

Profile: Rachael Zavodnyik, Head of Legal and Government Affairs APAC, Infosys



Caitlin Whale, Special Counsel, Baker McKenzie, sits down with **Rachael Zavodnyik**, Head of Legal and Government Affairs APAC, Infosys.

CAITLIN WHALE: Rachael - thanks for taking the time to talk with CAMLA today. Having reviewed your CV and seeing all the things that you have on I am particularly grateful. I can't imagine COVID is helping your workload.

RACHAEL ZAVODNYIK: Ah, the days are back to back and then the nights are just filled with reviewing documents and sending advices. I think every lawyer is experiencing the same sort of issue at the moment, that we're being tested at both ends.

WHALE: Your role as Head of Legal and Government Affairs sounds fascinating. Can you outline the work that you and your team do?

ZAVODNYIK: We support the business across a number of different industry verticals - everything's IT related obviously because that's what we do. We're IT services and software; software services and software provision.

We support industry verticals in banking, resources, energy and institutions, TMT, public sector and a variety of other retail businesses, so it's a really diverse portfolio. We support the contracting and deals that go along with those businesses.

In the last, I think, four years we have acquired a number of businesses across the world, and there's a lot of diverse work that comes out of this particular region associated with those businesses as well as a focus on process improvement, efficiencies and digital transformation.

WHALE: Unlike most in-house counsel, you have a role dealing with public officials and governments. How much of your work is involved in that and what's that experience like?

ZAVODNYIK: We have been building that function in Australia since the beginning of the year. I've been working a little bit longer in this space in a more ad hoc way but we are working with consultants to help us build this function out and develop networks with government.

We are members of industry leading bodies and, with other third party advisory people and we talk to institutions and we talk a lot to universities. We talk to state, federal and local governments. Our focus at the moment is with the Federal Government sector; that's where our business interests are. We also have an interest in enhancing the India-Australia relationship and there's a lot going on in that area at the moment. We've had great meetings with ministers, with backbenchers, with advisors; it's a fantastic opportunity to do something very different that is informed by the business that we are undertaking here in Australia.

It's not a marketing role, it is an informational role. So I'm well placed given what I do here in Australia internally to present Infosys externally in a way that's not pitching

anything, it's all about education, about creating an understanding of what Infosys does in the community, what Infosys does within the industries that it's active in. So you have to understand what the government does - I'm a lawyer with an interest in government, I used to work in government and that's taken me down this path. I find that it's a natural synergy with what I do and I work with a group of lawyers internally, who also do the same thing just in different jurisdictions.

WHALE: You started out in a more traditional legal and contracting role within the business - how did your role develop into this legal and government affairs role?

ZAVODNYIK: It's been a very interesting journey and people don't often tell you that the best thing you can do is say "yes". So every time I was asked to take on something new I said "yes". Every time I was asked to volunteer for something I said "yes" and I was really interested and keen to learn about Infosys and the business and that's where opportunities arose.

WHALE: It sounds like your role has probably been more heavily affected by COVID-19 than a lot of us, given the amount of travel that you do. How are you working now and do you think that the changes that we have all made in the last few months will continue after we return to normal? If we return to normal?

ZAVODNYIK: Absolutely yes. We've been through a few iterations now. I used to travel, if not every week, every two weeks, internally in Australia or overseas. So yes, the entire landscape has changed radically and I've changed the way I run my team, the way I interact with my team, and the business has changed the way they interact with me. We still love meeting face to face and we're lucky that we can do a little bit of that in Sydney. But our offices have not reopened in Sydney or in Melbourne or in Brisbane.

In terms of how we work with customers, there was a shift prior to COVID to doing a lot less physical travel as companies hit quarter four their travel budgets seem to become contracted and you can't go anywhere. So in January we were already leveraging video conferencing and teleconferencing. It's very hard to balance children and work and just having a home life. I think it's become much harder in COVID because we live in our offices and you can't get away from the work. I finished work at 11 o'clock last night, not through any real desire to finish that late, but that's not unusual anyway in a global company where you've got meetings at all hours of day and night. I usually start my day at 5.30 in the morning so it's a very, very long day and I feel that that has intensified, my calendar is constantly full, if I don't block out chunks of time for myself to do actual work I'm constantly running behind the eight ball and that's really, really hard.

The thing that I've found interesting in the COVID environment is interacting with governments and elected officials. They have more time while you have to be somewhat flexible because they can cancel at any moment. I think that generally I've had a better interaction with them than when I was walking in the halls of Parliament House late last year. The opportunities to connect, the genuine focus on what they're doing with you in those meetings is very different - there's no lights going off in the corner, there's no bell sounding going "you've got to go and vote now" - it's a really different environment and different feeling and that's really fantastic.

