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Walk in the Cloud

Accenture and Salesforce: Evolving the talent ecosystem

Ellen Bencard,
Walk in the Cloud Host

Ellen Bencard leads Accenture's marketing campaigns in the UK while also managing to nourish her journalistic roots as an established blogger on the arts, travel and fine dining. Her corporate work usually finds her behind the scenes, coaching her team to bring together big ideas, insightful commentators, exciting events and innovative channels in ways that inspire prospective clients. But this isn't the first time she's stepped into the limelight to show off her training as a reporter, writer and presenter. She's anchored a web-based YouTube series for BT called Top Tips for CIOs and was Northwestern University's on-site media spokesperson at the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and fellow alumna Meghan Markle. Born and educated in the American Midwest, Ellen's lived in the UK since 1999 and is a proud dual citizen.

Stephanie Sadowski,
Senior Managing Director,
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Stephanie Sadowski is a Senior Managing Director at Accenture and is the Salesforce Business Group—Europe Lead. Her role focuses on shaping and delivering the Accenture front office strategy and technology solutions for marketing, sales, service and customer analytics functions—powered by Salesforce. Stephanie has over 25 years' experience and has supported global large-scale, transformational programs in Financial Services, Telecommunications, Resources, and Public Sector. She holds 2 patents and graduated from MIT with a S.B. in Chemical Engineering.

**Stuart Mills,
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Stuart Mills is VP of Trailhead & Ecosystems at Salesforce working to build a movement for workforce development that puts diversity and equity at the heart. He loves solving the most complex of problems and building the greatest of teams, with the aim of activating the potential of everyone. Stuart holds a MA in Aeronautical Engineering from Cambridge University and a MBA from London Business School.

Intro: Walk in the Cloud.

Ellen: How is your talent pipeline these days? If you work in a highly skilled organisation, it's probably not as deep as you wish it was. And I'd wager you're very concerned about top talent getting poached. This is Ellen Bencard with Accenture's Walk in the Cloud. And in this episode, we are talking talent. Tech skills in particular are in hot demand, but businesses across the UK and around the world are citing skills shortages. Accenture and Salesforce are two companies that have experienced this and who've teamed up to help shared clients get on top of the challenge. Today, I'm walking with Accenture's Stephanie Sadowski. Hello, Stephanie.

Stephanie: Hello Ellen, thank you for having me.

Ellen: And Stuart Mills from Salesforce. Welcome, Stuart.

Stuart: Hey Ellen. Great to be here.

Ellen: They've been looking at fresh ways of gaining and retaining the much needed skills for today's workplace and ensuring they're put to good use. So Stephanie, let me start with you. Talent gaps and skill shortages have been in the news a lot for the past year or more. What's going on now? Why now?

Stephanie: Thanks, Ellen. I think a lot of this, we were already starting to see some of this before COVID happened. And when COVID happened, it was the equivalent of putting a match on gasoline and the fire got even faster and everything was accelerated,

and businesses have realised they need to digitalise so many things and they can't do it fast enough. And this is what's driving a lot of the skills, new talent and new ways of working.

Ellen: Got it. And Stuart, where do those skills and talents come from? I'm guessing you're gonna say that the traditional route of hiring certain degrees from certain feeder schools is not the way we go about things anymore.

Stuart: Great guess, great guess. Absolutely. No, I mean, I think is sort of that I always think of, we can get talent from everywhere, you know, in the world today, and we need to think that way. Traditional sources are important, but there are so many sources. And the kind of numbers we're talking about driven by the change that Stephanie's just outlined, are huge. And so we always don't, we can't find enough talent from traditional sources, so we're forced to think outside. But actually, we always should have been thinking outside those traditional sources, really, particularly with the pace of change that we're talking about. Technology serves people's needs, and needs to be built, maintained, and run by diverse talent that represents the communities that are being served by the technologies we're talking about here. So we should have lots of different talents that are really everywhere. And I think we're gonna get to it, but I think everybody can have a role and has a role in technology. And so we shouldn't see any barriers, and we are knocking them down.

Ellen: Before we move on to people who are in the organisation, let's talk more about finding people. Do you guys have any examples of unusual ways to find new skills?

