

# Using Technology to Strategic Advantage

At Accenture, **Annette Rippert** helps leading companies reimagine business through the power of technology and human ingenuity.

**ANNETTE RIPPERT ('86, KSM '94) loves data—not just for data's sake, but for what it promises for tomorrow.**

"Whether it's to inform product development, open new markets, or accelerate innovation, the power of data and insights is changing the future," she says.

As group chief executive of the Strategy & Consulting business at Accenture, the global professional services company, she oversees a 45,000-member team that helps Fortune 500 and leading technology clients apply data, analytics, artificial intelligence, assets, and innovation to deliver business outcomes.

Rippert credits Northwestern with teaching her the value of data back when she entered the field of electrical engineering and computer science as a student in the 1980s—and she has never forgotten the lesson.

In a 2021 *Fortune* op-ed, she said, "Business leaders need to break a lifelong habit of focusing on historical data and start learning from the future" by using new data sets processed by artificial intelligence to find patterns and anticipate trends.

"It's one of the reasons we've teamed with Northwestern to develop our workforce in the area of data and analytics," she says, referring to the custom executive education program in analytics and artificial intelligence that Northwestern developed in partnership with Accenture.

## Transforming business through technology

Rippert, who credits the fast-paced, ever-changing nature of her work for keeping her at Accenture for nearly three decades, specializes in using emerging technologies to help clients accelerate growth.

"I have been fortunate to work with clients on groundbreaking industry shifts, such as the cable industry's move from analog to digital transmission and building the foundation for today's streaming services," she says. "Seeing the impact of this work has been immensely rewarding."

Rippert started as a technologist, architect, and leader of complex programs, then quickly moved on to lead major client accounts and global service lines at Accenture, eventually heading up its technology business in North America. Recently, she co-sponsored the launch of Accenture's \$3 billion Cloud First initiative.

Her use of technology to transform business has earned her national recognition, including the Gold Stevie Award for Achievement in Management – Business and Professional Services. She was also ranked number one among the "Top Women Leaders in Consulting" for 2022 by *The Consulting Report*.

## Balancing life's opportunities

Rippert's journey to the top of the consulting world wasn't a straight line. She joined Accenture (then Arthur Andersen) in 1986 because she wanted to apply her engineering skills to the broader business world.



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“I could see technology was changing how business was done,” she says. “And I realized that rather than build better circuits, I wanted to build better businesses.”

After earning a master’s of management degree from the Kellogg School of Management and working her way to senior leadership positions as a partner at Accenture, Rippert left the company in 2004. “I had achieved a great deal professionally and wanted to invest my full focus on raising my five sons,” she says. “It was enormously fulfilling, but when my youngest son began school, I knew I had more to offer.”

Accenture welcomed Rippert back after nearly seven years away. “The experience shaped my desire to help women balance life’s opportunities and to sponsor programs to facilitate those who choose to leave and then return to the workforce,” she says.

### **In search of role models**

As an undergraduate, being one of few women in the engineering program wasn’t easy, but the support of professors encouraged Rippert to excel.

She owes much to those who encouraged her at Northwestern, including Professor Emeritus Larry Henschen, who gave her the confidence to dive deeper into electrical engineering and computer science.

“That’s one of the reasons being a mentor is so important to me today,” she says. “I learned the necessity of advocating for myself, and my experiences spurred my passion for helping women in STEM fields.”

Early in her career, Rippert was hard-pressed to find female mentors to help navigate her largely male-dominated professional path. And while today’s women engineers have more resources and support systems, Rippert says a notable disparity and culture gap remains.

“Research shows it’s critically important for girls and women to have visible role models,” she notes, “which is why I participate in and advocate for programs such as the Grace Hopper Celebration, Girls Who Code, and Hour of Code.”

### **Working together, giving back**

Northwestern taught Rippert the importance of collaboration across disciplines. “The teams I lead work in this interdisciplinary fashion every day,” she says. “The more we can develop whole-brain engineers and business leaders, the better off our collective future will be.”

She gives back to the University today by serving on the McCormick Advisory Council and the Northwestern Board of Trustees, and she will deliver Northwestern Engineering’s undergraduate convocation address in June.

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