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Holmes Energy Expert Interview 1: Bob and Jerry, Part 1

By **Bill Holmes, P.E.** November 5, 2012 03:28:14 pm[Email](#)[Print](#)

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You've all read the "Top Doctors" lists in magazines while you were sitting in a waiting room. During my nearly 40-year career in the energy profession, I have encountered a few people who have impressed me as the top in their specialties, so I have put together my own "Top Energy Experts" list. So you can share in some of the knowledge I have gained from them, I have initiated a series of "Conversations about Energy." I have always tried to learn from the best so don't be surprised if some of their comments sound suspiciously like things that I have included in my previous articles.

I have interviewed some by phone, some in person, and have recorded each conversation. My articles are basically verbatim transcriptions of those recordings with only minor corrections as required for clarity. Where they have asked me to keep their identities or company names confidential, I have done so.

The first was a joint interview with "Bob," the former Worldwide Facilities Manager for a Fortune 200 company, and "Jerry," the former CFO and Controller for a Fortune 100 company. They had never met prior to the interview and technically still haven't, as Jerry was in my home at the time and we had Bob on the speaker phone. I asked them in turn to tell us about themselves and their experience with energy management in their company. Part 1 is primarily Bob, the facilities manager, talking with me. Part 2 will include Jerry's story, along with the three of us discussing what had been said. Let's begin:

Bill: "Thanks for agreeing to talk with me and share some of what you learned during your 35 year career with ABC. Tell me what you did."

Bob: "I was the Director of Corporate Facilities for the 'ABC Company,' World-Wide Operations. I worked in all 50 states, every province of Canada, and 15 foreign countries. I was responsible for every aspect of the programming, design and construction of facilities ranging from technical centers, office buildings, manufacturing plants, distribution centers – the whole gamut of facilities. I personally hired every architect and engineer involved with our facilities. I had a whole range of responsibilities including energy management. We got seriously into energy management in the late '80s, early '90s starting with all of the U.S. plants."

Bill: "Bob, if I recall, when we were talking three or four years ago about managing and reducing energy costs in industrial plants, you told me that the most important factor was the support of top management. You said if I didn't have their support, I was wasting my time."

Bob: "Absolutely. And by top management I mean the president and the CFO. Somebody is going to have to budget the money and make sure you have it every year to continue the program."

Bill: "Why did ABC get into energy management? Was it money, or social responsibility?"

Bob: "It was basically social responsibility. ABC has always been a leader in doing the right thing; not only for the employees, but also for the communities. Whenever we did a site search for a new facility, we always looked for a location where we could make a positive impact. That's why we ended up in smaller towns, kind of out-of-the-way places where a Fortune 200 company would not normally focus."

Bill: "How did you start your program?"

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Author Bio

**Bill Holmes, P.E.**

Bill Holmes, P.E. founded Holmes Energy LLC www.holmesenergy.com and developed the AutoPilot Monitoring-Based Commissioning (MBCx) System in 1979. He has a B.S. and M.S. in mechanical engineering and has done additional coursework and research for his PhD. He is a former Purdue professor and taught for several years in the Continuing Education in Energy Management Program at the University of Wisconsin.

Bill has produced savings from 20% to, in a few projects, more than 50% from low-cost, no-cost changes in management, operation, maintenance and control alone in all types of facilities including Industrial Plants owned by Fortune 500 Companies.

He is the recipient of a DOE Award for Energy Innovation and was the Indiana Energy

Bob: "We started by looking at our current energy costs and determining the small steps we could take to reduce those costs. One of the first things we did was look at our electrical motors. What could we do with motors to reduce the electrical costs?"

"Next, we started to focus on existing controls in the buildings. Most of our plants had building management systems (BMS) from Johnson Controls, Honeywell and others. Nobody was monitoring anything except when a light went off that said we had a problem somewhere. So we set up a measurement system so we could measure where we were on a daily, weekly, monthly basis in terms of the energy being used in our various plants."

Bill: "Where did the data come from?"

Bob: "We had to start from zero. What are our energy bills today? We used utility bills from when we started the program as the benchmark. Then we initiated some projects and when they were completed, saw what kind of impact that had on our energy usage and costs."

Bill: "Were you doing any submetering inside the facilities?"

Bob: "Not initially, all we had to start with was our utility meters and bills. We started at the grassroots level, about as grassroots as you can get. Some of our facilities had only one meter for the entire facility. Then as time went on we started to submeter the distribution system to monitor specific areas or operations within a facility."

"That is how the whole thing started. Then we took one of our electrical engineers and made him our corporate energy manager; that is all he did. He worked with all of our plants, first in the U.S. Then he went to our plants in Europe and then to all of our facilities throughout the world. He started to change out lighting; he came up with other ideas and determined how to measure the savings. Under his management the program really took off."

Bill: "I knew him from the Association of Energy Engineers. I think he told me that before he went to engineering school, he had been a licensed electrician."

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Manager of the Year in 1990. He has published numerous papers and been making presentations on his projects and methods for more than 25 years. Bill is a sculptor, a writer and a regular contributor to Sustainable Plant.

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