Stephanie: Yeah, I think one great example Stuart and I can talk about is what we're doing in South Africa. And if you look at, you know, they're having similar demand there for digital skills. And in particular there was a bank that was really in need of skills and rather than kind of go traditional ways of leveraging resources, perhaps out of the country, especially when you look at their current situation of almost, I think 30% unemployment, you start to look at the problem in a different way. And recently Accenture and Salesforce launched the South African Delivery Centre, taking local talent and giving them the skills and certifications to start building these talents and digital skills in country. And I love it because you know, yes, it is solving a business problem, but it's also doing some additional good for South Africa while we're doing good for the companies as well. And I think we have some other examples within the Netherlands, where we're doing things with refugee force, with Salesforce, about taking people that are highly skilled and helping them find a new career and job that they hadn't had a path up before, or in Switzerland with bringing women back to work. Some people who've been out of the workforce for 10 years and might even argue that the degree or the diploma that they have might not even be relevant in today's world.

And all of a sudden helping them understand how to take all this experience that they have, and pour it into a new way and build a sustainable path forward in a career.

Stuart: And Stephanie, and those are great examples aren't there? Because, and I think maybe just add that, I don't think we're sacrificing anything in terms of looking at this talent. And that's something that sort of comes up in a lot of big organisations is we look to traditional sources cause we kind of know them. Whereas in these examples we've talked about here, which are incredibly diverse and we've got sort of so many of these, it really is. And pretty quickly being able to take somebody from perhaps a difficult place, but to a place of productivity pretty fast. And that is so compelling and so energetic. And the South Africa example, I think we've seen a photograph of the graduation of that first program. And it was the most joyful, energetic picture. And for me the most compelling bit was knowing that those people are not just being part of a program, it's that they're going into productive and decent work now, and that is solving a problem for themselves, giving them an opportunity, but the businesses that need that help are being served. So, you know, some really exciting things coming.

Ellen: So there are no losers here, literally everybody's winning. It's a great, great bunch of examples. Let me move on to once the talent is in the door, how do you make sure the people that you've worked so hard to find are engaged and productive?

Stephanie: Yeah. So I'll start on that one. I think there's really three things I would highlight, right? One is you have to have this notion of apprenticing, right? Just taking people, putting them through skills and giving them the academic experience is one part of it. But a second part is they have to apprentice under people that are very experienced and can help continue to refine and develop the skills. The second thing I would say is having this culture that it is expected. And I know the whole notion of apprentice it's one of our core values, right, at Accenture is something you have to have part of the culture and part of the performance. Otherwise it's not, you're not gonna get the full thing out of it. And then the third thing I would highlight is the businesses themselves also have to think differently about career paths and performance metrics and measurements. Because the traditional thing of, bring people in, let them do their time, kind of move up, the world is moving too fast. And you need to think about how you adjust it in line with how people are acquiring skills, and mastering things and are ready to move on with the next level.

Ellen: Yep. Stuart, any take on that?

Stuart: I think these exactly, I mean, I can't underline that apprenticing point enough and being involved and committing both sides in terms of the people who are providing mentorship and guidance and the role of the mentees in there. Continually, you're sort of seeing that we have to continually learn and continually change and look at things differently.

Agility and resilience have been two big words over the last couple of years, and I really hope that we've maintained those as people's careers evolve. And that's exciting, I think. Particularly as you start to sort of look at people building their career, traditional paths where you go from one step to two steps to three steps in a sort of traditional hierarchical model, are kind of dull. And I think the opportunity now is to sort of, to be able to transition, to move around organisations. And we're seeing so much energy that's released by these pathways, that where you can see talented people who can learn something new and bring something different as they evolve in their careers. But it is a challenge for organisations, because a lot of our organisations are built in a very traditional model, and with hierarchical and models and career paths. And particularly when we're bringing people back into the workplace, perhaps who've had experience, we need to challenge things like salary levels and all sorts of things. So it's constant work, but I think we're seeing so much energy as you start to sort of see diverse thinking populate and work its way through organisations that we can all work better, and bring people up.

Ellen: And speaking of working better, can I dig a little bit more into the cloud technologies behind this all? Stuart, I know you have an opinion on this one. What is, how has cloud made this world possible?

Stuart: I'm biased, right? I mean, Salesforce is born in the cloud, as we'd say. And very much is part of this.

But yes, I mean it's—cloud technologies have really—and we talk about being able to work from anywhere now. And you know—today we're the three of us—we're in three different places. But we're using a cloud technology to be able to talk together and it feels very natural, and we are connecting. And so where Salesforce talks about a digital HQ today, is that what a part of that is saying well, our talent can be anywhere. It can be all over the place and contributing all over the world. And the cloud enables that because it sort of distributes the computings and the databases, etcetera, that we all need to connect. And it empowers things. And of course then the volumes of data allow us to understand different things as well. So, you know, where cloud technologies are allowing us to move at speed, it also allows us to be distributed in where we are, and workforce that we've talked about so far.

