THRIVING IN TECH HERE AND ABROAD
AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Renee: Hey, everyone. This is Renee from Accenture in the Philippines. Welcome to the seventh episode of Pinay's Talk Tech podcast, the podcast for future-forward Filipinas. Join us as we have inspiring conversations with Pinays in tech. From young innovators to industry leaders, this podcast will show you how Pinays in tech are leading through change.

[00:00:24] Renee: This is Pinay's Talk Tech podcast.

[00:00:31] Renee: Modernization is inevitable. And the only way to get started is to get ahead of the curve. Our guest for this episode will share with us her invaluable experience of thriving in technology, in the Philippines and abroad. Accenture was her first job out of college, and she has worked here for the past 25 years and is currently the lead of Cloud modernization.

[00:00:54] Renee: She helps her clients transform their business from using outdated technology and move them to the Cloud.

[00:01:01] Renee: Let's welcome, Iscious Gabriel.

[00:01:04] Renee: Hi, Iscious. Welcome to the show.

[00:01:14] Iscious: Hello, Renee. I'm good. How are you?

[00:01:06] Renee: I'm doing okay. How's your 2022? It's August. And generally, at least in Accenture for us, it's actually year end. I've been here so long that I feel that that's the end of my year and it's all in a big flurry. So, what about you? What have you been up to?

[00:01:24] Iscious: So, 2022 so far has been very exciting and of course, busy as well. We've had several international women's day events in March, and I also started a number of new projects this 2022.

[00:01:45] Renee: Wow. So, the events for international women's day continues.

[00:01:50] Iscious: Yes.

[00:01:52] Iscious: It continues beyond March. Yes.

[00:01:55] Renee: Amazing. Okay. That's what I want to hear. Very good. So, I know of you, we have mutual friends and they would always talk about Iscious. And one of the things that people tell me, is that you lived in Japan and you're our lead in Japan. So, I'm very curious. So, what actually do you do? What field are you in?

[00:02:15] Iscious: I lead our Cloud modernization practice in Accenture technology in the Philippines. So, the work I do is I help clients find, bring new value out of their very old systems by moving them to more modern platforms and technologies. And with my scope of work, I get to work with different geographies and also different industries.

[00:02:35] Renee: So that's interesting. When did you start this? The Cloud modernization conversation?

[00:02:40] Iscious: We started this specialized offering and team around more than 12 years ago, around 2009.

[00:02:48] Renee: Amazing, amazing. 2009. So back in the day, how would you differentiate

[00:02:54] Renee: Remember everybody was suspicious of the Cloud. I can't believe you've been doing this for 12 years, cause it's still a buzzword now. Right. So, tell me the difference of having the tough conversations 2009 to today. What changed? Especially after the pandemic.

[00:03:10] Iscious: So, way back in 2009, we were focused on how do we modernize mainframes? Because as you know, we started 1985…

[00:03:22] Renee: COBOL

[00:03:22] Iscious: so we have a lot of yes-COBOL-clients. So back then we said, I think, there's a huge need for modernizing their old systems. So, the conversations then was "what can we do to help our clients start that journey?"

[00:03:40] Iscious: Cloud wasn't that rampant then yet? The conversations now, especially with the pandemic is how can clients move faster to the Cloud? Because that will entail more flexibility and agility to the organizations.

[00:03:54] Renee: For those who are not very familiar with what we're talking about, there's a concept in the past that in order for you to have a website, you have to rent a floor, buy servers hire people on premise. So, in order for you to create anything, it would be within your own network and you have to pay a lot of people. You need to think about disaster recovery, but the concept then was because it's in my building, I can secure everything and everybody was just so suspicious of the Cloud, but then, especially in the last, I would think, five years, especially in the last five years, everybody thought, what do you mean? I only pay for what I need. I really don't need to really rent a floor to buy my own servers? And if I want to experiment on a small app, I could just rent a small space in the Cloud?

[00:04:44] Renee: But I think the hardest people to convince were banks. Who are the main users of COBOL, 'no? So, is that conversation easier now for you, Iscious, with those types of clients?

[00:04:56] Iscious: It's a lot easier now though there are still complexities in handling of course, COBOL applications, because it's just very huge. But it became more easy because clients have become more open to those conversations compared to like more than 10 years back.

[00:05:12] Renee: Yeah. I can imagine everybody wants to save money now, right? And when they start understanding the concept of pay as you go, it becomes a viable, kind of business case.

[00:05:25] Renee: So how did you start there though? Number one, what was your course in college? How did you end up doing this Cloud modernization? It's crazy, right?

[00:05:35] Iscious: Yeah, I graduated from UP Diliman. I didn't take an IT course. I graduated Business Economics.

[00:05:40] Renee: Ah, wow!

[00:05:41] Iscious: Yeah, actually this is my first job. I still remember attending a job fair in UP. What attracted me to apply in Accenture was the vast opportunities in terms of learning, training, and of course, actual project experience. I started my career, as a mainframe developer. I learned it from scratch here.

[00:06:06] Renee: Amazing.

