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Chris King, M.AIRAH, with his 2015 Future Leader award, presented by A.G. Coombs' Bryon Price, F.AIRAH.

Q&A

Chris King, M.AIRAH

The 2015 AIRAH Awards Future Leader winner Chris King, M.AIRAH, expertly combines his engineering and business know-how in his role as business development manager at software solutions firm Envizi. King, the 2015 winner of the AIRAH Future Leader Award, recently caught up for a chat with Ecolibrium.

Ecolibrium: When did you first decide you wanted to be an engineer, and how did you get to where you are today?

Chris King: My father, brother and grandfather are all engineers, so I suppose it was the logical step. I didn't actually know what I wanted to do. I wanted to retain some flexibility and choice in terms of future careers, which engineering definitely offers.

Combining engineering with a commerce degree is a natural fit, as the two go hand in hand – this is particularly useful in a technical business development role. I suppose in my current role, I've essentially ended up doing exactly what I'm qualified in.

Eco: How would you characterise your approach to work? What are the fundamentals to your philosophy and process?

CK: Keep it simple and don't unnecessarily over-engineer things for the sake of it. There are always cost ramifications, particularly in the competitive market that we are in today.

Also, given my finance and economics background, I always try to ask myself, "What is the economic impact of this particular engineering decision?"

Good engineering is often about understanding commercial and technical requirements, getting this balance right, and designing accordingly.

Keep it simple and don't unnecessarily over-engineer things for the sake of it

At Envizi, we often see solutions in the software space, which are over-engineered and too expensive for a client's requirements.

Eco: What did it mean to win an AIRAH Award?

CK: Although it's always nice to be recognised by industry, there are many people out there who would also deserve such an award. So for me, it was a good reminder to keep learning and furthering my professional development.

Eco: Do you have a checklist you always follow at the start of a project?

CK: When I was doing project work, checklists help as a quality assurance tool. However, I'm wary of a formulaic approach to projects because the nature of engineering is such that no two projects are the same. A prescriptive model often does not allow for project-specific idiosyncrasies.

Having said that, the devil is in the detail, and on complex projects it's simply not possible to remember everything, and a checklist can work well.

I'm really enjoying the business-development aspect of my role, and do not miss the more mundane aspects of project work such as drafting checks and QA.

Eco: Are you open to new ideas, or are the old ways the best ways? Do you like to collaborate?

CK: In data-driven software analytics, it's vital to be as open as possible to new ideas because the industry is moving so quickly. However, old ideas around engineering first principles are still as relevant today as they have always been, and it's important to use these principles as a framework around which to develop new ideas.

I still use my engineering training daily, and it serves as an excellent foundation; many of these ideas can be traced back to the 1800s.

Eco: What are your favourite projects you have worked on and why?

CK: Some of the work we are doing in the data-driven building optimisation space is really exciting, particularly with respect to equipment-level software metering with clients such as St Vincent's Health. This is very exciting, as we are delivering real-value equipment-level energy visibility to our clients without any physical sub-metering expenditure on their behalf.

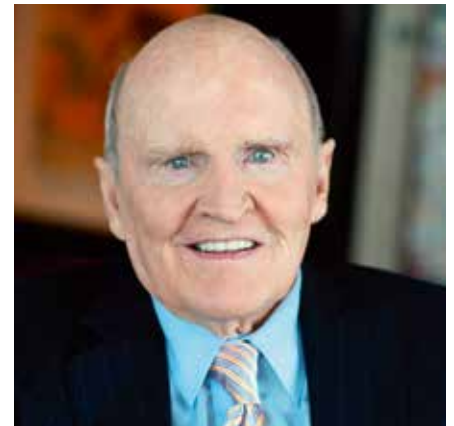
We are also very active in the tertiary education sector, and count many of Australia's top universities as our clients. There are many synergies between innovation in building analytics and universities' research in this space.

Eco: Whom do you admire and why? Do you have a mentor? Do you gain any satisfaction from mentoring others?

CK: Visionaries in the engineering field who have successfully made the transition to commercial management positions, such as Jack Welch.

There are a couple of people within the industry who I often defer to for technical advice. They know who they are.

It's satisfying to help mentor university students around career choices because we have all been in a similar position and know how difficult it can be.



King admires engineer turned management guru Jack Welch.

Eco: What advice do you have for emerging engineers who wish to follow in your path?

CK: Understand your personality type and what you enjoy doing first before embarking on a pre-defined career path dictated by others.

Detailed design work is suited to a specific type of person – and likewise with business development and sales work. Ask yourself what you enjoy doing, and tailor your career choice accordingly, because if you enjoy something you will be better at it.

Eco: What's the most important lesson you've learned throughout your working life?

CK: Listen to others first before providing any type of advice. The best engineers I've worked with have always been great listeners.

In a sales role, this is extremely important, as it's really about understanding a client's needs first and then providing a product to address this need accordingly – not the other way around.

Eco: What's next for you, and what are your goals for the future?

CK: I'm focused on growing Envizi's business in Victoria and expanding into new markets. Particularly exciting for us are the emerging trends of data-driven maintenance and using software to do the heavy lifting for traditionally labour-intensive tasks.

Eco: What does AIRAH membership mean to you?

CK: AIRAH is a great way to keep up to speed with what's happening



Having studied in Berlin, King would love to return there to work.

‘ Good engineering is often about understanding commercial and technical requirements ... and designing accordingly ’

in the industry, network with peers, and continue professional development – particularly outside of a consulting environment where it’s a little harder to keep up with what is happening.

Eco: Describe yourself. What are your defining characteristics?

Open to new ideas, but balancing these new ideas with proven methods that work.

Eco: If I wasn’t an engineer, I’d be a ...

Professional involved in business strategy or entrepreneurial finance in the technology industry.

Eco: Do you have hobbies or diversions?

I like playing music, cars, and cooking when I get time.

Eco: My most valued possession is ...

A rare 1990s Rickenbacker left-handed 4003 bass guitar.



Eco: Tell us something about yourself others might not know.

Having studied part of my finance degree in Berlin and briefly worked in Germany, I’m fluent in German and would love to go back and work there one day.

Eco: In five years I’d like to be ...

Managing a successful team in the software analytics and building energy optimisation sector. And still working with the same clients we have today. ■

To book a seat for the 2016 AIRAH Awards dinner on November 10 in Sydney, email alison@airah.org.au or go to www.airahawards.org.au