

# DARE Q & A with: Jeanette Horan



*In May 2011, Jeanette Horan was appointed Chief Information Officer of IBM. Her organization supports operational excellence and drives IBM's transformation agenda, focusing on business transformation, workforce transformation, and IT transformation. The CIO office is responsible for equipping IBMers with the technology and tools they need to better support clients and achieve IBM's objectives.*

*Previously, Ms. Horan was the vice president of Enterprise Business Transformation. In this role, she led IBM's transformation program for key back office processes to accelerate the company's leadership as a globally integrated enterprise. In partnership with IBM's Global Business Services and SAP, she led a multi-disciplinary global team deploying simplified business processes worldwide.*

*Jeanette Horan joined IBM in 1998, and has held leadership positions within the Lotus brand, Information Management and IBM Software Group Strategy. Prior to joining the CIO office in 2006, Ms. Horan was responsible for worldwide product development for the Information Management business in Software Group, and was the General Manager of IBM's Silicon Valley Laboratory.*

*Before joining Lotus, Ms. Horan spent four years with Digital Equipment Corporation, where she was vice president of development for the AltaVista business, bringing the web search engine and suite of intranet products to market. She has more than twenty-five years of experience in development and management roles in the computer industry.*

*As part of her business and personal involvement in the advancement of technology and service to the community, Ms. Horan serves on the board of Microvision Inc., an innovative display and imaging solutions company. She also serves as a director on the board of Jane Doe No More Inc., an organization committed to improving the way society responds to victims of sexual assault. A native of the United Kingdom, Ms. Horan earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the University of London and an MBA from Boston University.*

**Q: What is the most challenging thing you have ever had to do?**

**A:** When I joined the IBM CIO organization in 2006, my role was in Architecture and Standards, and I quickly realized that we needed a completely new approach in order to keep up with the changing business strategy for IBM. Making the case for change to the senior executive team was extremely challenging. There was a strong belief that we could make incremental progress, building on our legacy environment. Over the course of nine months, I put together a fact-based case for change, built a business case, and won them over. (cont.)

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**A:** (*cont.*) Of course, getting to yes was just the first step, as I then led the project to implement my recommendations over the next three years. Getting alignment across a business as big and diversified as IBM is a significant challenge that made me call on all my leadership skills and perseverance.

**Q:** Where did you get the courage and confidence to accomplish this matter?

**A:** I was really fortunate to have a very supportive manager, who was a great coach, and I had a great team that really believed in what we were proposing. Gathering the facts was very important in making the senior executives understand that staying on the prior course was not going to deliver the business result we needed. Once we had made that case, I knew I had an audience willing to listen. Then it was all down to putting together a solid plan and convincing them we could execute.

**Q:** What is the biggest mistake you have ever made? What did you learn and how did you recover?

**A:** Early in my career, I was responsible for engineering for a new product. When it was launched, we quickly learned that we had not provided some critical functionality that would enable our customers to move to this new product. It was a major error, but it taught me that it is critical to listen to your customers and to really understand the market you are trying to serve. Since it was a software product, we were able to work on the next release, to include the missing functionality, but our revenue plan was missed. It was a tough, valuable lesson.

*“...it is critical to listen to your customers and to really understand the market you are trying to serve.”*

**Q:** If you had a young woman you cared deeply about entering the workforce today, what single piece of advice would you have for her?

**A:** My biggest piece of advice is to follow your heart. Work consumes such a large part of our lives that you have to do what you love.

**Q:** How did you make the leap from middle to senior management?

**A:** I guess being in the right place at the right time. Promotions always came when I had proved myself in a role and gained the confidence of my upline management. I have never been afraid of taking on a new challenge, so when I was given an opportunity to move up, I jumped at it. I do appreciate that (*cont.*)

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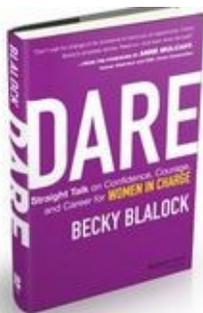
**A:** (cont.) my manager at the time took a risk on me, as he was new in his role and could only rely on the advice of others to promote me.

**Q:** What advice do you have for building self-confidence?

**A:** First and foremost, you have to know your subject matter. We all have many different experiences and many ways to learn. And whether you are building on your academic credentials or branching out into a new field, it is always important to listen and learn. You don't have to know everything when you come into a new role, but it is important to quickly learn who you can trust. You need to be willing to take some risks and challenge yourself to take on new roles, and with each new role you build your own knowledge base, which enables you to move up in your career.

**Q:** What do you fear most today?

**A:** Fear is a strong word and my literal answer would have to be nothing. But if you ask what keeps me awake at night, it would be how to enable my team to keep up with the rapid pace of change in the business world today.



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