

Skills to Succeed

An Interview with Adrian Lajtha,
Chief Leadership Officer, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE *As part of his responsibilities, Adrian Lajtha oversees Accenture's corporate citizenship initiatives globally and is a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee. Prior to assuming his current post in September 2007, Lajtha was Group Chief Executive of Accenture's Financial Services operating group. From 2000 to May 2005, Lajtha was managing partner of Accenture's Financial Services business in the United Kingdom and Ireland. He led Accenture's resource management group in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and South Africa from 1999 to 2000 and the company's Strategy unit in the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region from 1993 to 1999. Lajtha has spent nearly his entire professional career in Accenture's Financial Services operating group, with a particular focus on banking. He joined Accenture in 1979 and became a partner in 1990. He served on Accenture's Board of Partners prior to the company's incorporation in 2001. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Bankers and holds a degree in Classics from Oxford University.*



Adrian Lajtha

COMPANY BRIEF *With over 244,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture (www.accenture.com) is a global management consulting, technology services, and outsourcing company combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful companies. Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.*

How critical is community engagement to the culture of Accenture and how do you drive that throughout the organization?

What we do in corporate citizenship is profoundly important to us. Our efforts align with our mindset and perspective, and they are fundamental to the character of the company and part of what defines us. In fact, when we refreshed our core values several years ago, we embedded corporate citizenship into them even more deeply, particularly around our value of stewardship and the way we can make the world a better place.

We have a vision of the difference we can make and the extraordinary talent organizations we can help build, and when you talk to our people

about what they enjoy most about the company, the citizenship agenda is number one or two everywhere in the world.

How important is it to align your philanthropy with business strategy?

Quite simply, it's best practice. A business like Accenture must align its corporate citizenship efforts with the natural rhythm of the business.

Four years ago, we decided to re-brand ourselves in this space. We are fundamentally a talent and skills building company. So it was a natural act for us

to harness that energy to make a difference around skills that drive economic empowerment and to address massive areas of disadvantage in both emerging and developed markets around the world.

We also consulted with a number of people outside Accenture who are thoughtful about best practice. Our process produced Skills to Succeed, which is the banner headline for the energies of our more than 240,000 people around the world and our corporate efforts to make a difference in this space.

Is it difficult to put metrics in place to track impact in this area and how important is it to have those metrics?

We have clear metrics and expectations, just as we do with our client work, and we are moving as a global force in the citizenship space with exactly the same governance, business disciplines, and measurements our clients expect.

We declared an overarching ambition two years ago, which was to equip 250,000 people around the world by 2015 with the skills to get a job or build a business. To underpin that goal, we will commit the energies, passions, and resources of Accenture. We will also commit over \$100 million over the three-year period to support our corporate citizenship efforts.

Along the way, we're measuring how we're working with a growing number of strategic partners, our pro bono activity, and local and global giving efforts. Ultimately, we want to understand whether we are making a difference to those we want to touch with this effort.

How critical is this CR commitment to employee engagement and how important is it to attracting talent?

It's enormous. If we aspire to attract, recruit, and retain the best talent all over the world, we have to be relevant generationally to what is on their minds. We plan to recruit more than 60,000

people this year – and every year, the majority of our candidates tell us that working at a company that places citizenship at its heart is important to them.

Our citizenship agenda and ethical business conduct, and the fact that we're driving inclusion and diversity, means they see Accenture as a company with a broader purpose.

Our generation of leaders must understand the citizenship agenda. If they don't, their people will know quickly. I'm pleased that Accenture's leaders all over the world help drive our efforts.

How critical is it to have a workforce that mirrors your diverse clientele and how does diversity and inclusion relate?

A diverse workforce manifests the broadest mix of talent you can bring to bear – across generations, cultures, countries, educational experiences, and backgrounds. Inclusion is about the receiving ground – it's ultimately the organization that must maximize the success of and revel in the achievements of those diverse segments.

We concentrate on how we can nurture those diverse segments of our population and create a virtuous circle. If you just focus on the individual, you miss the larger organism of which they're trying to be a part. But if you just focus on the organization, you don't recognize the specific needs of diverse populations and the picture is incomplete.

Over the next few years, we're going to be dramatically more diverse than we are today, which makes the company a richer place to be.

What has made Accenture a place you have wanted to stay?

I didn't think I would stay. When I joined the company more than 30 years ago, I expected to move on in a year. But I was genuinely delighted by the spectacular people who work at Accenture and the fact that it's simply not possible to be bored here. We constantly challenge the status quo and that keeps my energy level high.

It seems that no matter how the company grows, the culture remains intact.

It is more vibrant, relevant, and pervasive today than it has ever been in my tenure here. If someone asks for help, regardless of who we are, we drop things to help that person. That approach is inculcated into all of our people. Our mind-set is all about leaders teaching leaders and we know we have a responsibility to talk with our people. It seems to work well. I believe we have the most creative, forward-thinking individuals in the business world and they come together every day to deliver the high performance our clients expect. ●