

Delivering Technological Solutions

An Interview with Shelly Swanback,
Senior Managing Director-Technology, North America, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE During Shelly Swanback's 22 years with Accenture, she has helped companies solve complicated information, technology, and management problems and worked with numerous CIOs to significantly improve their IT operations. Previously, she served as the Managing Director for the Central client service group for Accenture's Communications, Media, and Technology North America operating unit. She also served as the Managing Director for Accenture's Denver office. Swanback holds a Bachelor of Science degree in finance and computer information systems from Colorado State University. She has been a board member of the Women's Vision Foundation and the Global Leadership Council for Colorado State University's College of Business.



Shelly Swanback

COMPANY BRIEF Accenture (www.accenture.com) is a global management consulting, technology services, and outsourcing company that combines unparalleled experience and capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful companies. With approximately 281,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.

How do you define your role at Accenture?

I've been with Accenture for more than 22 years and currently serve as the Technology Lead for North America. This means I am accountable for sales support, solution design, and delivery of Accenture's technology services and offerings across North America.

Every day, I have the privilege of leading some of today's top talent in helping our clients solve global business challenges using technology in ways that we would have never have thought possible even two years ago.

Is there close coordination within the company around the world?

Yes. We excel at collaborating – it's required, and a deep-rooted element of our culture is to collaborate with our clients, our technology partners, and across our own organization. For example, my North America team is very tightly connected to our global technology delivery team. We're on the ground locally with our clients in North America, and we coordinate the services with our global

colleagues to come together to deliver the services we have offered to our clients.

How important is it to stay on top of technology today?

It's incredibly important, and also not easy. I have never seen a time of such fast innovation in the market; and with that comes some challenges but also great opportunity.

Accenture has unmatched global reach; there is hardly a corner of the world that we don't touch, and our global delivery network provides deep industry and technology skills not found

elsewhere.

We have the industry's widest range of alliances with top technology providers of all sizes, including SAP, Oracle, Microsoft, Salesforce, Workday, EMC, and many more. Because we know our alliance partners and their technology inside-out and are able to complement that with our deep industry and business process knowledge, we can recommend the solutions that will work best for our clients.

We are able to blend both our technology and our business expertise to help our clients solve real business problems and drive growth. Our clients know what to expect from us: industry- and market-leading capabilities and technology services and solutions that deliver reliable, cost-effective business results on a global scale that meet the highest standards and are backed by the best people.

At your size and scale, how do you avoid losing your innovative edge?

At Accenture, everyone considers innovation to be part of their daily agenda, which is great for the company and very exciting.

Innovation comes from different sources and happens in different ways. We have people who spend their time focused on a particular kind of technology, and they have responsibility to drive innovation for our technology offerings.

We also have people who focus their time within a particular industry, and they have responsibility to innovate within that industry. Part of what they do is take the innovations from the technology teams and figure out how to further innovate with that technology to solve a business problem for their client.

So we don't think of it as an R&D function – it's something our people enjoy and something our clients require us to do every day.

What opportunities exist for women within Accenture?

The opportunities are truly endless. We have great opportunities for those who want to develop deep technology expertise, or for those who like and want to use technology but have a passion for a particular business process or industry.

Additionally, through our women's theme, "Defining success. Your way.", we encourage all of our women to create their own paths to success. We also provide mentoring and sponsorship initiatives. We hold quarterly forums on leadership topics and, as part of our \$870-million annual investment in training, we customize training for our women.

How important are STEM skills to Accenture?

STEM skills are critical to Accenture's success. Technology-led innovation is at the heart of our business and one of the building blocks of high performance for our clients. So Accenture is focused on what we can do both internally in terms of building STEM skills, but also externally to make sure we have a workforce ready at Accenture and other technology companies to put those skill sets to work.

One of our key initiatives was just announced this month: our sponsorship of the Million Women Mentors initiative, which will build a network of one million mentors in STEM who will connect with one million girls and young women.

How do you find the balance with clients in terms of utilizing technology while also maintaining the personal touch?

It's important that our people experience the environment and realities that surround our clients where they live, because that provides important context to the services we're providing. In many cases, we have our people working within our clients' offices.

We're also big users of collaboration technology to ensure that team members who aren't on-site with the client remain closely connected. For example, we use tools ranging from video technologies to those that allow you to collaborate on documents.

What makes Accenture the place where you want to stay?

I have never considered leaving. I love the work, the challenge, and serving our clients. I also love our people. We pride ourselves on having the best people, and when you get accustomed to working with those who are so passionate about what they do, it's an environment you don't want to leave. Accenture has also offered me the flexibility to have a rewarding career and a family life. ●