

ICT Executive Profile

Lee Ward, VP/GM IT Outsourcing and Services, UNISYS Australia



What is your current role and what is your scope?

My role is to lead our \$200 million/year IT outsourcing and services business, which supports customers in all the countries where Unisys operates across Asia Pacific. Our customers are well-known organisations and span many industries from federal and state governments, finance, airlines, and retail. The role that my team and I play is to look after all of our clients and support them in the business they do. It's always fun – I love working with people, which is really what ICT is about.

What attracted you to a career in ICT?

I came from a Catholic education system devoid of any computers and landed in university in 1981. Having never used computers at school – other than scientific calculators – it was all very new to me. I enrolled as a maths/physics teacher at Macquarie University but quickly changed to Computer Science after I fell in love with programming in FORTRAN

and assembler! ICT was very new and centred on programming...but I just knew I wanted to be there. When I graduated I was offered a role with IBM as a systems engineer or Qantas as an assembler programmer. Despite the attraction of cheap flights and holidays – I chose IBM – I liked its R&D.

Tell us about the highpoints and lowpoints of your career?

I am a firm believer that you need to learn more from your mistakes than successes. I spent one year on a sales pursuit. The client was in London and operations in Hong Kong and Singapore. I flew to London 10 times in nine months through SARs, the Iraq War and some pretty interesting times. I left London not that long before the terrorist attack. At one stage I had my home in Sydney and an apartment in Singapore and another in London.

Maybe it was the day I couldn't remember where my shoes were, or the one where I was walking down George St and froze – I couldn't place which city I was in. I knew then that this is not glamorous and it's not the way I want to live or the career direction I want.

Highlights – every day is a highlight. I love what I do and the harder the problem or challenge, the more I love it. I like to go home and think – well I learnt something new today that I didn't know before. Sometimes you don't learn what to do, but rather what not to do – it's just as valuable.

I believe in the saying “if you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life.”

What does work life balance mean to you?

Well – I think I'm a blender. I love my job, my not-for-profit (NFP) work, my volunteer work, my son's school, my friends, his friends – I love it all. Because of that I naturally find that I blur the lines as I don't find any of it a chore. I like to be in touch with all aspects of my life and I don't keep tallies on the hours I spend here or there – I just do what it takes to get things done. I certainly like nothing better than to go to sleep and think – that was a day well spent.

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Yes, I can be a pain to live with – especially the 10km run at 5:30AM when I do my best thinking– but I am blessed with good health and high energy levels. I guess what I need to improve though is just chilling out – I failed the only yoga class I did for being disruptive...I'd rather box or do bootcamp.

What attracted and kept you in the ICT industry throughout your career?

The pace and the amount of change. I guess being a bit of a scientist at heart, I love to read the research side and see how it plays out into real technology solutions. It's generally accepted that "facts" have a half-life and in ICT that's very true...what we thought was a practical limit of technology yesterday, is overcome within a year. The coolest inventions in ICT are definitely yet to come.

What ambitions personal or professional do you still want to achieve?

I love mentoring and coaching and have been part of Menttium – a US NFP that focuses on women and other minority groups. I have been privileged to work with women all around Asia Pacific and I always get as much from them as I hope they may from me. It's so satisfying seeing women grow, reach new levels of confidence and then go on to mentor other women themselves. That's the power – not just one mentor – but creating a whole new set of mentors who help other women similarly grow and prosper.

I would really like to do more coaching and what I would call "facilitating women to be the great women they already are". Apart from that – I know in my heart, I'll always be doing NFP and volunteer work...probably abroad in the future. Somewhere you probably wouldn't go on holidays and hopefully helping women in different ways. There may not be much ICT in some of these places though...

What's the one piece of advice you'd give to yourself starting out on your career?

Set out to enjoy the journey because we really don't know the destination. My son is 14 and I said to him that one day the career he will do when he is my age most probably hasn't been invented yet. It's a really exciting journey – so enjoy every minute and look for those interesting "side streets" that may well be an opportunity to branch out into new areas.

Don't worry about mistakes – learn from them and move on. If there is one "gift" I could give to the next generation – its resilience. Go test the boundaries and when you find one – just bounce back. Magnify the successes you have and really enjoy them – they will carry you over the next hurdle.

Most of all – remember to give something back of yourself – take what you learn and share it with others and the future will get better and better..

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