

# WORKING

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## Break into the OIL & GAS INDUSTRY



Lorraine Hjalte, Calgary Herald  
With the oil and gas industry so pervasive in Calgary, making contacts to break into the industry should be relatively easy.



Catherine Brownlee

**“The oil and gas industry, particularly, is an anomaly because we're like a tiny little family. We all started at the same place: at the bottom.”**

CATHERINE BROWNLEE  
OF PROMINENT PERSONNEL

### Headhunters parlay experience into how-to guide for aspiring energy professionals

DEREK SANKEY  
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Many people across Canada, and indeed the world, hear stories about the lucrative oil and gas industry in Calgary and want a piece of the action, only to arrive to find disappointment.

Now, a couple of veteran headhunters are trying to dispel some myths and break down barriers to entry. “The oil and gas industry, particularly, is an anomaly because we're like a tiny little family,” says Catherine Brownlee, president of oil and gas recruitment firm **Prominent Personnel**. “We all started at the same place: at the bottom.”

More often than not, people who want to break into the oil and gas industry have to be willing to start below the level they've achieved in other industries, until they've “earned their stripes” and the respect of “the family,” says Brownlee.

“I have yet to see a case where a sales manager from the pharmaceutical industry, say, is able to successfully cross over to a sales manager in the oil and gas industry,” she says, adding that despite rigorous training in pharmaceuticals, energy firms want to see you sell energy products before they'll acknowledge the experience.

Misconceptions about the energy industry continue to hamper many people's efforts to enter it at all levels and areas of expertise.

“I believe that 99 per cent of people from other industries and countries have this mind block that Calgary oil and gas is hard to get into,” says Brownlee. “I'm not going to say it's not (difficult), but if you connect the right dots, it's actually quite easy.”

Brownlee and a colleague, Heather Johnson, recently published a book called *Want to Work in Oil and Gas*, meant to parlay their combined experience into career success for those who want a piece of the oil and gas action.

Brownlee recalls her own experience breaking into the industry and says it reflects one of the critical elements of the process: getting in front of the right people.

“In Calgary, the person to the right of you and the person to your left is either in oil and gas or knows someone in oil and gas,” she says. “Start there.”

Brownlee's entrance into the industry came unexpectedly, when she was volunteering for a gym-and-swim program for preschoolers at the Eau Claire YMCA. One of her favourite children, Curtis, had a father in the industry.

Upon applying blindly for a sales position with an oil and gas service company, she turned up for the interview and it was Curtis's father across the table. She started with the company two weeks later.

“If I'm awake to opportunities in front of me and I want it bad enough, with pure intention you will attract it,” says Brownlee.

The industry generally expects you to move to Calgary and establish roots to prove you

are serious about a long-term career in the industry, she says. “It's connecting with the right people, being in the right places, joining the right associations, getting involved with the charities that other oil and gas people are involved with,” Brownlee says.

For example, the Calgary Herald's Oil and Gas, Engineering and Technology Career Fair is being held Oct. 2 at the Telus Convention Centre — a perfect place to rub shoulders with key industry recruiters.

Johnson, the co-author of Brownlee's book and an oil and gas recruiter, says the best job searches are often those done without a resume, although a polished resume is also a prerequisite.

“A good resume is like a formality,” explains Johnson. “In the very best job searches, there is no resume, just some very well-crafted letters.”

Research also pays off. One of her clients, a former telecommunications professional, carefully researched a corporation's information technology strategies and sent off a letter outlining what was working, what wasn't, and how his skills could help fine-tune their IT strategy with big payoffs for the company's bottom line.

“The VP phoned him back upon receiving it and gave him an interview,” says Johnson. “He got the job.”

Victor Luhowy, president of **Mystique Energy**, says many people miss out on opportunities because they don't understand the true scope and breadth of the industry.

“There are about 700 oil companies in Western Canada,” says Luhowy of the different oilfield service, exploration, production and related energy firms of all sizes. “All of those (companies) provide really great opportunities for anybody who wants to get into the industry.”

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Competition #: 2007-0154 Closing Date: October 9, 2007

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Calgary Herald  
Human Resources  
Department  
215 - 16th Street S.E.  
P.O. Box 2400, Station M  
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T2P 0W8

DEADLINE  
Wednesday, September  
26, 2007

Only applicants selected  
for interviews will be  
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No phone calls please.

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- previous Executive Assistant experience an asset
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- highly proficient in computer programs - Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Powerpoint), Microsoft Outlook, and the Internet
- executive-level writing skills are vital
- superior organization and time management skills
- excellence in attention to detail and accuracy
- experience working with budgets, financial reports, invoicing, timesheets, schedules and spreadsheets is essential

#### RESPONSIBILITIES:

- provide executive-level administrative support to the Vice President of Manufacturing & Distribution, including managing schedules, co-ordination with other Herald departments, work on confidential files, answering and responding to phone calls and correspondence
- co-ordinate travel arrangements for Vice President of Manufacturing & Distribution
- prepare budgets, expenses, invoices, and department payroll
- accurate and efficient preparation of meeting minutes



**CALGARY HERALD**

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### RPS ENERGY

RPS Energy and RPS-APA are part of the RPS Group, an international consultancy providing advice upon the development of natural resources, land and property, the management of the environment and the health and safety of people. RPS Energy operates worldwide from regional offices in Canada, USA, Europe, Asia and Australia.

RPS-APA has offices in Calgary, Halifax, Dallas and also Houston. We are presently recruiting for all offices in response to increased demand and global market opportunities.

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##### OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

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- Personnel: Focal point for our consultants' training & support requirements.

##### SEISMIC OPERATIONS

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10 years in technical & managerial roles in 3D Land, TZ & Marine projects. Foreign language skills (Russian, French, Arabic, etc.) an advantage.

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