

Chemical Engineering Leadership Seminar Series

Top 5 Lessons from a Career as a Chemical Engineer

Stephan Whitley

BS 1989

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Wednesday, October 7, 2015

Lecture: 2:30-3:30 p.m. PAA A110

Reception at 3:30 p.m. in Benson Lobby

Abstract

"I have a fantastic job. I am 48 years old. I am semi-retired. In other words, I work 50% of the time. When I work it consists of flying all over the world looking at factories and chemical plants."

Alumnus Stephan Whitley attributes where he is today to a combination of luck, his chemical engineering education and five lessons he learned along the way. Through his seminar, he will address these lessons and the importance of intrapersonal skills, teamwork, driving to the root cause, good problem solving, effective communication, and appreciating one's support network. Changing trends within the industry will also be discussed.

Speaker Biography

Stephan Whitley graduated from the University of Washington in Chemical Engineering in 1989. His first job was at Exxon in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana refinery as a process design engineer. During his eight years at Exxon, Stephan performed a variety of jobs from process engineering, to refinery planning to process control. In 1997, he left to start a consulting firm with two older associates who had retired from Dow Chemical. In 2010, Stephan left that firm and started his own consulting firm finding projects for retired engineers and technical experts. Projects can range from helping clients troubleshoot specific reactor technology, to helping with process design or capital project management, to finding ways to reduce costs to due diligence projects. Stephan's time is focused on due diligence and analysis. Due Diligence projects typically involve evaluating chemical and manufacturing businesses and plants, helping investors or buyers determine how much to pay for them and then producing presentations of findings to share with key stakeholders such as the Board of Directors.

Throughout his career, Stephan has been to 200-300 factories in all parts of the world ranging from oil refineries to fine chemicals to textile fiber plants to perfume manufacturing. He has consulted for companies such as Exxon, Valero, LyondellBasell, DSM, Celanese, Koch Industries, Flint Hills, SABIC Innovative Plastics (formerly GE Plastics), Michelin, Georgia Pacific, Invista (Dupont Nylon), Afton Chemical (formerly Ethyl), Valspar, International Flavors and Fragrances, Symrise, Aleris, Kraton (formerly part of Shell), Noveon (now Lubrizol), Blackstone Private Equity, and AEA Investors.