

Leading with Innovation

An Interview with Peggy Kostial,
Senior Managing Director, Southwest Region, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE *In her current role, Peggy Kostial focuses on bringing innovation to clients, attracting top talent and strengthening the company's impact in its local communities. She also serves on Accenture's North America Leadership Team and Global Leadership Council. During her 30-year career with Accenture, she has focused primarily on the oil and gas sector. Before being appointed to her current role in December 2016, Kostial*



Peggy Kostial

was senior managing director of Accenture's Resources operating group in North America. Other leadership roles at Accenture include serving as the managing director responsible for Accenture's Energy practice in North America; leading an e-business start-up; and leading Accenture's strategic business relationships with Microsoft and SAP for the energy industry. Kostial is a board member of the Space Center Houston, Houston Zoo, Vanderbilt's Owen School of Management and SpringSpirit, a Houston based non-profit focused on underprivileged and at-risk youth. She also served on the 2017 Houston Super Bowl Host Committee, participating as one of 17 vice chairs and Accenture's representative as a founding sponsor. Kostial graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt University, receiving a B.S. degree with a major in mathematics and a concentration in chemistry.

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 deep 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 nearly 460,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.*

What have been the keys to Accenture's industry leadership and brand strength?

I'm proud to work for a company that leads with innovation and that puts our clients and

their industries at the center of everything we do. We serve more than 40 industries for which our industry leaders constantly evaluate norms, disruptions, trends, pain points, and so on to identify opportunities for clients to improve and drive value. From here, we apply our uniquely wide range of capabilities in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations to solve some of the toughest business challenges. It's this industry-centricity combined with this unmatched breadth of capabilities that sets us

apart in the marketplace.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for Accenture in the Southwest region?

Our greatest opportunity lies in helping our clients innovate and transform in the digital era, which is more competitive and faster-changing than ever. This challenge can, at times, seem daunting, and clients need significant leadership and guidance to navigate this complex transition. Beyond this core focus, success also lies in how we contribute in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. In each market we serve, we want to be an integrated member of the local community where we engage, participate, have a voice and make an impact. Whether that be helping Houston post Harvey, helping Dallas find its path to innovation leadership or working with San Antonio to build a workforce of the future through strategic apprenticeships, we strive to be meaningful participants in the local communities where we live and work. It gives greater meaning to the work we do day to day, and it is really the least we can do to support the communities that support us so much.

Accenture is known for its work with large, multinational companies. Is this the main focus for Accenture and how critical is it to build client relationships with entrepreneurs and emerging companies?

We work with the world's largest, most successful companies primarily because we are uniquely positioned to help with the size and scale of their problems. In fact, we serve 95 of the Fortune Global 100 and more than three-quarters of the Fortune Global 500. To do what we do, it's essential to be part of the broader ecosystem, which includes small companies, entrepreneurs and startups. As we know, many times the best innovations come from these

entities, so being properly networked and engaged with them is critical. This usually takes on multiple forms beyond the classic client relationship, including investments to incubate them, research and development, partial ownership or co-ownership with other industry partners, and teaming as part of the local innovation landscape or a go-to-market strategy. Today, in our inter-reliant world, any two given companies, even as they differ in size, may buy from, sell to, borrow from, and hold a joint venture with one another all at the same time. We're no exception to that, and our deep relationships with our network of partners is a key part of our strategy and success.

Accenture places a major focus on diversity and inclusion. Will you discuss this commitment and how much diversity is a part of the culture at Accenture?

What I want – and what all our senior leadership wants – is for every single one of our colleagues, regardless of who they are and where they come from, to be completely comfortable being who they are at Accenture. We're on a bold journey to be the most inclusive workplace in the world. To this end and to hold ourselves accountable, we've set public goals for diversity, and we disclose our U.S. demographic breakdowns, a step very few companies have taken. We're fostering greater understanding by openly talking about difficult subjects like race and behaviors that, even if unintended, can make people feel excluded. We're leading comprehensive research on topics such as gender pay and skill gaps, and we're working to implement our findings in our own organization. It's a constant work in progress with much heavy lifting still to be done, but I am very proud that we're tackling this so openly and so ambitiously.

What advice do you give to young women beginning their careers?

I tell both young women and men the same thing: the beginning of your career is such an exciting time, that you should fully embrace it, and that it's totally fine not to have 100 percent clarity on what you want to do. It is just as important to learn what you don't like doing as it is to learn what you do like doing. I encourage young people to be open to different opportunities as one just never knows what something might lead to. And lastly, I encourage them to work hard, to develop excellent skills and to build their network as those three things will serve them well regardless of the path their career takes. ●