



# Sloan Career Cornerstone Center

## Profiles of Chemical Engineers



**Deborah Grubbe**

**Vice President – Group Safety  
BP, p.l.c.  
London, England, United Kingdom**

**Education:**

B.S. - Chemical Engineering, Purdue University  
CPGS – Chemical Engineering, University of Cambridge, England

**Job Description:**

Vice President – Group Safety, BP

**Advice to Students:**

"I believe the experience women have as chemical engineers is greatly determined by their mindset. I have found that people will treat you with respect if you behave in a manner that calls for respect."

**Interview:**

"I have worked as a chemical engineer for twenty-seven years and currently am Vice President of Group Safety for BP, which is the fifth largest company in the world. I just joined BP and previously worked for DuPont. At DuPont I held director level positions in operations, engineering management and safety. My responsibilities in all of these positions, at both BP and at DuPont, include setting strategic direction and actions to support business success. I started my career with summer jobs at various firms and tried to find out what I wanted to do. I was not well suited to research, so I explored design engineering. But my skills in design were not yet advanced enough and I moved on to work at a plant site in manufacturing. I found that I really enjoyed this work, the interaction with people, and the implementation of engineering concepts.

I am licensed as a Professional Engineer. To become licensed, one must take two eight-hour examinations. The first is taken at the end of college and the second is taken after four to five years of work experience under the guidance of a licensed Professional Engineer. When I got my license, I hung it on the wall in my office to make a statement that I was serious about what I was doing. This statement was necessary for a woman in this field in 1984. However, I believe the experience women have as chemical engineers is greatly determined by their mindset. I have found that people will treat you with respect if you behave in a manner that calls for respect.

I would advise students to choose a field of work that they are excited about. Be sure you have entry-level credentials and be willing to work hard."

## Interview Segments:

Q: What kind of work do you do?

▶ Grubbe: I provides safety leadership for the world's fifth largest corporation - BP.

▶ Q: When did you know you wanted to become an Engineer?

▶ Grubbe: I knew after my junior year in high school when I spent one week discovering what engineering was. I wanted to be able to support myself and to make good money. Engineering allowed that.

▶ Q: What was your college experience like?

▶ Grubbe: Fantastic! It was hard work, but I played hard, too. I joined a sorority, and was able to study with other women engineers. We learned a lot from each other!

▶ Q: Did you co-op while you were an undergrad?

▶ Grubbe: No, I wanted to finish in four years, and so I did summer internships instead. They enabled me to get the work experience that I needed. I was lucky to get a summer internship every summer! Even after my freshman year!

▶ Q: How did you get your first job?

▶ Grubbe: I interviewed through the university placement service, and ended up with 17 job offers!

▶ Q: What's the most rewarding thing about being an Engineer?

▶ Grubbe: Great job! Meet great people! Get to travel all over the world and get to know folks in China, Japan, Australia, and Brazil. Really very, very special work, and it helps the world be a better place, too. I have worked on super projects that make things that save people's lives!

▶ Q: Do you spend a fair amount of time traveling?

▶ Grubbe: Yes! In fact, when I go on vacation, I want to stay at our beach house and NOT travel! I am crossing the Atlantic Ocean right now as I type this!

▶ Q: Do you have a mentor?

▶ Grubbe: Or did you in your college years? Yes, I had many mentors over the years, mostly men. They were very helpful to me, and I owe them a lot.

▶ Q: Do you find yourself working more in a team situation, or more alone?

▶ Grubbe: I have always worked in teams. The world works in teams. Team skills are critical to develop.

▶ Q: Do you find you are able to balance work with social/family life while working in your current job?

▶ Grubbe: It is hard to do, but possible if you have an understanding spouse or partner. You must choose your partner well. It is probably the most important decision in your life. Big jobs with big salaries take a lot of time. However, it is important to put family first. It can be done, and don't be scared away from it.

▶ Q: If you had to do it all over again, would you still become an Engineer?

▶ Grubbe: ABSOLUTELY!!!

▶ Q: Did you think that school prepared you for the way the work gets done in the real world?

▶ Grubbe: In some ways, yes. I took advantage of lots of extracurricular things. The summer jobs really helped the most, though.

▶ Q: Where do you see jobs for Engineers in the future? What should students be doing to prepare themselves to take on those roles?

▶ Grubbe: Engineering is a great field, and very wide open. The bio thing is big right now, and students in high school should take all the math and science they can get their hands on. They should also learn to speak a foreign language.....it really helps! I speak Spanish, and it makes a difference!

▶ Q: What other advice do you have for students?

▶ Grubbe: Have fun and enjoy! Don't get too stressed out!