



Sloan Career Cornerstone Center

Profiles of Chemical Engineers



Ann Marie Rahill

**Engineer
Procter & Gamble
Cincinnati, OH**

Education:

B.S. - Chemical Engineering, Rutgers University

Job Description:

Engineer in research and development

Advice to Students:

"If you want to relocate, you have to be very honest with yourself. If a company is six or seven hundred miles away from where you grew up and all the people that you know, it has to be a challenge that, in and of itself, you're willing to approach and accept."

Video Transcript 1:

"Research and development is a place where you're faced with a problem and you have to find a way to answer that problem. We're always searching out and developing new technologies, superior products but we're also doing it in a way that we're going to develop that product for a profit. We're going to sell that product. So it's a real world application of the engineering field."

Video Transcript 2:

"If you want to relocate, you have to be very honest with yourself. If a company is six or seven hundred miles away from where you grew up and all that you know and all the people that you know, you have to be very honest and it has to be a challenge that in and of itself you're willing to approach and accept."

Video Transcript 3:

"So you have to be very honest with yourself. You have to keep in perspective what is important in your life. If job advancement, salary, and recognition are the most important things, then they're willing to give you that, provided that you're willing to put in the hours. But if a family is important, or a social life, or things outside of work are just as important as work, it is certainly possible to balance. Not at all easy but, again, as long as you're willing to communicate that within your management and be honest with yourself, you can achieve it."

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Interview:

Rahill: My name is Ann Marie Rahill. I work for Proctor & Gamble as an engineer. I went to Rutgers University and I have a bachelor's in chemical engineering.

Q: How would you describe R&D?

Rahill: Research and development is an area where you're faced with a problem and you have to find a way to answer that problem. So you're constantly looking for answers and ways to apply those answers. In research, you're just looking for the solutions, but in R&D you're looking for the solutions and ways to apply those solutions in the real world. For example, Proctor & Gamble is a consumer products company. We're always searching out and developing new technologies, superior products, but we're also doing it in a way that we're going to develop a profit. We're going to sell that product. So it's a real-world application of the engineering field.

Q: What are the differences between an R&D position and a manufacturing position?

Rahill: Research and development attracted me because I saw it as a place where I could use a little bit more of my creative energies. I could be myself. We're not faced with the same issues on a day-to-day basis. It's very unpredictable-you don't know what problems you're going to be faced with today. In manufacturing, you have one objective. You want to get in there, you want to make product and you want to sell that product-that's your ultimate objective. Manufacturing is much more structured versus research and development. We're much more relaxed. You try to get the creative energies going. You're out there developing technologies, you're in uncharted waters, literally. You're doing things where maybe there may not be a cookbook to follow. Process engineering is a form of manufacturing. We just manufacture different things than those you learned about in college, but you're still applying the processes that you use to make the products.

Q: Who do you work with on a day-to-day basis?

Rahill: Within the research and development area, we work mostly with chemical engineers. Probably 95% of the R&D environment is chemical engineers. Within my specific project team, I work very multi-functionally, where my interactions on a daily basis will include advertising, marketing, market research, finance, and package development. The specific areas in R&D where I work are products research and product development. I'm the chemical engineer on a multi-functional team. However, within the specific R&D environment it is mostly chemical engineers.

Q: Did school teach you to do this job?

Rahill: We obviously have job-related training that we're required to take. Other things are available that are more elective. We can pursue things that are appropriate for our job. But there is a lot of on-the-job training. Probably 90% of what you learn is what your manager teaches you or what your group teaches you. I didn't come out of school expecting to know everything and, certainly, when I walked through the door, Proctor & Gamble did not expect me to know everything. But as long as you're willing to learn and you're willing to keep your

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eyes open and focus on the information that's being made available to you, you can certainly succeed in whatever job you want to attain. School is only going to teach you so much. Fifty percent of it is probably common sense-just good general learning how to do things, as long as you're willing to learn. Then 50% of it is probably your technical skills that you picked up in college.

Q: How did school help prepare you for your job?

Rahill: I always felt when I was at school that I was there to learn as much as I could, both in the textbook and outside of the textbook. I think at heart I always wanted to be out in industry applying what I learned. And I knew that I was not going to apply everything that I learned. Also, there were skills that I needed to hone, such as my communications, writing, and leadership skills. These are the things that I was always trying to perfect as much as my thermodynamics and kinetics. So I don't know if there ever was that transition for me. I think I've always wanted to be out in industry, not necessarily doing what I'm doing right now, but more of applying what I learned.

Q: How did you get where you are?

Rahill: Quite honestly, I did not have a whole lot of clear guidance. It was mostly either up to me or I learned it as I went along. I learned a lot from my interviews. I just applied for everything that was out there. And in my screening interviews on campus, as well as some of the data sets, I utilized them as opportunities to learn about the positions available for a chemical engineer. I met a lot of really neat interviewers whom I was able to be very open with and have real heart-to-heart discussions with to learn about what they do on a daily basis, to learn about them personally in a lot of ways. I utilized my interviewers as more of my guidance than my professors or a career service that was available at school. I did two summer internships, one between my sophomore and junior years, and then again between my junior and senior years. The first one wasn't very glamorous-it was in a sewage treatment plant. I was a lab technician, and I learned very quickly what I didn't want to do. The second one, was environmental clean-up for a mid-sized chemical company in New Jersey. Very interesting and I learned a lot of research. There it was more research and a little bit of development or practical application. I was faced with the problem for two months and I had to learn the skills to approach that problem and tackle it. I'm not necessarily using that particular technical knowledge today, but I did learn how to approach an issue, break it down into steps, identify what I needed to solve, and go about doing it.

Q: What about relocating?

Rahill: If you want to relocate, you have to be very honest with yourself. If a company is six or seven hundred miles away from where you grew up and all the people that you know, it has to be a challenge that, in and of itself, you're willing to approach and accept. I was looking for a much slower lifestyle. I was looking for a lifestyle that I could afford. As an engineer coming out of school, this job offered an attractive salary, and I knew it would take me places and offer me opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise get on the East Coast. I had a pretty good idea what I wanted, where I wanted to live - slow paced versus fast paced and less crowded versus more crowded. I moved out here, I've got a wonderful job, and met my husband out here. It has

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certainly been very rewarding, there are things that I don't think I would have gotten had I not been willing to take the chance.

Q: Tell us about balancing personal and professional life?

Rahill: Working for a very large global company, I think it's inherent that the company will take from you as much as you are willing to give them. So you have to be very honest with yourself. You have to keep in perspective what is important in your life. If job advancement, salary, and recognition are the most important things, then they're willing to give you that, provided that you're willing to put in the hours. But if a family is important, or a social life, or things outside of work are just as important as work, it is certainly possible to balance. Not at all easy but, again, as long as you're willing to communicate that within your management and be honest with yourself, you can achieve it. I haven't achieved it yet, but I'm still learning. It's just something that you just have to be willing to go with the flow.

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