator. I like to receive input and I have a very strong safety and environmental team that are the experts. They're the ones who know what's happening on the ground. That's where the collaboration comes in but at the same time, it's very important that we make decisions quickly because we're in a very fast-paced work environment.



My role is to set direction but then make sure that they have the resources and support they need.



In your current role, you oversee the safety and environmental operation of Motiva's assets on an enterprise-wide level. How do you juggle your day-to-day responsibilities while still managing your overall responsibilities as a leader?

It's having trust in your team and allowing them to do their job. They're experienced and skilled to know when they need additional support. My role is to set direction but then make sure that they have the resources and support they need.



What is the best leadership advice you've ever received?

Stay true to your values and be generous. Treating people with kindness, providing support when needed and accepting that not everyone is going to do things the way I do them. There was a point in my career when I was battling to get ahead and to get people to do things my way. It took a couple of years to see how certain behaviors as a manager can negatively impact people. Now that I'm older and wiser, I understand teamwork and the importance of loosening the reins, working with your team's strengths, and giving them the support when needed.



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Why do you think health safety and environmental compliance is so important in your industry?

The petroleum industry is very dangerous. When people don't follow the rules, or we don't have the controls in place, bad things can happen. And most compliance requirements are there because someone died, or there's been a significant environmental impact. Compliance is mandatory because you can have catastrophic release, you can have explosions, and you can have serious injuries. Sometimes I lose sleep over what could go wrong if we're not complying with our requirements.



What advice would you give to women who are interested in this industry?

Women should explore careers in the petroleum industry because there are opportunities for whatever your interests are. Whether you're in engineering, finance, or communications, we're a fully integrated industry that has opportunities for everyone. Many of us at Motiva are working moms and Motiva's health and wellness benefits helped to support my family while the company gave me the flexibility to manage my family obligations.

The other thing in our industry is most people stay. I've grown with a lot of my colleagues and our children have grown up together. As women, we appreciate the family atmosphere and the caring we have for each other both as work colleagues and as parents.



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