Jean-Paul Gillet

Job title: Senior Associate | Zenobe Energy
Graduation date: 2017
Degree: MSc Engineering with Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Tell us about your current role

I studied an MSc in Engineering with Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and right now I'm an associate at Zenobe Energy. The company develops, owns and operates energy storage assets. For example, we provide services to the National Grid to increase the reliability of the electricity system. We also do reduce energy costs for large energy consumers. In the UK, they get charged at certain points more than others, like during the peak times and in the afternoon and we allow them to reduce the consumption during that time.

My role as an associate is more on the business development side. I'm working a lot on trying to get new clients on board. On top of that, because it's quite a new and innovative technology, it draws a bit from my course at UCL with entrepreneurship and innovation. We're actually having to create our own markets as a lot of the time things don't exist already. We need to explore and explain what we're doing and how it's going to work and then come up with the whole new business plan nearly every time.

What motivated you to go into this sector?

I find energy storage incredibly interesting. The UK has targets, by 2040 it wants to have a certain amount of renewables, and you have that in most places across the world, especially with the Paris accord.

One of the things is that renewables are not dispatchable. Before, we had gas and coal assets, which would allow us to ramp up production just generate more power when there's more demand. Now we don't have that, renewables and solar can’t be dispatched, they rely on the wind and the

Sun and the days when there is no wind, no Sun, we are pretty much screwed if that doesn't work out. What energy storage does, is it allows flexibility of being able to dispatch a non-dispatchable resource.

Before I did my masters at UCL, I worked in oil and gas and I wanted to transfer into something clean and something a bit more innovative. And this is key because this is the key that's going to unlock a renewable future.

What was the application process like?

When I was at UCL, I came across my previous employer, Camborne capital who had an internship scheme with UCL (UCL Careers Summer Internship Scheme subsidised by Santander). I applied, was shortlisted by UCL who sent me onto the employer and I got that role. I left two months ago and my role at Zenobe Energy I essentially got through a recruiter.

What does your normal work day look like?

I normally start at 8:30-9, catch up on emails. Then depending on what the project pipeline is looking like I'll start working on some analysis and trying to put up some presentations to take to the clients to demonstrate savings. Some of these clients are quite big, like it can be National Grid or it could be a mid-sized to a large business with a high energy consumption. I can actually go to the clients, spend a whole day on site explaining things, looking at how their business works and how we would fit in. It really is quite a diverse job. I don't think that there are two days which are the same.

What things do you enjoy the most?

For me it's the innovation side, which is the reason why did my masters at UCL. Every day there's something new, there's a new challenge and there's a new business model you are using, or the technology has changed, or there is new application for that technology. So every day you're trying to apply it to something different. And so every day is a bit of a challenge, and every day is a new challenge.

What are some things that you find frustrating?

I'd say that the main frustration on energy storage in the UK is the slowness of the regulatory environment. Because energy storage is not generating anything, it's not like the Sun or the wind, and you can price that power to then sell it, it's actually unlocking the flexibility of other assets and working in conjunction with other things, and right now, that's been quite slow. There's no actual accurate definition of energy storage, because I believe it's still waiting for parliament to pass a

definition of it. So this is quite frustrating because the technology is ready to go, and it has so much potential, but the regulatory environment is always a step behind.

What advice would you give to someone looking to get into this sector?

I would say go to the events. Whilst I was at UCL I went to an event by the UCL energy society which was done with Imperial and I met so many people in the energy space. Take part in all the societies, take part in all the conferences you can go to.

I'm not great at the application processes for large corporations, which is why I went for SMEs, where they value a lot more meeting them, they like you, you like them and you feel you can add something, they feel you can add something and then it works. It's a lot nicer and a lot more personal and human than I find with a large-scale application process. So that's why I'd recommend just get out there and meet people.