WHALE: You've really got their full attention.

ZAVODNYIK: Yes and it makes a huge difference. While as lawyers were very used to getting on with the job of negotiating or finalising a deal or settling a matter or settling a dispute over the phone or via video conference, I don't think it was the same for politicians and it's amazing how they've actually changed the way in which they function to the benefit of the Australian public. We thought we would have no parliament for the rest of the year and they've managed to do it. While they can't vote face-to-face, they can actually do a lot of other things and I think transacting the business and getting the legislation through that they've managed to do in this really hard time is amazing. I think the way that COVID has impacted us can carry us through the future and that we should be actually campaigning for innovations that will give more flexibility and create better outcomes for the community to work in this way, going forward.

WHALE: What's your best working from home tip?

ZAVODNYIK: Routine then exercise. I walk every day - 30 minutes - I make that time "me time" and it's a regular time. I have a personal trainer as well and he calls me - I don't go into the gym because all these COVID hotspots seem to be generated out of gyms - and we do a lot of stuff at home. It's more focused on movement every day and diet.

So having a routine is really critical. Not getting into the trap of binge TV watching on the weekends, because that just kills your weekend and you stop doing things. I have a son who's very involved in scouting and he loves being outside. So we've tried to maintain that as best we can through COVID and it's very rewarding to make sure that you're grounded by the people around you and then having a routine, having exercise time. Sticking to it is really important.

WHALE: You've got a leadership role in your organization - you're part of the Australia-New Zealand strategic leadership - are there any insights that you can share about being in a leadership role and anything maybe that you see differently now that you're sitting at the big table?

ZAVODNYIK: I'm very fortunate that I've been sitting at that table for the better part of five years.

WHALE: I did wonder if it would be hard to remember what it was like before you had that role!

ZAVODNYIK: I guess the things that I take away every day is that I'm very fortunate to work with great people and there are great people in those roles. Not just within Infosys, but just business and industry generally and there's always something you can take away, there's always something that you can learn. Being alert to the fact that you don't know everything is really important; knowing that everyone has something to contribute and you can learn from every single person.

There are no small roles. It doesn't matter whether you're a leader or not, you bring your entire experience with you and everything contributes. The formative experiences I had as an ambulance chasing a lawyer in Albury still can help me identify risks and issues in the business today. So I'm very grateful for all of my experiences and coming into that strategic role and that strategic leadership function. I know I have something to contribute.

WHALE: What do you wish you had known when you started your career in law, and is there any advice that you'd give to young lawyers, particularly looking to work in the kind of IT, technology and software space.

ZAVODNYIK: I think one of the things is say "yes" to everything if people ask you to do something, if it's within your power to say yes, say "yes". Try something new.

Be prepared to fail because failure is not a failure; failure is a learning and growth experience.

Try and look for the best in everyone that you work with because it makes things easier. If you look for the negatives that's all you see; if you look for the positives, you'll be pleasantly surprised every single time. That's the biggest learning experience I've had at Infosys. I came in with my eyes wide shut. I had no idea what I was going to experience and I really took the experience with both hands and I shook it and I really have enjoyed every single moment and I hope it continues. There's more to do, and there's more to learn. I've been given great opportunities to be involved in operational things, I've been involved in global rollouts of different products internally. I've been involved in productivity improvement plans. We've even done design thinking on the legal team to see how we can benefit the business.

There have just been so many positive things that we've done that I've been able to contribute to because I'm not closed to it. Be open. In terms of young lawyers in an IT world, the sky's the limit. You can do anything.

The more you know about how the business works, how the products work, how software works, how things work, being interested, because curious, constantly learning is something that will take you to the next step. It doesn't matter whether you want to be a litigator, a barrister, the best negotiator or compliance professional, all of those things have the same basic recipe. You've got to keep learning.

WHALE: Thank you, that was fantastic. The pep talk I needed! My last question was what do you like best about your job?

ZAVODNYIK: Recently I've been able to recruit and work with people that I really know and respect and who are my friends. I feel privileged that I've got to develop a team where my colleagues are my friends and I work across a business and a global function where I've developed friendships and that has enriched the whole experience.

Having friendships within the business has made such a huge difference to the way I view every day. I get up and talk to one of my colleagues in the US daily almost and she's my rock - we're of a similar age and we like to throw things around together. And we've got a small group, a book club where we exchange the books that we read and the ideas that we have and that's an enriching experience.

WHALE: Thank you Rachael, I feel fortunate to have nabbed some of your precious time. That was quite life affirming for me to hear your responses to those questions particularly your advice to young lawyers, because I think that advice applies to anybody at any stage of their career.

ZAVODNYIK: Thanks Caitlin. Great to chat with you too!