

A Business of Relationships

Boynton goes beyond finance as CFO of Royal Dutch/Shell

The role of chief financial officer has changed dramatically in the last decade. No longer is the CFO merely a finance expert. Now, chief executive officers expect a partner who knows the industry and can help guide the company's strategy while explaining it to investors and others.

At Royal Dutch/Shell, that person is **Judy Boynton, '78**. "More and more, senior executives are called on to be flexible, adaptable, willing to listen, and continually willing to learn," said Boynton, who is the first woman, first American, and first Shell outsider to hold the company's top financial post.

Boynton, 47, spent 20 years at Amoco in finance, strategic planning, and mergers and acquisitions. She returned to the oil industry in June 2001 following a rocky three years as executive vice president of business development and CFO at the faltering Polaroid after the popularization of the digital camera ate into its profits.

That experience, she said, contributed to her own growth as an executive. "I knew going into Polaroid that this was a company in the midst of a turnaround. But what it gave me was the ability to manage in a much different business environment. I was stretched. The communications challenges were large. And that's good for [personal] development."

Being forthright in a variety of situations is serving Boynton well in her

new position, where she has overseen Shell's acquisition of Enterprise Oil, Texaco's interest in two joint U.S. ventures, and ongoing negotiations for Pennzoil-Quaker State. Boynton is poised, cool, and very careful—her communications training at Polaroid shows through in the precise care she takes in choosing her words. She is also very engaging, and this skill is particularly important at a global company like Shell.

"The energy business is a business of relationships, because our projects are very long term and they're often significant in a macroeconomic sense to the partners with whom we work," Boynton said. "The ability to understand different cultures, different countries, and different perspectives is important for maintaining those relationships over a long period of time."

Boynton, who is based in London, has been interested in working with developing countries since the early days of her career. Her undergraduate degree at Wellesley was in math and economics—"I'm analytical by nature," she said—but she also spent a

year abroad at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England, which had visiting scholars from Asia and Africa. That's partly why the oil industry is such a good fit for her as CFO, she said. "You must look at the business from someone else's perspective to understand what their needs are and how you can create solutions that are mutually beneficial."

Boynton brings a deep knowledge of the oil industry to Shell; at Amoco she worked in the chemical, exploration and production businesses, as well as the refining and marketing businesses. Even so, during her first three months on the job at Shell, she visited operations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, and the United States, and she plans to visit the company's Latin American and Canadian operations next. "It's important to see the scope of the company firsthand and to meet members of the finance community in the various countries," she said.

This kind of on-the-ground insight is key, Boynton said. "Strategy is not an exact science. It is really understanding the business, understanding your partners and customers, understanding the competitive environment, and always looking for win-win opportunities. CFOs must be able to participate well in the decision-making process in total."—Jennifer Vanasco



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