

ICT Executive Profile

Based on feedback from the annual survey around having access to more senior women as role models, each month we have an executive profile compiled from 7 questions posed to key executive women in the ICT industry

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What is your current role and what is your scope?

My primary role is leading the team that runs the industry client sector for IBM Australia and New Zealand. IBM's industry clients represent the largest of our clients in terms of engagement and they represent the head growth for the business. They also have dedicated account teams associated with them and account for a large part of our business. I'm also the Diversity Chair for IBM Australia and New Zealand and I'm the Canberra location executive – so I play several key roles for IBM.

What attracted you to a career in ICT?

When I graduated from university, I had only the vaguest notion of where I was headed. Also back

then, technology and I did not exactly have a great relationship. During my third year at university I took a holiday job at IBM, and it was suggested I should apply for the graduate program. This was the time where technology was really transforming industries and communications, not to mention changing lives across the world. I remember going through the numerous interviews at IBM and the psychology tests that were part of the program. Soon after being accepted into the program, I realised that IBM's graduate program was the benchmark in the industry.

Tell us about the highpoints and lowpoints of your career?

There have been a lot of highs but I've been fortunate enough to not have had too many lows. I've been very focused on my strengths and I believe strongly that positive leadership is directly linked to outcomes. I have always set myself personal goals for learning new skills and while we all have our personal strengths, I recognise there is always room to improve and grow. I've had many career advancement opportunities at IBM, including running IBM New Zealand for a number of years and being educated at Harvard University and Darden School of Business. Working at IBM, I have the ability to be part of an industry that is at the 'pointy end' of change, and this always brings new opportunities. Not everyone gets to work in a high-tech industry, but within any field there are jobs that have more potential for growth than others.

What does work life balance mean to you?

Throughout my childhood, my parents emphasised the importance of having a meaningful life. As a child I never thought about what I wanted to be. When my Dad finished school he became an engineer in the aviation industry, which took him to the Middle East following WWII. Dad was an engineer all his life until he retired at 62, however work dominated my father's life and this ultimately contributed to his death a year later when he was aged only 63. My father's death is a defining factor in my attitude to work and my very strong belief in the importance of work-life balance.

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IBM has built a strong reputation for helping our employees manage their work and personal priorities by providing a range of flexible work and leave options. In my role as Diversity Chair, and in every senior role I've had, I've tried to foster an environment of professionalism. When it was necessary to get the job done, I expected the team to work extra hours if needed. When it was not necessary I wanted them to work normal hours, go home and enjoy time with family and friends. That balance is incredibly important. I wanted them to have a life outside work; we pay our people for the quality of their work, not for the hours they work.

At IBM we believe that part of the solution for our nation's sustained productivity will come from how businesses and government leverage our increasingly connected and networked world. New 'horizontal' organisations will aim to be flexible and responsive, turning their focus to 'what' and 'how' work is done instead of 'where'. Location will be less important than skills and capabilities, which will open opportunities to engage talent no matter the location.

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

I've had many opportunities to continue to develop my skills throughout my career at IBM, but what keeps me most engaged is that the business has continued to reinvent itself. At IBM, we've been innovating for more than 100 years. When IBM first started in 1911, we used to make punch cards and the time recording clocks. By the 1940s, we developed electronic calculating machines and magnetic tapes. Throughout its history, IBM has continued to invent and redefine the technology industry. Today we have refocused our business on the high value services segments with the most recent shift to the digital economy.

It is important to me to work for a company where we continue to look at ways to improve the way we work, improve the way the world thinks and enhance the productivity of the communities in which we live.

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

I think you've always got to have a forward-looking plan about what you want to achieve. Those opportunities exist for me at IBM, whether it's here in Australia or elsewhere in the world, so I'll continue to progress my career through aligning my strengths to opportunities. I think it is important for everyone to have a long-term goal – it does not have to be too specific but a long-term goal provides purpose and direction. Some people may have a goal of having a certain amount of free time while others will take a more traditional career path. I also believe everyone should have shorter-term plans which are more immediate and focus us on what we need to accomplish in the short-term future. People ask me what is most important, talent or ambition. I believe ambition is more important, because this is key to attaining what we set out to achieve, both personally and professionally. I also believe that you cannot teach ambition.

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

Be willing to learn. We don't know what work will look like in five years and therefore you need to ensure you continue to develop and accept new skills. I've continued to learn from people around me and as a result, I've had great opportunities put in front of me. Be willing to expand your skill sets, expertise and capabilities – this is what will keep your options open and allow you to take advantage of opportunities that arise.

NB: As appeared on FITT e-newsletter September 2014 and also features on the website.

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