



WPS (Women in Power Systems)
Steering Committee

Interview with **Rachel Linke, Marina
Cizmesija & Petra Curlin**

Inspire, Encourage and Advocate: The Women Behind WPS

Petra Curlin



Rachel Linke



Marina Cizmesija



Women in Power Systems (WPS) is a community created by women for everyone in the power industry. The creative minds behind the initiative are three members of the WPS Steering Committee: the Chair, Rachel Linke, Member Services Manager for the Electric Power Reliability Alliance (EPRA), Associate Editor for APC Media and Secretary for IEEE PES SmartGrid Marketing Working Group; Marina Cizmesija, WPS Editor in Chief, and Petra Curlin, WPS Communications and Projects Manager.

Alan Ross: I am delighted to announce that we are launching a new community - Women in Power Systems. The idea was wrought by three women that I am honored to introduce. Rachel Linke, the organizer and advocate, Marina Cizmesija, the heart and power behind the scenes, and Petra Curlin, the next generation thinker. Petra, you always come up with new ideas. Where did the Women in Power Systems idea come from?

Petra Curlin: As we were working on new digital content for Transformer Technology, a moment of beautiful synergy happened, as Marina would put it. It turned out we had both had the same idea for some time, which is to have a Transformer Technology magazine issue dedicated especially to women working in the power industry and, of course, in the transformers segment. That idea somehow bloomed into a much larger project as we realized that one issue is not enough. Because we live in a world where diversity and inclusiveness are becoming an increasingly important topic, we felt what we needed is a space for women to be who they are, a space where they can balance their professional career and their personal life.

We also realized that, while such organizations already exist, they mostly focus on women engineers, such as IEEE and CIGRE's Women in Engineering (WiE), as well as Women's Engineering Society (WES) which organizes the International Women in Engineering Day (INWED) on June 23rd. Being non-engineers ourselves, we figured that there are other professions within the power industry and we would like to include all of them. I think that was somehow the starting point of it all. To honor INWED, we chose June 23rd as the launch date for the inaugural WPS edition.

AR It is amazing that you mention synergy. For me, Women in Power Systems started with the second of two interviews with Khayakazi Dioka from Eskom in South Africa. We were all inspired by Khaya's

background, both as an engineer in a post-apartheid country, and as a next generation leader. She has two daughters. We talked about science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). And it hit me at that point - it would be amazing to have a community for women within power systems. Right about that time these three inspiring women had come up with this idea. The beautiful synergy happened. Marina, what happened from your perspective?

We want to make sure that women know that they are valued. These are our three main goals as we go forward - we want to inspire, encourage and advocate for women in power systems.

Marina Cizmesija: For me it came from a much wider perspective, and that is that today, globally, we need this synergy. Not just between men and women, but the synergy between each and every individual. I think that enough has been said about equality, not enough done though, but we also need to stress the need for cooperation and support between each individual person. We are all here to contribute and each one of us has something to offer and something to give. We are all part of a bigger picture, and our individual growth and success is reflected in the growth and success of the team or a community we make part of. We all have some talents and many of us don't necessarily believe in ourselves. Or

maybe in the workplace we are more picked upon for what we haven't done properly. But what if we focused on those little things that shine in people and we supported them in that perspective? Then they would shine even more, they would build self-confidence and grow more passionate about themselves, about what they do, about their part in the team. They might even outgrow themselves in ways they couldn't even imagine. Their contribution in the workplace would then become invaluable, and you wouldn't feel that comfortable to say they are replaceable, because bringing in technical knowledge is one thing, but bringing in passion about what you do is something completely different.

We put this in the perspective of power systems because we work in that industry. And women have that subtle perspective they can take, coupled with their cyclical approach to life where everything is interwoven, and are able to tell their stories in a certain way which is different from men, and which we all can learn from. In that way, I think we need to give them space and freedom to express themselves fully for who they are, what they are, in all segments of life including their workplace, and contribute even more in this industry, which is mainly a man's world.

We would like to show the younger generations how much opportunity there is out there for them in the power industry.

AR One of the things I love about what you just said, Marina, is that we want to celebrate the whole woman and the community of women in power systems. Power systems really is a man's world. It is changing, but changing, in our opinion, much too slowly. Rachel, when you first heard about Women in Power Systems, what were your thoughts and what is your drive for doing this?

Rachel Linke: First of all, thank you, Petra and Marina, for what you said. I think that really puts a good perspective on what we are trying to do. Something else I think that we really want to do with Women in Power Systems is to

advocate for the younger generation to start looking at power systems as a potential career path.

I have been in the industry for about 11 years, and when I first started, I did not hear of very many women at all. As I have been in this career, I have started to see more and more women merge into the power industry. And it is exciting. But there are just not as many as we would hope. I think part of Women in Power Systems is not only to encourage and build women up and give them a voice, but also to advocate for more women in this industry. I think that is something that we really want to push forward and encourage women to look at the power industry as an option. Because it is just not as prevalent for women as it is for men.

AR If I were to pick one word from each of what you said - Rachel, yours is *Advocacy*, we are here to advocate. For Marina, it would be *Sinergy*, we are here as a collective, and we advocate for our community. And then Petra, yours is *Dynamic*. This is a dynamic community. We want to bring ideas and thoughts and other women into it.

Women in Power Systems is created by women - for everyone. I really appreciate you making



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me part of the community. And as the Editor in Chief of the launching edition of WPS, I am going to work behind the scenes to enable Women and Power Systems to be everything it can be.

Rachel and I are co-hosts on a podcast called High Voltage, and we will be interviewing both men and women, providing inspiring profiles for Women in Power Systems. Rachel, tell us about some ideas you have got.

