

# Effective Leadership

**An Interview with Robert B. Catell,  
Chairman, Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center at Stony Brook University and  
Chairman, National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium**

**EDITORS' NOTE** Robert Catell was formerly the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of KeySpan Corporation and KeySpan Energy Delivery, the former Brooklyn Union Gas. His career with Brooklyn Union Gas started in 1958. Following National Grid's acquisition of KeySpan Corporation, Catell became Chairman of National Grid U.S. and Deputy Chairman of National Grid plc. He currently serves as Chairman of the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center, National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium, and Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School. Catell received both his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from the City College of New York and is a registered Professional Engineer.



Robert B. Catell

the employees, the customers and the community. The vision must be clear in the expression of its mission and the plans to execute upon it, and an effective leader's actions must always be consistent with the vision.

An effective leader must inspire and motivate the employees to "do the right thing." Unfortunately, today, there aren't enough examples of good leadership to inspire young people as role models of behavior.

**Do you feel it is a responsibility for business leaders and leading companies to be engaged in the communities they serve and to be a force for good in society?**

Involvement in the community is essential for business leaders and for leading companies if they truly wish to serve as a force for good in society. This involvement can take many forms, but it must be visible and tangible to be effective. Companies and their leaders have a responsibility to support the community by

engaging in activities which are essential to the health and well-being of the constituents they serve. This applies to support of not-for-profit organizations in the fields of education, health and medicine, which are the backbone of society and require the involvement of leaders in the business community to ensure their sustainability and success.

While financial support is critical, it is also important for the leaders in the business community to contribute their time and expertise to those organizations that support the people in the community. They should also encourage and provide the support of their employees to engage in community activities.

**How critical is it for business leaders to bring managerial expertise and skills to support the work of nonprofits?**

An essential role of a business leader is to provide the vision and managerial expertise for the business organization it leads. These managerial skills are equally important in the support of philanthropic causes and nonprofits which may not have the financial resources to

**INSTITUTION BRIEFS** Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center ([aertc.org](http://aertc.org)) is located in the Research & Development Park at Stony Brook University and is a true partnership of academic institutions, research institutions, energy providers and industrial corporations. The Center's mission is innovative energy research, education and technology deployment with a focus on efficiency, conservation, renewable energy and nanotechnology applications for new and novel sources of energy.

National Offshore Wind Research and Development Consortium ([nationaloffshorewind.org](http://nationaloffshorewind.org)) is a nationally focused, not-for-profit organization that seeks to produce innovations that directly respond to the technical and supply chain barriers faced by offshore wind project developers in the U.S., build strong networks connecting technology innovators, investors, and industry, and increase U.S. content and job opportunities.

**What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and is leadership today about more than just focusing on the bottom line?**

In today's very complex and interconnected world, the key to effective leadership has to be multi-faceted and focus on more than just the bottom line. An effective leader must start with expressing a vision which takes into consideration all of the stakeholders, which includes

**“In today's very complex and interconnected world, the key to effective leadership has to be multi-faceted and focus on more than just the bottom line. An effective leader must start with expressing a vision which takes into consideration all of the stakeholders, which includes the employees, the customers and the community.”**



*Students of Cristo Rey High School in Brooklyn, New York*

employ on their own. Many philanthropic organizations and nonprofits have missions which are essential to support and develop for those in need, but they lack the managerial skills and financial resources necessary to guide a successful organization.

In addition to providing financial support through fundraising, providing managerial skills are essential to the long-term financial sustainability of the nonprofit organization. The same skills which make a business leader successful are required to make a not-for-profit organization a viable entity.

**How critical is it to provide quality education opportunities for the next generation of leaders?**

My long career in the energy utility space provided a great platform for my current role in the development of alternative energy. That role is to provide a practical lens which will allow for clean alternative energy to become a major force in the energy landscape of the future, while reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and reducing the impact of climate change.

My ability to be successful in this role was built on a foundation of an excellent education at the elementary school and high school level and on through college. I would not have been able to achieve a measure of success in business without the benefit of a good education, provided by a first-class engineering program at the City College of New York, which was tuition-free when I attended.

For that reason, I believe that in order to provide the opportunity for success for young people growing up today, it is essential to provide them with a good education, particularly the young people from underserved communities.

**What attracted you to focus much of your philanthropic work in the field of education and will you highlight your involvement with Cristo Rey High School?**

I have focused most of my philanthropic support in the field of education at the high school level, providing students from underserved communities the opportunity to go on to college. I currently chair the Cristo Rey High School in

Brooklyn, a Catholic high school which provides a quality college preparatory education to underserved youth in Brooklyn and Queens, availing almost 100 percent of its graduates to a four-year college education. In addition to a great high school education, the Cristo Rey model provides the students with a meaningful work experience through its Corporate Work Study program. This program, while providing financial support to the school to support tuitions, provides the students with a work experience which is invaluable to their future success in the business world.

So, while providing these young people with the values of a Catholic education, Cristo Rey provides the pathway to a four-year college education and positions them to be our leaders of the future.

**With all of your experience and leadership in the energy and utility business, what do you tell young people today about the types of careers the industry offers?**

I am a great believer in the future of the energy industry and the utility business as a career opportunity. While the energy industry will be different from the past in providing our future energy supplies through clean renewable energy, it will provide job opportunities that can be very rewarding.

The design, installation, and maintenance of our future energy production and delivery system will require technical skills provided through a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education as a foundation. There will also be a need for the financial, accounting, computer and information technology skills to ensure these resources are available at a reasonable cost to the consumer. I would certainly recommend a young person consider a career in the energy and utility business and hope they will find it as rewarding as I did and that it puts them in a position to provide leadership and give back to the community in the future. ●

**“In addition to a great high school education, the Cristo Rey model provides the students with a meaningful work experience through its Corporate Work Study program. This program, while providing financial support to the school to support tuitions, provides the students with a work experience which is invaluable to their future success in the business world.”**