Ellen: And also allows Accenture and Salesforce to be elegantly together in that partnership. Let's talk a bit more about the partnership. And how do you two and your teams come together to help clients address those skills gaps?

Stephanie: Start with one example with a global bank. And we actually started this one just before COVID happened. But they were in need of building some Salesforce skills, and there weren't enough in the market in the UK. And so they, you know, how do we solve this? And at the same time they're looking at, they have other parts of their business that are, maybe, you know, operations that are getting a bit more automated or technology that's starting to slow

down. How can they, you know, take that into account? And so we worked with this large global bank to help them pivot people from operations or technologies that are starting to slow down into Salesforce. And so putting them through the appropriate training certifications. But then equally important, how do you also have them then apprentice under an experienced team to grow and build something sustainably for their company? And it's such a win, win, win, because it, you know, first off finds the skills they need. But secondly, it also takes people that, you know, might traditionally not have had a job with that company anymore and actually creates a whole new path and future for them, which the individuals find exciting that they had that ability to pivot, and create a sustainable path forward.

Ellen: Stuart, anything you wanna add in there?

Stuart: Yeah, no, I think Stephanie's touched on this is win, win, win situation. And sort of traditionally work on skill shortages is driven by single companies, and employing the right, a certain number of people themselves. Whereas you know, as in my job title and the way that Stephanie's just described is we're thinking about things as an ecosystem. So we estimate that Salesforce can employ about 2% of the people that are needed because of our technology and because of projects, and implementations that we've just been discussing. So we think about, well now we want to work as a hundred percent. Well that requires partnerships with organisations like Accenture,

and the customers like this bank that we're talking about here to come together and say, how can we influence employment? And that's really exciting now, because we are seeing those partnerships. And Salesforce and Accenture, I think we have such a trusted partnership. We're able to have this conversation together without immediately starting well, I want to compete for that talent and working through that. And so, you know, ecosystems and partnerships like this are so important. And we're really truly gonna solve this problem and take the opportunity that technologies, like Salesforce give us in terms of digitising the way we can work, and the diversification of where people could do this work.

Ellen: We're getting to the end of our walk. Now, if I ask you each to just give somebody one piece of advice? The first step they should take to think about closing their digital skills gap, what would that first step be? Stephanie, let me start with you.

Stephanie: I was still thinking about my answer. I would say the first thing they have to really do is look at the problem from a lot of different angles. And, you know, as we've talked in this podcast, it's gonna be a combination of things to solve it. But at the end of the day, it's gonna be really thinking of about all your sources of talent, both internal and external. And then how do you give them the skills and then set them up for success with the right apprenticing as their first assignment? Those are probably the things I would start with.

Ellen: Stuart, would you start there?

Stuart: As an organisation, I think you, Stephanie, you're exactly right. It's like, look and perhaps underline, look at your own talent and make sure that you're doing everything they can to skill and re-skill and continually evolve the skills of your own people. Perhaps I'd just add on an individual basis, if you are looking at entering the workplace and thinking about jobs and technology it's, you know, start with, I mean, I'm biased here of course, Trailhead is the platform that Salesforce has for technology. So there's lots of places to learn. Go start learning, and lots of it's free. So get learning. And then look for jobs. And please, please, regardless of where you live in the world, don't let that be a blocker for you, and your own experience. I think we need more and more examples for people to see that there are so many different jobs, including from a philosophy kind of perspective, around certain things like ethical use of technology. So, you know, don't let anything be a barrier. I think that's the main thing I'd say.

Ellen: Well, thank you for giving us such a great, good news story today and so relevant. Yeah. The UK is talking about leveling up and spreading the world outside of London, and this is just spot on. So thank you very much for joining me.

Stephanie: Thank you, Ellen.

Stuart: Thank you.

Ellen: One of the areas companies could be putting those digital skills we've just talked about to work in, is customer experience. I suspect you all have examples of when that digital experience wasn't nearly as good as you wanted it to be. I'm walking with executives from Accenture and Adobe to explore how we can live up to technology's potential and customer's growing expectations. Speaking of experience, if there's a way we could make this podcast better for you, we'd love to hear about it. Find me on LinkedIn and drop me a note. And if you're enjoying our walks, do share it in your favorite social ways. I'll walk with you next time. Bye bye.

Outro: Walk in the cloud.