

Clients, Employees and Communities

An Interview with Julie Sweet,
Group Chief Executive - North America, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE Julie Sweet is responsible for leading Accenture's business in the United States and Canada. She is also a member of the company's Global Management Committee. Prior to assuming her current position in June 2015, Sweet served as General Counsel, Secretary and Chief Compliance Officer. Before joining Accenture in 2010, Sweet was, for 10 years, a partner in the Corporate department of the law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP, which she joined in



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1992. Sweet has spent substantial time working in Hong Kong and Mainland China. She serves on the board of directors of the National Center for Children and Families and on the board of directors of the Bipartisan Policy Center. She holds a B.A. degree from Claremont McKenna College and a J.D. degree from Columbia Law School.

COMPANY BRIEF Accenture (accenture.com) is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology, and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions – underpinned by the world's largest delivery network – Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With more than 373,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

How have you focused your efforts within your role?

On any given day, I focus on the same goal for three audiences: to improve the way the world works and lives – for our clients, our employees, and the communities in which we live and work.

I think about the investments we need to make to better serve our clients, and to attract and retain the highly specialized talent we need. At Accenture, our people are everything, and it's important to me that we create an environment where they can be successful at work and at home, at any stage of their lives.

For example, across Accenture we invested more than \$840 million in learning and professional development last year, and we recently expanded our parental leave policies. Now, primary caregivers can work locally for one year following their return from the birth or adoption of a child.

We are also passionate about making a difference in our communities, so I work on creating ways to have a bigger impact on our communities and to ensure our employees can be involved in the exciting work we do in those communities.

How does your previous role as Corporate Counsel compare to this one?

One of the reasons I joined Accenture is that the then-CEO told me he wasn't looking for a lawyer – he was looking for a business leader with legal experience. That resonated with me, and I've been at the table since day one, very much focused on our business, on being able to help drive our investments, and on our strategy. As a result, the shift from General Counsel to this role was relatively seamless.

Is there organic growth today in the North American market?

We absolutely view North America – particularly the U.S. – as a growth market. Over four of the past five years, our revenues in the U.S. have grown by double digits, largely through organic growth, while the market has grown 3 to 4 percent.

There are three primary reasons for our excitement about this market. First, from an economic perspective, the U.S. is the world's largest economy, providing incredible opportunity for growth. Second, North America has an excellent talent pool. Accenture has more than 50,000 people in the U.S. – and we continue to hire. Finally, this is the epicenter of innovation, both in terms of generating and adopting it. Many of our global clients are headquartered in North America and are early adopters of the innovation coming out of this market.

How important is it to be with clients to see those evolving needs and changes? How do you maintain innovation at your size?

It's critical to stay close to clients. We must understand what is on clients' minds and what their needs are, and we must also be close to our teams who are serving our clients. At day's end, it is all about delivering value to our clients as defined by them.

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As part of that, we make big feel small. Our culture connects people to their local offices and their teams – and very much to their clients. We are always creating new ways to help our people learn, grow, and stay connected, and we offer a wide range of collaboration tools through which our people can share ideas, knowledge, and experiences.

Would you talk about what makes cloud so critical and important?

As context, I think about transformation in terms of digital, cloud, and security. Today, everything is digital – it's transforming enterprises, both from a growth and an efficiency perspective. It's massive, and at a scale and magnitude that are unprecedented. Our digital services grew by 35 percent last year to more than \$7 billion.

Cloud is so important because it enables digital transformation. It underpins disruptive new technologies in social, mobile, and analytics – and it is enabling industry leaders to compete in digital. Innovation is happening in the cloud – and cloud gives companies the speed and flexibility to be much more agile.

In the old, on-premises world, we had to make updates client by client. With digital, companies need to move quickly and change quickly, and cloud provides a competitive advantage. As a one-to-many technology, cloud allows multi-tenant changes. That is, cloud serves a lot of customers, and when a change is made, the change gets pushed out to a lot of customers. It is the utility of technology.