[00:06:07] Iscious: And since then, I've been working with clients on mainframe. And then I evolved, in the journey. Meaning, I tried to understand what can we do for our mainframe clients to help them survive, thrive in the new. So that's how I was able to start our modernization practice in the Philippines.

[00:06:30] Renee: How did you, how did you go about that? How did you convince yourself that this is better? What did you feel at the time? Or were you excited?

[00:06:40] Iscious: I was excited because my thinking is, about the values that we bring our

clients. Most of our largest clients are on mainframe and no one will help them if no one will specialize on this type of work. And also when I talk to our younger team members, I always tell them, why do you need to learn mainframe still now? Because to help our clients move to the new, you need to know how to tame the dinosaur because I call not mainframe a dinosaur. I always tell them you need to know how to tame the dinosaur. If not, how will we help our clients move to more modern technologies?

[00:07:17] Renee: I mean, how are you gonna translate their challenges? I think – I find that very interesting. So that's a very interesting journey for you. Number one, you were not tech, you were business economics. Then you learned how to do mainframe, crazy. Then you learned how to move to Cloud. But what I like about your background is you can talk to clients because you understand business, especially in the very beginning. Like I said, what I remember of you as our friends talk about you sometimes is you stayed so long in Japan. Iscious from Japan. That's what I know of you. How did you find yourself there? And how long did you stay there? What's that journey about?

[00:08:00] Iscious: Well, I lead our modernization practice for Japan. I went to travel to Japan at exactly a long-term assignment. But, I have conducted like a talk on modernization in one of their events like in Amazon Tech Summit, where I'm the only foreign speaker. So, I had a translator beside me when I talked about our modernization practice. I also went there to join like COBOL on AWS Hackathon with my team.

[00:08:37] Renee: What?!

[00:08:38] Iscious: Where we were also the only foreign team who joined that that hackathon.

[00:08:42] Renee: Amazing. What, how did you think of that experience? That must be daunting. Nobody understands, cause I think in Japan they have a very strong nationalism. So, most of them really speak Japanese, which is fantastic. Unlike the Philippines actually we know English a lot, even cross islands, right? It's easier to speak across islands in English because we

don't know their own native languages and dialects. So, what was that like for you being in front of a sea of Japanese people, looking to you for what is modernization?

[00:09:15] Iscious: Yeah, it was both very humbling, exciting, and one-of-a-kind experience like knowing that my Accenture Japan counterpart trust me to be in that event. They don't care if I don't speak the language, meaning that I will present in English, they were ready to provide me a live translator. It's a very rewarding experience also, knowing that people from around the globe listen to you as an expert in modernization

[00:09:52] Iscious: It's about the expertise and knowing that you have some value to share and seeing that other people trust you regardless of the language and that means a lot. And that boosts my confidence even more. And of course, knowing this thing that I know. The ins and outs of mainframe modernization, it also helps with my confidence.

[00:10:15] Renee: Are you an introvert or extrovert? Is it natural for you or is that a challenge?

[00:10:20] Iscious: No, I'm really an introvert, but over the years, because I really worked hard, to develop expertise in what I do, I also don't back down in any learning opportunities, be it technical or soft skills.

[00:10:40] Iscious: And my practice in talking to clients, it also helps me be more comfortable in talking about this topic and talking in a broader audience. So that helped me transform myself though I'm an introvert, but I know that I've evolved also to be better at what I do.

[00:10:58] Renee: No, I think you are great at what you do. And also, congratulations, 25 years. Yes. 25 years in Accenture. Did you ever, ever, ever think you would be here this long?

[00:11:15] Iscious: No, no, but of course it's a conscious decision of course, to stay in

Accenture. This is my first job and I always tell my team, the reason why I continue to decide to stay is because I really love the culture and also, the opportunities that Accenture brings. I love the people I work with. It's different generations. And there's open communication, you can talk to anyone at any time. So, it's really the people that makes me stay in Accenture. And I'm so proud that I reached 25 years.

[00:11:50] Renee: Amazing.

[00:11:50] Iscious: Yeah, my initial goal was to just try it out. When straight out of college, my goal was to try it out. But I learned to love what I do. So, I guess, Accenture love me backwards. Love me back. So, that's why I'm still here.

[00:12:08] Renee: Amazing. If the IT thing was not supposed to work, were you thinking of you would go into business or what were you thinking at the time?

[00:12:16] Iscious: Actually, my childhood dream was to become a lawyer because my dad was a lawyer, but I said, it's too long to study law. I think my other passion if IT didn't work out was more like an events coordinator, which is very different also. So those are my options. Either law or going into like the events coordinator.

[00:12:38] Renee: Can you share with me the environment of tech abroad? How different is it from here? And if you've been to other countries as well, could you share with us your perspective as a person who's seen a lot. I can see it in your eyes. You've seen a lot.

[00:13:00] Iscious: Yeah. Of course, I worked with different cultures. Some cultures would start their day very early and cultures have long working hours, specifically, Japan. Some cultures also are used to direct conversations like American cultures, but some cultures are more conservative. They are not direct. So, you need to read between the lines. So, in terms of messaging, I always try to check who am I talking to? If you're talking to a Japanese counterpart, you need to be very detailed, needs to be backed up by data, and, you need to make

sure how you communicate is something that is not very aggressive. So, I learned how to tailor the way I communicate and the details of my message, depending on the culture I'm working with.

