



ELECTRIC AVENUE

Bauer alumna and President of NRG Retail and Reliant lends
experience, input to Bauer College

By Danielle Ponder





President of NRG Retail and Reliant Elizabeth Killinger (BBA '91) maintains a busy schedule as a mother of three and an active member of the Bauer College Board.

If you ask Elizabeth Killinger (BBA '91) what it takes to be successful as a woman working in the energy industry, she'll likely share a piece of advice that applies beyond gender and career.

"I have learned a great lesson, that nothing is forever, so we have to consciously choose to always do our best, no matter the circumstances," she said.

Growing up, Killinger thought she might be a homemaker, like her mother, or an engineer, like her father.

She started college at Houston Baptist University and soon after transferred to University of Houston's engineering program, but neither was the right fit. Then, she discovered Bauer College.

"I knew as soon as I came to the business school that this is where I needed to be," Killinger said. "I sought a real world education that wasn't focused solely on classroom instruction. I wanted something hands on in the career I would have after graduation."

She graduated with a bachelor's degree in management information systems and immediately began working as a consultant for a software developer, where she felt a sense of belonging.

"I loved the people and the challenge of working in client services, where I learned management consulting," Killinger said. "I was able to travel all over. It was interesting living in new places. I gained so many great experiences during that time."

Killinger said she never expected to pursue a career in retail electricity, but when the opportunity came, Reliant (now an NRG company) presented her with the question, “What will it take to get you to do this?”

Killinger not only took the opportunity — she ran with it. At Reliant, she spent two years helping prepare the wholesale and retail businesses for electricity deregulation in Texas. After more than a decade taking on increasing responsibility across the retail business, she was promoted to her current position as President of NRG Retail and Reliant.

The challenge of running the company’s retail operation, the largest in the state, was no problem for Killinger, who learned how to successfully balance priorities early on while at Bauer.

“I was highly active on campus as a full-time student, and I worked part time,” Killinger said. “My parents set the tone for me that getting a job after graduation was my goal, while still having a fun college experience.”

She chose meaningful leadership roles on campus, including student senate, and was hand selected as president to reopen Phi Mu Sorority’s chapter that had been closed for some time.

“I was busy, but being very involved helped me understand that we have to be passionate about what we participate in throughout life,” Killinger said. “In order to do our very best and be our very best, we need to be excited and inspired by being purposeful with our choices.”

Eventually, she found her passion in the energy business, a growing sector where she sees tremendous opportunity.

“Energy is a wide-open field, and there is no brighter time for anyone, man or woman, to find where they belong within it,” Killinger said.

She points out demand for hands-on skills like data and programming, but also indicates a need for outside-the-box areas like creative and marketing professionals.

“There is a need for all types of individuals from varied backgrounds because we are thinking about power differently. It’s no longer just the traditional idea of a plug with an outlet on the wall,” Killinger said. “Students can find a job in energy, wherever their interests are.”

Specifically, she encourages young girls to pursue technical fields such as accounting, finance and technology.

“We as adults need to help our daughters realize their potential in technical professions. They may be ruling out an entire set of career paths because they think they



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can’t do it,” Killinger said. “I’ve had that same challenge, too, with myself and my daughters. As people, if you think you can’t, you hold yourself back. We have to get into the mindset that we absolutely can.”

Her outlook on life — a self-proclaimed ability to see things through a “lens of abundance”—made Killinger an ideal person to serve on the Bauer College Board, a group of executives and leaders that advise Dean Latha Ramchand on everything from new curriculum to how to engage the business community.

“I was honored and appreciated being asked to join the board because I realize what a difference we as professionals can make in educating our future leaders,” Killinger said.

She added: “This is our chance to see who will carry on our companies after we’ve gone, and we will know they are better leaders because of the foundation we’ve given them. It’s a great way to give back.”

When she’s not giving back to her alma mater or overseeing the future of energy innovation, Killinger is a dedicated wife and mother of three.

Striking the perfect work-life balance comes back to Killinger’s perspective on making deliberate choices. Knowing what’s most important, she said, allows her to have ‘ah-ha’ moments where she checks herself within that balance.

“If you’re passionate about your career and love the people you work with like I do, it’s easy to get sucked in and pulled one direction or another,” Killinger said. “You have to keep a close tab on your variety of commitments, make some time to rest and recharge. That way you never forget what you stand for.”