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How to be
Kathryn Cussell is at the top
in a man's world as head of an
IT company

MY FIRST career choice was around the age of six, when I wanted to be a vicar's wife. The combination of talking to people, helping them and being well dressed was very appealing. Of course, I hadn't heard of consulting — I didn't realise it involved listening to people, helping them and that I'd get to wear great tailored suits!

My parents have been a huge influence in my life — at school they made it clear they weren't concerned with my attainment, rather that I try my best. They would have been content with A for effort and little else.

The idea of doing my best has stayed with me ever since and today, as the head of CHP Consulting Australia, I believe my role is predominantly about motivating and encouraging members of my team to do their best.

I'm often asked if it's difficult for me to lead a company in a typically male-dominated industry. Quite simply, no. Perhaps I've been fortunate, but I've never experienced any setbacks because I'm a woman working in IT.

However, I also recognise that IT isn't a career path that appeals to many women and I think this is mainly due to the lack of information about the roles and opportunities available.

Being in a leadership position, I am ideally placed to actively

encourage women to consider IT as a career option, particularly positions in IT project management and consultancy, which I believe harness women's traditional strengths of organisation and communication.

I joined CHP in 1994, just a few years out of university. My first impression of the company was that it was too good to be true. While many IT firms at the time talked about exceeding client expectations, CHP really walked the talk. I recall when we had just implemented a program for our first client with hire purchase agreements. It was a huge success, but as soon as the implementation was complete, we were looking at whether the software would need modification to support consumer loans.

Not surprisingly most of my career highlights span the 13 years I've been with the company — like running my first project; and the first thank-you letter a client wrote to the directors about me.

In 2002, while running two projects simultaneously at opposite ends of the UK, the executive team considered a move into the Australian market. We needed someone to spearhead the project.

Although I had led large project teams in the UK and felt confident in my ability, running a team of 17 people in Australia and 20 in London would be the real acid test. Little did I realise what an impact time zones would have on the



Doing what she enjoys, Kathryn Cussell encourages women to consider IT as a career option.

working week. Time zones are the bane of my existence. Being global, we have operations in the UK and North America, and although as a company we use innovative communication channels, there are times when you just have to speak with the person directly. Consequently, my mornings and nights take a bit of a beating as a few

times each week I'll be on the phone to a colleague, in one of our overseas operations, navigating the international time zones.

My first trip to Australia was when I came to Melbourne to visit my aunt in 1992. The ticket was a gift for my 21st birthday. I remember those six weeks quite vividly. I wanted to see everything I possibly

CV

Born Blackheath, England, 1971.
Education B Sc honours in biological science, University of East Anglia; company director diploma, Australian Institute of Company Directors.
Jobs Junior programmer, Cap Gemini, 1992-1993; programmer, HSBC, 1993-1994; consultant, CHP, 1994-2000; manager, CHP, 2000-2006; head of CHP Australia, 2006.
Good break Facilitating a series of workshops for a prospect in northern England two years into my career with CHP. Not only did I realise I could do this, I also realised that I was very good at it.
Mentors My father, who always listens to me and gets me to put myself in other people's shoes; my husband, who always encouraged me to achieve more.
Unwinding I read — I love to immerse myself in a good book. A good book and imagination can take you somewhere completely different; they allow you to escape.

could and go everywhere we had the energy to go to, because at the time, I thought it was a once-in-a-lifetime, never-to-be-repeated trip. I never dreamed that fate would bring me back.

My husband had never been to Australia, so the idea of relocating didn't immediately grab him. However, as I have family in Melbourne, between us we persuaded him to "go and see". Of course, once here, he fell in love with the lifestyle, the sun and the easygoing pace.

My father gave me some fantastic advice when I was growing up: "Do what you enjoy, because that way you'll be good at it."

I've applied this to my life and career, and have been fortunate enough to work for a company I believe in.

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