RL Yes, aside from women involved in power systems, we have talked to quite a few companies led by men who have expressed an interest to really expand the role of women within their company. That is something that we also want to see. We do want to hear from men within our industry as well. There is passion to see the industry change, to bring more women into various roles, because we bring different unique abilities and talents to these roles. We want to see more and more of that. And I think many companies are seeing that as well.

AR One of the things I really appreciate that you bring to this, Marina, is your focus on women being themselves. When women come into an industry like this, many times we expect them to act like men. And the truth is, we don't want women to come into

because if we are not authentic, if we can't express who we are, if we need to imitate and fit into predefined expectations of what we should be, feel or act like, we can't find and live our passions. It's like stepping in other people's shoes and that's not comfortable, is it? To be able to grow and develop, we need to feel authentic. We need to feel free. We need to be able to express everything that we are, to show all of our talents, no matter how tiny they might seem to somebody. Only then we can really contribute. Many women have made their careers, thanks to their own knowledge and talents, but in many ways by acquiring male principles of thinking, problem-solving, acting in the workplace, by not standing out or showing their feminine side. I don't think that really brings the benefits, because a perfect synergy is the one that unites masculine and feminine energies and this balance brings to fulfilling our full potential.

Outside their knowledge, the experience and technical skills, women have a lot of different and unique skills. They have hobbies and interests which are also translatable to what they do. For example, their role as mothers requires and inspires in them aptitude and finesse, as well as the strength, to balance, support and manage so many important aspects of life, and they bring

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power systems and act like men. We want them to come into Women in Power Systems and be women. We want to celebrate the whole woman in all her roles, interests and pursuits. And then the role that she plays in business is integrated. I love the fact that you are talking about the complete woman. Marina, tell me a little bit more about what that means to you.

MC Being complete, in all your roles, and acting as a complete person with all your flairs, talents and desires is very important



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these skills to projects they work on, which they tend to with special care. They are fantastic organizers, coordinators and irreparable multitaskers, but how many times have we seen that motherhood is seen as a disadvantage in the workplace? If women can feel free to incorporate their complete self in their everyday workplace and life, I think that helps them a lot in achieving the true sense of purpose.

AR One of the many elements of content that Women in Power Systems will offer is something I call Petra's Notebook. Petra calls it Women of Note, and I like that. In every one of our digital issues, Petra is going to profile women with inspiring backgrounds in the power industry. Petra, you are a different thinker. I use the word dynamic. You bring a unique perspective to this of the next generation. What does all of this mean to you?

Apart from doing interviews, we would like to invite all women who like to write to contact us. We would like to have bloggers and publish inspirational stories that celebrate the importance of collaboration, of showing belief, expanding and erasing the boundaries, and stepping out of the comfort zone.

PC I love that you assigned that word to me, dynamic. I was just thinking how I recently had the pleasure and privilege of talking to a woman in a very high position in the power industry, with more years of professional experience than I have on this planet. One of the things I loved about her story is that she said there are so many more opportunities in the

power industry today that did not exist in the beginnings. The power industry was exciting and promising back then, but now it is even more so, with new digital technologies, possibilities that we could not even imagine a few decades back. It is offering so much possibility, and her advice was for all the younger generations - just join the industry. Do not hesitate if you have the talent, if you have an interest in this. Join the industry because it is offering so many possibilities. And that is something that we would like to explore here. We would like to show the younger generations how much opportunity there is out there for them.

Our future efforts are focused on decreasing partial discharge as well as developing a system that will ensure the bushings have self-cleaning properties, approaching those of porcelain.

AR Excellent. And to you, dear readers - we would love to hear about the new ideas that you have as women for where we are going in the power industry. My wife asked me what my motivation is for doing this. Having thought about everything that I am doing or have done, I think this initiative is going to be the most giving that I could ever have been part of, the one that is going to impact the future better than anything else.

MC Just like you feel that this is something really big for you, Alan, I think it will be for many people. We are stepping out wider now with this idea. We want women to show all of their colors. And apart from interviews we will be doing, I would like to invite all women who like to write to collaborate with us. We would like to have bloggers as well, we want inspirational stories but not necessarily in their greatness of achievement but stories that celebrate the importance of showing belief, expanding and erasing the boundaries, stepping out of the comfort zone. Sometimes the person you inspire most when you start writing is yourself. It is an amazing gift that you can

discover in yourself. I would like to encourage all the amazing women out there - think about how much you can inspire, not only women, but also the men around you. We can help each other grow and expand. This is the gift that we all have and I would like to see us all embrace it.

AR That is a wonderful message. If you have got something to say, Women in Power Systems will be a voice for you. The word that comes to me is *inspire*. If we inspire one woman to advance in her career, or one man to look at women as engineers, it is an achievement to celebrate. We want to put generational stories out there to inspire the younger generations.

RL I think this is an exciting first step into something that is really needed. I hope to see more and more women inspired to join this industry. We want to make sure that women know that they are valued. Those are our three main goals as we go forward - we want to inspire, encourage and advocate for women in power systems.

What we need today is synergy. Not just between men and women, but the synergy between each and every individual. We are all part of a bigger picture, and our individual growth and expansion are reflected in the growth and success of the team or a community we make part of.

MC I would like to invite all women and men alike to join us, to feel open to this idea and see - they might be surprised - how much we can all grow through this community.

And to you, dear readers - we would love to hear about the new ideas that you have as women for where we are going in the power industry.

PC Sometimes in life, the unexpected things are the best. And that is what happened with the idea of Women in Power Systems. You think of something, and then you realize that there is already a space in the world that seemed to have been waiting for you and this idea to be born. I believe that this voyage into the unknown will be a good thing for all of us and that we will discover that there are many more people who will be inspired by this along the way.

AR I hope that we are going to look back on this later in life as the genesis of something very special. I really appreciate each of you individually and I love the synergy between all of us.



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