



Family is central to Phil's life. Pictured here at his daughter's wedding with his wife, Deb, and their four children.

A career in Geophysics: Technology, Travel and Interesting People (Page 1 of 4)

Brian Wickins, 27 Oct 2014

If you want to succeed in a science or technology-based career it's a good idea to make sure you know your stuff. Those were the words of advice issued by Phil Cook, Regional Geoscience Manager for DownUnder Geosolutions, during an interview with *PNRonline*. He has spent his working life making sure he knows his, in addition to keeping on top of, or at least being aware of, the trends and developments.

"It's a technically complex business and the technology is continuously evolving," explained Phil. "And aside from the geeky side of things, never forget that it's a people business too, so forming relationships will also be important."

Although many people know the industry they want to work in from an early age, others only know what they like doing and, focussing on doing that to the best of their ability, leads them to a particular 'unplanned' career path.

The 'unplanned' was the path for Phil.

Born in England and emigrating with his family to Australia when he was 8 years old, Phil had a passion for mathematics. From Rossmoyne High School in Perth he went on to get a BSc in Mathematics at UWA which opened the door to the petroleum industry.

"Frankly, I stumbled in to the seismic industry as I was looking for somewhere where I could use my maths degree and replied to an advertisement for a Seismic Observer. I was always keen to watch, so thought that was the job for me..!"

He doesn't describe becoming a geophysicist as "a defining moment" in his life but he was quick to realise the excitement of working on land seismic crews in the early 80s.

"This convinced me that this was a career for me. It had the combination of a challenging technical job, travel opportunities and interesting people."

He'd already stated that the oil and gas industry is a 'people' business, so when asked who had helped him in his early career, he had no hesitation: "Warwick Greville offered a lot of support to me early on in my processing career."

Obviously Warwick's support was well founded and helped Phil establish a long and enjoyable career in the Australian seismic industry.

It's an industry that usually comes with a series of overseas postings to regions in all four corners of the world. But not for Phil. Not only did he manage to build a successful career, he did it without moving outside of Australia.

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His career has included three years with Horizon Seismic, three-plus years with Geosystems (now Terrex Seismic) and more than 25 years with Fugro (with a few name changes such as SPT and Robertson), including 10 years as Managing Director of Fugro Seismic Imaging. In 2011 he became VP Eastern Hemisphere for Fugro-Geoteam and then, following the acquisition of Fugro by CGG, Deputy Regional Acquisition Manager. And then in early 2014 he joined DUG.

When I asked him if he thought the oil and gas sector still offers individuals the same long-term growth and career prospects for today's youth, he said he was positive it does.

"I think so, although there is possibly a greater volatility in general business today. I think that similar career prospects are still available to today's youth as compared to when I started. Often we over complicate things by talking about Generation Ys and Generation Zs and I think young people are mostly looking for the same things – opportunities, challenges and the chance to make a difference.

"In order to retain key staff the same issues are there for management – give them something interesting and rewarding to do and make them feel that their contribution is important.

"I think that the key is job satisfaction and, if today's youth are receiving that, then their incentive to move on is lessened."

One of the most enjoyable aspects of Phil's career is the people he has met along the way. He believes travel broadens your view on life, which in turn generally makes you a more interesting person.

"Since all of us in this industry travel a lot, it means that most people you meet are good to talk to and have something to offer.

"I would hope that all industries are realising that, at the end of day, all business is built on relationships and so soft skills are always going to be important. Communication, in all its forms, is such an important tool and perhaps even more so today in the era of short messages. Get it wrong and you can easily get a client or a colleague unnecessarily upset.

"That being said, one can go overboard with too many soft skill courses and so I think it comes down to mentoring within an organisation rather than outright training."



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During his 25+ years with Fugro there were a number of achievements and rewards, with one of the most satisfying being at the helm of Fugro's processing growth in this region. He is also proud of the fact that the company was able to attract, and retain, top calibre staff.

Any career comes with its challenges and Phil recalls that one of his most significant was moving across from processing to acquisition when he was with Fugro.

"I had the management and company experience but I have never worked on a marine seismic vessel so to suddenly be responsible for the region's activities – four vessels when I started – was a big challenge. I think it's important you gain the trust and respect of the people that work for you and I'm a big believer in honesty and open communication. And, of course, ask a lot of questions!"

Although he enjoyed working with Fugro and had some positive experiences with CGG, his move to DUG was prompted by the appeal of working for a company that is dynamic and expanding - and "wanting to be a part of that growth and to contribute in some way".

His role with DUG is as Regional Geoscience Manager where he is responsible for all in-house processing projects and for business development in the Australasian region. It's his goal to position DUG as a supplier of choice for their clients and to attract and retain top quality staff, which he sees as two things that go hand in hand.

"I think 'innovative' and 'energetic' are two good adjectives for describing DUG and, really, were a large part of the reason why I was attracted to join them. We have a lot of young and very smart people working for us (I am one of the few exceptions...! – at least on the 'young' side of things) and that kind of environment inherently breeds enthusiasm and dynamism."



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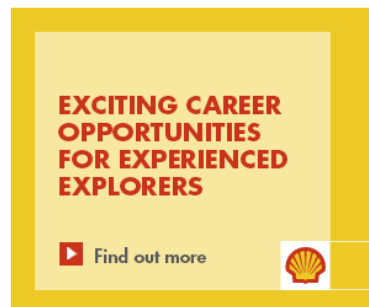
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On holiday at Rottneest, Phil wearing a seaweed 'wig'.

During his career Phil has become well known for his humour and many, on numerous occasions, have been impressed with his ability to be able to peel off a humorous story for almost any occasion. Most conversations appear to trigger his memory for a humorous tale or joke. But he laughed at the suggestion he must have a phenomenal memory and quick wit.

"Not sure about a phenomenal memory, more just a disproportionate one in that I can remember jokes but not always good with names! I don't know that a quick wit as such is a help, but more perhaps it's an indication of the ability to communicate and, I think, the importance I have placed on that aspect of dealing with people."

Not wishing to miss the opportunity to inject humour into the conversation, he added: "I'm sure it helps people remember me but I would've thought my striking good looks would've done that anyway..!"

Building a successful career in any industry comes with its challenges, not least managing a work-home balance. When both parents are working, raising children requires a good deal of scheduling. Still, Phil says he managed by communicating with his employer so they understood his situation.

"It was difficult early on as I have four children and my wife was also working full-time. I think you need to be upfront with your employer so they understand your situation. And then you work extra hard whilst you are in the office and, if you do so, then you shouldn't feel guilty to be leaving early one day for that

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