



## **Meet Jeff Custer**

### **Xcel Energy**

#### **Director of Distribution, Design, & Construction**

*SE MN Workforce Development Board (WDB) Member since 2008*

*Current WDB Treasurer*



#### **Why did you decide on a career at Xcel Energy and who or what influenced you to decide on this career choice?**

When I started at Xcel Energy, I wasn't really looking for a career but just a job. The position I started in was a budget analyst, which matched my skills and education. After a couple years in the finance area, I transitioned to the construction group and have been there ever since. Over my 20 years at Xcel, it has proven to be a very rewarding career. I like working with customers and governmental entities to solve problems that make our communities better places to live and work. I also enjoy leading and developing teams, as well as helping people reach their full potential. I was influenced to pursue the construction path by a mentor at Xcel.

#### **What are some of the major differences between energy sector careers now and 30 years ago?**

The industry has become more competitive requiring employees in the energy sector to be more mindful of customer wants and needs. Cost control is also a major driver, as we must offer our services at a competitive price. All of this has happened while the industry transitioned to renewable energy. The traditional generation of electricity by burning coal has shifted to natural gas, wind, and solar. These changes have shifted the work we do. Much of the equipment we install is now programmed by a technician using a laptop. This is a trend that will not only continue, but accelerate.

#### **What education, experience, and/or key job competencies are needed for the majority of positions at Xcel Energy?**

There are a wide variety of positions at Xcel Energy. We have all the typical corporate functions such as accounting, finance, legal, and human resources; but also have many positions in engineering, regulatory, customer care, and marketing. Most of those positions require a 4-year degree. We also have many positions in construction and operations. Those positions tend to require less formal education such as associate degrees or other certificate-type programs. We are looking for people who have excellent leadership skills and have the ability to work effectively in teams.

### **Does Xcel Energy offer any training or scholarship program opportunities?**

We offer extensive employee training programs. Nearly all field employees complete 3 or 4 year apprenticeships. We also provide significant ongoing technical and safety training. The company offers a tuition reimbursement program for those employees wanting to pursue accredited degree programs such as Bachelor's degrees or MBAs. Through the Xcel Foundation we provide funding to postsecondary institutions for student scholarships.



### **When recruiting for a position within your organization, what qualities make a job candidate appealing to a hiring manager?**

For me, the perfect candidate brings both leadership and technical skills. Candidates should be able to demonstrate their abilities in crafting strategy, managing talent, effectively building relationships, along with their technical and operations experience. We also look for people who have aspirations to grow in their career.

### **What are common/average wages for new hires entering energy sector careers in the area?**

Because we have so many different types of positions, the wages vary considerably. However, our line workers routinely make about \$100K per year after completing their apprenticeship, with only one year of formal postsecondary education. We offer competitive benefits packages to employees.

### **Job outlook/Employment trends: What do you predict in terms of the demand for energy industry careers now/in the future?**

Like nearly every industry, we are in the midst of a retirement wave. That phenomenon is causing us to hire many employees. Overall, however, it appears that demand for employees in the energy industry will be flat, with companies only replacing workers leaving the workplace. Increased automation will continue to change the skillset required of our employees.

### **What advice do you have for someone who's thinking about pursuing a career in the energy field?**

The energy industry is challenging and rewarding. People of many backgrounds and skillsets will be needed for the energy industry of the future. First of all, figure out what you are passionate about and pursue it with everything you've got. Then, whatever your passion is, you'll likely find a career in the energy industry to match that passion and your skillset.