[00:14:00] Renee: Right. So, you tailor the tone of the message for the person who's receiving it, right?

[00:14:05] Iscious: Yes.

[00:14:05] Renee: That's really good and I think that's a life skill. Even if it's not a different language, right. I think that's a life skill to make sure that the message is heard, not just said. So, I love that. Apart from Japan, where you've been assigned?

[00:14:20] Iscious: I had my long-term assignment in the US, and then I have brief travels in Scotland, London, Singapore, and Japan. But my long-term assignment was in the US. I was assigned in Phoenix, Arizona and Hartford, Connecticut.

[00:14:40] Iscious: I think American culture as Accenture Anderson consulting before actually my bootcamp was also in Chicago because that time we were just like small. Our bootcamp is we were sent to Chicago. It was a very good experiences to like, work or study with people from different cultures. I think we're used to American culture. Also, my, my sisters are also based in the US, so it's very easy for me also to adapt to American culture.

[00:15:10] Renee: So, because you had to work with clients in Japan, did you attempt to learn the language?

[00:15:18] Iscious: Yes, I did. I signed up for the language course offered by Accenture for executives.

[00:15:25] Renee: Wow.

[00:15:25] Iscious: Because I really wanted to understand the language. It's easier If you get a grasp of the words, the sentences they say in actual meetings and as I learned the language, my sensei or my teacher would also share Japanese culture information that is also very useful in dealing with Japanese teams and it's very nice to be able to say some phrases like when I have a new Japan team, I introduce myself in Japanese, like "hajimemashite, watashiwa Iscious-desu. Accenture-no cloud modernization, Executive-desu, yoroshiku onegaishimasu ." And every time introduce myself in that, they are very amazed. They're very glad to hear that, even if that's the only straight sentence I can say. So, it's very nice to learn the language of the people you're working with.

[00:16:25] Renee: Yeah. Because it's as a sign of respect, isn't it?

[00:16:28] Iscious: Yes.

[0016:28] Renee: Yeah. Like even in the Philippines, if somebody who's visiting the Philippines would say a Filipino word. So, I can imagine how valued people feel if you learn the language. It's so incredible to see a woman who's been in the tech industry. Did not come from a tech background and yet thrive for 25 years. What's your advice for women? How do you advise, especially if we have recent graduates listening to us that cannot imagine themselves in tech, or maybe they're already working in their fields, but wanna move to tech. What's your advice to those women?

[00:17:10] Iscious: My advice for fellow women is it's not really the course or a degree in college. What's very useful is aside from, of course your analytical skills, your ability to be resourceful, and of course, everything can be done with hard work as long as you put your mind in something, you can do it. And also believing that there are always opportunities to learn and grow and the mindset that you need to continue to invest in yourself.

[00:17:45] Iscious: When I say invest in yourself, even if things get busy, I always try to take on training opportunities, still. Because it's a way to continue to evolve and grow as a person, professionally and also personally.

[00:18:00] Renee: Have you seen a shift in equality from your point of view? You've been in a lot of countries with the work you have. You've been in so many roles. What progress have you seen in terms of equality, especially women in tech.

[00:18:18] Iscious: Years back, I've seen myself several times wherein I'm the only woman in the board room, especially when I travelled back in the early days, like in say India, or even in the US. Back then I would always see myself as like the only woman in the boardroom or of course in the hackathons I join. Sometimes I'm also the only woman in my team.

[00:18:40] Iscious: But it has evolved, of course. Now there's more equal opportunities and more women are also, being successful in IT. I think it's a matter of having role models in this industry, knowing that women can also be successful in this kind of industry.

[00:19:05] Renee: Yeah. And, and this is exactly why we have this podcast 'no? So that people understand the different dynamics. Cause a lot of times I would hear somebody say, oh, I'm an introvert. I can't do client facing work. And I think somebody like you, who has done everything in a front of a lot of people who does not understand your native language, I think that's being an incredible role model. So Iscious, final words for those listening to us. What would be your message about, the love of learning, traveling, and the love of tech in general?

[00:19:38] Iscious: My advice is, again, there's a lot of opportunities in tech, and to be able to be successful in tech, we just need to have the determination that there's no limit to learning and to the opportunities that we can tap. For fellow Filipinas also who want to explore working abroad, my advice is I hope the motivation is not just for greener pastures, but really to make a difference and represent your organization or country well, staying grounded, even when you're abroad or when you've achieved something significant will help you focus on the

value you bring rather than what you get in return, and taking on opportunities regardless of what it is, be it an opportunity to work abroad or continue to train and develop yourself, it's something that is really very rewarding. IT industry and doing work abroad comes with high expectations, but what is important is you grow as a person and you help others in that journey.

[00:20:50] Renee: Thank you so much for joining us today. I'm delighted to have you with us today, and I hope you also enjoyed yourself. Thanks so much, Iscious.

[00:21:00] Iscious: Thank you, Renee! Thanks for having me.

[00:21:05] Renee: All right. And that ends our episode.