

Leadership Lessons

An Interview with Robert B. Catell,
Chairman, Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center at Stony Brook University and
Chairman, National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Catell was formerly the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of KeySpan Corporation and KeySpan Energy Delivery, the former Brooklyn Union Gas. His career with Brooklyn Union Gas started in 1958. Following National Grid's acquisition of KeySpan Corporation, Catell became Chairman of National Grid U.S. and Deputy Chairman of National Grid plc. He currently serves as Chairman of the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center, National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium, and is Chairman Emeritus at Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School. Catell received both his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from the City College of New York and is a registered Professional Engineer.



Robert B. Catell

long distance circuits in the basement of a building in Manhattan when I saw an ad in the newspaper for Brooklyn Union Gas, which was hiring engineers. I applied for the job and was accepted and worked there for 50 years, retiring as U.S. Chairman of National Grid.

Along the way I had many different jobs at Brooklyn Union in engineering, sales, rates and regulation, and in gas supply. I was promoted to President and CEO in 1991 and led the company through a number of mergers and acquisitions to become KeySpan,

the largest gas utility in the Northeast and the fifth largest utility in the country, which was acquired by National Grid in 2007.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership?

A leader needs to be able to articulate and communicate a vision for people to follow. It needs to be credible and achievable and something the team can relate to and feel good about. The vision should have strategic goals and provide for suitable rewards if achieved by the individuals and the team. A leader needs to be able to create a culture of people working together as a team to achieve the goals. A leader needs to set the example by practicing what is preached, by walking the walk, not just talking the talk. The individuals and the team should be rewarded for their accomplishments and counseled when needed to achieve their goals.

You have a long history of supporting nonprofits and giving your time and energy

to philanthropic work. Where did your passion for philanthropy develop?

My passion for philanthropy or helping those in need originated through my mother, who always tried to help those less fortunate, and taught me to do the same. She instilled in me the value of giving back when able and to "do the right thing." I was fortunate to work for a company that was very involved in the community. Brooklyn Union supported many nonprofits in their territory and developed programs to enhance the community while supporting economic development. Since utilities are limited in the amount they can spend on philanthropy, we established the KeySpan Foundation and dedicated significant shareholder dollars to support nonprofits and educational institutions in the territory we serviced. National Grid continued the Foundation and added funds to the Foundation when they acquired KeySpan.

How do you decide where to focus your personal philanthropic efforts?

On a personal basis, I focus my philanthropy in two areas. The first being education of young people to give them an opportunity to achieve a successful, productive life. I had the benefit of getting a great public education and went to City College when it was tuition free, and I attribute much of what I was able to achieve to a good education. I believe it is more challenging for young people today, particularly from underserved communities. This has led me to support public education at my alma mater, where I serve on the

ORGANIZATION BRIEFS Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center (aertc.org) is located in the Research and Development Park at Stony Brook University and is a true partnership of academic institutions, research institutions, energy providers and industrial corporations. The Center's mission is innovative energy research, education and technology deployment with a focus on efficiency, conservation, renewable energy, and nanotechnology applications for new and novel sources of energy.

National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium (nationaloffshorewind.org) is a nationally focused, not-for-profit organization that seeks to produce innovations that directly respond to the technical and supply chain barriers faced by offshore wind project developers in the U.S., build strong networks connecting technology innovators, investors, and industry, and increase U.S. content and job opportunities.

Will you highlight your career journey?

I was born and raised in Brooklyn by a single parent, my mother. I attended public school and was fortunate to get into City College when it was tuition free. I started in liberal arts and switched to mechanical engineering for both bachelor's and master's degrees. My first job was with AT&T or "Ma Bell" as it was referred to at that time, with 450,000 employees. I was testing

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An offshore wind farm

board of the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership. I also chaired the Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School which provides an excellent Catholic education to underserved students and a work experience that prepares them for future employment.

The other area of interest to me is medical research which I believe will prevent and cure many of today's diseases. I serve on the board of the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research at Northwell, which is doing groundbreaking work in research of Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Cancer, and bioelectronic medicine.

I also support a number of other good causes on a modest basis such as homelessness, hunger, and mental health.

You serve as Chairman of the Board of the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center (AERTC) at Stony Brook University. Will you discuss AERTC's mission?

When I retired from National Grid, I connected with the Dean of Engineering at Stony Brook, Dr. Yacov Shamash, who I had known from the research KeySpan and National Grid did at Stony Brook. The energy industry was going through tremendous change and

there was a need to develop new technologies to provide cleaner, more efficient energy systems. We were fortunate to raise \$50 million from New York State and built the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center at Stony Brook. Its mission is to do research to develop the new technologies which can be commercialized to provide a cleaner, reliable, affordable, more efficient energy delivery system.

Research is done in every facet of the energy value chain and will produce cleaner forms of energy and provide for more efficient technology at the user end. The AERTC has a strong relationship with Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL), one of the Department of Energy's premiere laboratories, and a number of Stony Brook faculty have positions at BNL as well, allowing for collaboration on research from the molecular level to the burner tip.

What interested you in serving as chairman of the National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium (NOWRDC), and how has the work of the Consortium progressed?

As we move to clean up the environment it will be necessary to incorporate more renewables like solar and wind into the energy

mix. Offshore wind provides a large amount of clean energy to other parts of the world, in particular the U.K. and Eastern Europe. The Department of Energy, wishing to stimulate an offshore wind industry in the U.S., sent out a proposal to invest \$20 million in offshore wind research. New York State, through the New York Energy, Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) was willing to match with \$20 million and they reached out to me in my role as Chairman of the AERTC to be the Chair. I accepted and New York won the DOE award.

The mission of the NOWRDC is to do research to develop the technologies to reduce the long-term cost of offshore wind. It has given out over \$50 million, due to other state support, and has been very successful in developing new technologies.

You are very engaged with supporting educational organizations with your work with Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School and Futures in Education Endowment Fund. Will you discuss your commitment to creating educational opportunities for youth?

As I indicated earlier, I believe a good education provides a platform of opportunity for young individuals. Much of what I have been able to achieve was based on having a great public education and having a supportive family environment. Many of today's underserved young people do not have a strong family environment which makes it even more important to have the education necessary to achieve a measure of success in business. I believe that Catholic education provides both a great educational experience and the values appropriate for a meaningful life, with a commitment to give back to support those in need. I served as Chairman of Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School for 15 years, and I serve on the board of Futures in Education in Brooklyn and Tomorrow's Hope on Long Island. In the public sector, I have done Principal for a Day at my alma mater, New Utrecht High School, and sit on the board of the Colin Powell School at City College.

Do you feel that the same traits that made you successful in business translate to being effective in philanthropy?

To be successful in business requires an organized approach to making decisions after receiving input and then moving forward with a committed motivated team. The same traits apply to philanthropy in order to be successful. There must be a vision tied into a mission that is easily understood by all constituents, and in particular financial supporters, with an emphasis on measurable results.

While there are clearly differences whether you are a nonprofit or a for-profit business, the same principles apply. Attention to the bottom line by making decisions that translate into providing cost efficient services to the constituents should resonate with supporters and maximize their giving. At the end of the day, it's about managing a philanthropic organization like a business to make it successful. ●

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