

Shaping The Future Of Business And Technology

An Interview with Stuart Henderson, Market Unit Lead – U.S. Northeast, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE *Stuart Henderson is Accenture's Market Unit lead for U.S. Northeast and responsible for clients, people, offices, community involvement, and financial performance across the region. Leading more than 10,000 people in the Northeast – spanning Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont – Henderson focuses on bringing continuous innovation to clients, attracting and retaining top*



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talent and strengthening Accenture's impact in the local communities. He also is a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee and North America Leadership Team. Prior to his Northeast role, Henderson was Accenture's client account lead, responsible for building and growing relationships with the world's leading companies operating in the United States and Canada to drive client value and co-innovation. Henderson was also Accenture's global industry lead for Life Sciences – guiding the strategies, offerings, and thought leadership to help pharma, biotech, medical technology, distributor, and consumer health companies reshape the future of medicine and care. Before joining Accenture, Henderson worked in corporate strategy and development, heading up R&D strategy at AstraZeneca and leading life sciences strategy and transformation at IBM Global Business Services. Henderson joined Accenture in 2014. He earned a BS degree in information technology from De Montfort University.

COMPANY BRIEF *Accenture (accenture.com) is a leading global professional services company that helps the world's leading businesses, governments, and other organizations build their digital core, optimize their operations, accelerate revenue growth, and enhance citizen services – creating tangible value at speed and scale. Accenture is a talent- and innovation-led company with approximately 743,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Technology is at the core of change today, and Accenture is one of the world's leaders in helping drive that change.*

Will you discuss your role as Market Unit Lead for U.S. Northeast and how you will focus your efforts in the role?

Approaching the two-year mark as the Market Unit Lead for U.S. Northeast, this journey

has proven to be both challenging and very rewarding. I'm responsible for clients, people, community engagement, and financial performance, leading more than 10,000 people across Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

My focus is, and continues to be, to work with our clients on their reinvention journey, while at the same time, retaining and developing top talent and strengthening Accenture's impact in

local communities. As a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee and our North America Leadership Team, I have the opportunity to understand our business and our impact through both a macro and micro lens – it's a very inspiring vantage point.

Prior to my Northeast role, I was Accenture's North America Client Account Lead, responsible for building and growing relationships with the world's leading companies operating in the United States and Canada to drive client value and innovation.

In addition, I was Accenture's global industry lead for Life Sciences – guiding the strategies, offerings, and thought leadership to help pharma, biotech, medical technology, distributor and consumer health companies reshape the future of medicine and care.

How do you describe Accenture's culture and purpose?

At Accenture, our goal is to create 360-degree value for our stakeholders – our clients, our people, partners, and communities. We measure our success by how well we are achieving this goal.

Diving into our culture and purpose, we are deeply committed to giving back to the community. We all have the responsibility to strive each day to live our values of equity, respect, inclusion and belonging for all people.

One effort I'm particularly proud of is Share My Meals, a New Jersey-based non-profit. Their mission is clear: provide greater access to healthy food while eliminating food waste. Share My Meals collects surplus meals from food service providers and distributes them directly to local families at their homes or through a network of community partners. Local food donors provide a crucial role, providing high quality, nutritious food on a flexible basis.

Our people are all in, working together with clients to enhance the organization's technology and streamlining processes for greater efficiency. We collaborated to integrate their fundraising and other business-critical systems for their clients, donors, volunteers, and administrators. While these improved systems have delivered measurable results for Share My Meals – including increasing the volume of meals shared with the community by more than 400 percent in the next two years – the innovation is scalable and has the potential to improve organizations like theirs throughout the country and beyond, and that's good for everyone.

At the end of the day, we are incredibly thankful for our people who care so deeply about the work we do and the impact on our clients, our communities, and each other.

What have been the keys to Accenture's industry leadership and how do you define the Accenture advantage?

Accenture sets the bar in many ways – an important differentiator is our research, which helps to shape the future of business and technology. We know that Gen AI is unlike any technology change we have seen in the digital age. We believe that leaders need to have a deep understanding and ensure their employees do as well so that they can leverage this technology as a catalyst for reinvention.

One of our reports, released at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, revealed Generative AI has become a fundamental business lever for business reinvention as disruption continues to rise globally. In fact, the rate of change affecting business has risen sharply; by 183 percentage points since 2019 and 33 percentage points in 2023 alone, with 88 percent of C-suite executives anticipating an even faster rate of change in 2024.

This report, "Reinvention in the age of Generative AI," highlights five key imperatives that need to be addressed to execute a successful reinvention strategy:

1. Be value-led in developing end-to-end capabilities, powered and reinvented with Gen AI.
2. Develop an AI-enabled, secure digital core.
3. Set and guide a vision for how to reinvent work and prepare workers for a Gen AI world.
4. Make responsible AI pervasive, systematic, and enterprise-wide.
5. Splice continuous reinvention into organizational DNA, blending technology like Gen AI with people's ingenuity to capture long-term value and build lasting resilience.