As a result of all this, just as digital has taken off, we see an inflection point with cloud. Our cloud business is strong. Globally, it generated \$3.5 billion in revenue last fiscal year, and we have 18,000 people with deeply specialized cloud skills. We are investing in its future, including through our recent acquisition of Cloud Sherpas, a leading pure cloud services company.

The third piece is security – people are now comfortable that they can make the cloud and these digital technologies secure. We continue to invest in our leading security capabilities, including our acquisition earlier this year of FusionX, which focuses on advanced cyber-threat testing.

We've made a lot of investments in digital, we're investing in cloud, and we're investing in security because those three areas are what clients are continuing to move toward.

How important is it to mirror your diverse client base within the workforce?

We believe that creating an inclusive and diverse environment is not only the right thing to do, but it also makes our company stronger, smarter, and more innovative – which helps us better serve the needs of our clients, our people, and our communities.

Our commitment to inclusion and diversity starts with action at the top, which is different from tone at the top. We actively develop the next generation of women leaders through a number of initiatives. Three years ago, we launched a program in which each of our top leaders personally sponsors a senior woman. During the first two years of that program, we saw a huge percentage of those senior women progress in their careers as a result of clear sponsorship and leaders taking action.

We empower our people to lead, and empowering our more than 130,000 women is a key part of this. We believe strongly that gender equality is essential for a high-performing, talent-led organization. Today, women make up 37 percent of our global workforce. We have pledged that by 2017, 40 percent of our new hires will be women.

Would you talk about Skills to Succeed and Accenture's broad commitment to corporate citizenship?

Skills to Succeed is our corporate citizenship initiative, and it is a critical part of our mission to improve the way the world works and lives. We are filling the global need for skills that open doors to employment and economic opportunity. In fact, we plan to equip more than three million people around the world by the end of fiscal 2020 with the skills to get a job or build a business.

Skills to Succeed is an enormous source of pride for our people, and their energy and expertise have greatly enhanced our contribution to our communities. For example, our people are working with Girls Who Code, a nonprofit dedicated to helping young women pursue technology careers.

Can you talk about Accenture's focus on employee benefits?

At Accenture, benefits are not simply stand-alone programs; we think about them as ways of helping our people be successful both at work and at home. Within that context, we focus, for example, on working

parents. In 2015, we announced we were doubling our maternity leave, as well as improving our paternity leave. In addition, we doubled the amount of backup childcare we provided from 40 hours to 80 hours, and from 40 hours to 120 hours the first year after one has had a child. There are simply times when people need benefits like that, and Accenture is well suited to provide them.

At the same time, our backup care is also available for elder care. Again, over the course of a career, one may or may not become a parent but many employees have elderly parents who need care. It's a very stressful time if one's elderly parents are ill, and this benefit can help ease that stress.

I'm particularly proud of a plan that I think is industry-leading. It specifies that when people come back from parental leave in the first year of their child's life, they will be able to work locally for a year. This recognizes what it's like to have a newborn, when it's often difficult to travel. Our benefits are meant to be thoughtful about how we, as an employer, can help our employees have a better experience at home.

How has your employee review process contributed to Accenture's success?

Our people are our business so our leaders spend a lot of time focused on them, their careers, and their development, and enabling them to be successful. Two of our core values are respect for the individual, and focus on having the best people. This is who we are as a company, and it's critical to our success.

We're redefining performance management to strengthen how we develop and grow our people. Our new Performance Achievement approach involves real time, forward-looking conversations about setting priorities and growing strengths, to help our employees be more successful.

We are moving away from individual performance rankings. As an organization, we spend a lot of time talking to each other about rankings, and we wanted to shift from ranking our employees against each other to having thoughtful discussions about each employee, their strengths, and where they need to develop. It's really part of our drive to focus on helping our employees be successful and giving them the feedback they need to be successful. ●