

MEMBER PROFILE

MARY JANE LOUSTEL, CPA, CA
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL PROGRAM EXECUTIVE
IBM CANADA



With a population of just over 45,000, Brandon is Manitoba’s second largest city. The prairie metropolis is home to the Wheat Kings hockey team, the Keystone Centre (one of Canada’s largest convention and entertainment complexes), and four post-secondary institutions, including Brandon University. The city plays host to many events—some big, like the 1982 Labatt Brier, and some steeped in tradition, like the annual Royal Manitoba Winter Fair. It’s here where IBM Canada’s national aboriginal program executive, Mary Jane “MJ” Loustel, grew up.

“I was born in Brandon, went to high school there, and from a young age knew that I wanted to be a lawyer, accountant or doctor... but I couldn’t stand the sight of blood,” laughed Loustel.

At 18 she packed her bags and moved to Winnipeg to attend the Asper School of Business at the University of Manitoba where she soon decided accounting was for her.

“Accounting is very fascinating to me because I find that if you can understand business models and understand the financing you can solve problems, bring solutions, and be successful in the business world.”

After completing a Bachelor of Commerce degree, she got a job at EY (Ernst & Young).

“One of the interesting things about me—especially in the 1980s when this was less common—is that I had a family when I was very young. In fact, when I started my career at Ernst & Young I was already a mother and before I finished articling, I was expecting my second child.”

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As a mother and ambitious professional, Loustel had to learn to balance work and raising her daughters. Her hard work paid off when she earned her accounting designation while at EY.

The next move in Loustel’s career saw her accept a position as Internal Auditor at Red River College.

“I helped them transition from being a government department to being board governed, and assisted with their adjustment to this new way of operating.”

From there she landed a role at the University of Manitoba where she spent more than four years focused on systems of accountability within the post-secondary education system as well as aligning resources with programs that have productive outcomes.

she apply at the company. It worked. Loustel is now the National Aboriginal Program Executive for IBM Canada.

“I work with First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Canadians to ensure they are included in the technology sector, whether that means having businesses in the tech sector, being employed in the tech sector, or having access to the services that are offered as a result of technology. I think that’s really great.”

One of the programs Loustel helps facilitate is IBM’s “IGNiting Interest in Technology and Engineering” program (IGNITE).

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What does success look like to Loustel, and what is she working towards?

“I would like people to view our community as a global leader in understanding human rights. I want Winnipeg to become the example of a complex diverse community that works. In our day-to-day lives I want us to become a city that’s an example of how diverse communities can work together to provide a stronger, safer and healthier society.”

The role of an accountant and a CPA designation can lead to many places. For Loustel, it’s led her down an important path.

“You can’t really predict where your designation might take you,” Loustel adds.

Perhaps not. But it sure is one of the great things about the CPA designation.

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“After a combination of those career experiences and having worked for two post-secondary institutions I began to look at Indigenous inclusion and ensuring that Aboriginal people have access to education,” she explained. “I looked back at my own history and how fortunate I was to have obtained my accounting designation and started to really think about what I could do to promote inclusion for Indigenous people across Canada.”

Loustel, who is Metis, decided to go back to the University of Manitoba as a student and get a Master’s degree in Native Studies.

“I went back to better understand the history of Aboriginal people and ensure the work that I did contributed to a positive change. When I look back now, that’s what brought me to IBM Canada.”

Through her research at the University of Manitoba she met an executive search recruiter for IBM Canada who recommended

“We come in to a community, bring technology, put together a curriculum and a two or three day technology camp,” she said. “What we leave behind are contacts, technology, and encouragement for these communities to continue to use technology to educate young children.”

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Loustel takes a few minutes to reflect back on her journey. “I’m surprised how I landed in a position that is so non-traditional to accounting because I never imaged that,” she said.

She goes on to explain that one of the great things about an accounting designation is its flexibility. She comments that you can be in public accounting at the beginning of your career and in the next phase take on complex and rewarding socio-economic issues.

Mary Jane Loustel is the Co-Founder of SHEDay, an original member on the Winnipeg Police Board, and is a part of national boards and think tanks such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, Aboriginal Financial Officers Association, and Indspire.