“Gen AI offers a trio of opportunities – it can accelerate economic value and drive business growth while also fostering more creative and meaningful work for people.”

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership during times of accelerated change?

At Accenture, we talk about essential qualities of leadership. What we're looking for is for people to lead with excellence, confidence, and humility. We do the right thing – always. And we exemplify client centricity while we care deeply for our people. Inclusion and diversity are not just principles but lived values, and we embrace the courage to drive change.

For me, these are not just “words.” This is how we show up every day for our people and our clients.

During periods of accelerated change – as we have seen in recent years and ahead – leaders need to be agile and navigate uncertainty willingly – table stakes at Accenture.

What are the key issues facing C-suite executives today and how is Accenture helping to address these issues?

C-suite executives who I work with are talking about Gen AI – where to start, how to prepare their ecosystem, and how to leverage its potential. Last year we saw a lot of very exciting experimentation; even the shift from GPT 3.5 to 4 and the recent Gemini version are huge steps forward. C-suites today are focused on how to scale and how to drive value from this Gen AI revolution.

Beyond that, digital literacy is essential – not just for leaders, but for everyone. As our research shows, continuous reinvention is achieved only with a very deep understanding of advances in transformative technologies like Gen AI that have the potential to transform every part of the enterprise.

And we don't just counsel our clients about the need for ongoing training; this is what we practice with all our employees, in the Northeast and throughout the world. TQ – it stands for Technology Quotient – is a curriculum of basic technology skills in key areas – we believe that this understanding is critical for success for all of our people. As a company, we spend about \$1 billion a year, an average of 40 hours per person, on training. That helps us both from an overall performance perspective, and it helps us recruit top talent.

Will you discuss Accenture's investment in technology and how important it is to not lose the human touch that Accenture is known for with the focus on technology?

Accenture's investment in technology is significant by any benchmark. Last year, the company announced an unprecedented \$3 billion investment over three years to help clients across all industries rapidly and responsibly advance and use AI to achieve greater growth, efficiency, and resilience. This investment built on Accenture's decades-plus leadership in AI, including more than 1,450 patents and pending patent applications.

As it has been said, AI will be a mega-trend, transforming industries, companies, and the way we live and work. Gen AI is democratizing business process redesign, giving everyone – from assembly workers and customer service agents to lab scientists – the power to reshape how they work. But this transformation can only happen if there is trust that organizations will integrate the technology in ways that protect and prepare workers. Approaching this integration through a people-centric lens has the potential to create more than \$10 trillion in economic value. This was reflected in recent research, “Work, Workforce and Workers,” from Ellyn Shook, Accenture's Chief Leadership and Human Resources Officer and Paul Daughtery, Group Chief Executive, Accenture Technology.

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How critical is it for Accenture to build a diverse and inclusive workforce to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table when addressing client needs?

Diversity drives innovation – it's at the heart of who we are and what we do at Accenture. Diversity and inclusion are in our DNA. You can only have a culture of equality if you start with the belief that diversity matters, that it's not only the right thing to do, but that it's an important part of your business.

We are committed to helping our people thrive, which includes advancing inclusion and diversity – and we treat inclusion and diversity like every other business priority. We set goals, share them publicly, and collect data to measure our progress and continuously improve. As leaders, we're accountable for ensuring we have the most innovative and talented people in our industry. This approach is a key driver of our success.

What do you see as the responsibility that leading companies have to being engaged in the communities they serve and to be a force for good in society?

We promote equality and foster employment and advancement for under-represented communities, both globally and locally. We actively collaborate to address specific challenges and advocate for meaningful change.

A great example of this is our apprenticeship program – an innovative, year-long, learn-and-earn model. This initiative provides apprentices with market-based wages and comprehensive benefits while equipping them with skills essential for a successful career. Since we established the apprenticeship program in 2016, Accenture has hired more than 2,000 apprentices. The vast majority joined the company without a four-year degree.

We continue to expand our program to give more people access to digital economy jobs. This program has lifted not only the lives of our apprentices, but their families and communities as well. And our ambition for this program goes beyond Accenture – we're helping other employers, including our clients, create professional apprenticeship programs based on best practices we've established. We've launched 10 local Apprentice Networks convening over 200 employers with talent and other key partners. We've even published a playbook to help companies jumpstart their own apprenticeship programs.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Three things: Be a steward of the talent following you. Be a constant learner – the world is moving faster and faster and you must invest in learning every day to remain relevant. Finally, cultivate connections.

When I speak to people interested in building their careers, I emphasize the value of cultivating connections – whether with clients, teams, or peers. People are at the heart and center of our business. Also, continuous learning is paramount to our success in the market. As we've discussed, change is constant – and opportunities don't happen, you have to create them.

If people are interested in a career in a business like ours, it's helpful to combine a strong understanding and background in technology with a passion for what's new. As for me, I'm inspired by our “new joiners” – our term for new employees – they bring fresh ideas, new life experiences, and diverse perspectives to our company. ●