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EnergyFactor
By ExxonMobil



Lauren Fortson Ray: She works in oil or gas

When people ask what I do for a living, the simplest reply is, "I'm a geologist in the oil and gas industry." What I should really say is, "I'm a geologist in the oil or gas industry." That's because my job is to determine which of the two energy sources, if either, we're most likely to find. Because when it comes to the bidding process, knowing the difference is tantamount to success.

I'm originally from Detroit. A track and field scholarship took me to Vanderbilt University in Nashville for college. I realized while minoring in geology that I enjoyed it far more than my communication of business strategy major. So, after graduating, I got a master's in geology at the State University of New York in Buffalo.

I'm a detail person, so being a geoscientist was the perfect career choice for me. Whether I'm analyzing a seismic image of a reservoir or studying a hydrocarbon molecule on a shale sample, my goal is to piece together tiny bits of information to map out what lies beneath the surface.

I joined ExxonMobil five years ago and today am part of a team that explores the vast expanses of the Gulf of Mexico, looking for oil or natural gas resources.

Around a year ago, I had one of the most exciting experiences of my career. We were mapping seismic images of the Perdido Fold Belt in the Gulf of Mexico. We knew there was a high chance that we would find either oil or natural gas because the seismic images showed great evidence of hydrocarbons beneath the earth's surface.

We presented our evaluation to management, detailing the findings and probability of success. That in and of itself is a big deal. I mean, if it were easy to find oil or natural gas, everyone would be doing it!

While we were pretty confident in our predictions, we weren't starting the drilling operations just yet – we still had to win the bid rights to the area.

We all held our breaths as we watched the bidding process on our internal broadcast system. When the winner was announced, I felt like I was going to hyperventilate: we got it! Because of our detailed analysis, management bid confidently, knowing the reward could be much greater than the risk.

The best part is that I'll stay on the project into the next phase, the actual drilling. Believe it or not, it gets even more detailed from here on. We'll be designing a well and predicting a lot more, including down to what the sand will look like in that well. Being part of a team that may make an oil or natural gas discovery is quite exhilarating.



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