

LONG DISTANCES SEEM TO HOLD NO FEAR FOR PATRICK TAM: IN HIS LIFE HE'S JOURNEYED FROM HONG KONG TO BRITAIN AND FROM SHIPBUILDING TO BANKING; AND HE RUNS A MARATHON EVERY YEAR. BUT AT WORK FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S STANDARD BANK, HE USES SUNGARD SYSTEMS TO HELP BRIDGE THE OCEANS BETWEEN LONDON AND JOHANNESBURG



Patrick Tam, to use his own expression, is “not your typical City CIO”. The global head of IT, wholesale banking, at Standard Bank in London has had a rich and varied career that began in the most unlikely of places for a financial information officer – the Swan Hunter shipyard in Newcastle in the U.K. Now he is charged with pulling together Standard Bank’s disparate technology systems all around the globe.

Based at the London headquarters of the South African banking group’s international operations, Patrick’s role reflects the reorganization the bank has made towards a more global structure, with IT one of the first areas to establish roles covering operations in both Johannesburg and London. Standard Bank Group’s international operations offer investment banking solutions focused on emerging markets and natural resources outside South Africa.

When he joined the bank in middle of 2003, Patrick took little time to make his mark. “My first task was to pull the technology team together and I did that in the first month. I might have upset some people in the process, but I would rather do that than have six months of uncertainty.” Patrick appointed a core management

team who were each given global responsibility for a layer of technology – for example, front-office, back-office or middle-office. Before this move, Standard Bank ran different systems, with duplication rife across its operations. “If one person is in charge, he soon realizes that if systems are duplicated it has an impact on his budget. This is the best way to consolidate systems,” he says.

LEAST FAVORITE THINGS

Following some “wise advice” given to him by a previous manager early in his career, among Patrick’s first tasks of the working day will be to tackle the five things he hates doing the most: “Deal with the tough issues that you keep putting off. Do that in the morning, then the day can only get better.” He is not afraid to make decisions, as

HOME LIFE

FAMILY: “I have been married for 27 years and have two sons of 24 and 14.”

HOME: “Kingston, in south-west London – next to Richmond Park, where I can run.”

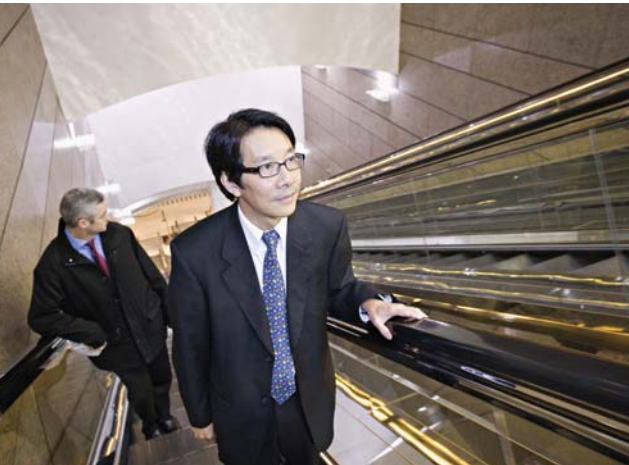
HOMETOWN: Hong Kong.

PASTIMES: “I took up marathon running a few years ago when my wife started. I wanted to see if I could run under four hours before I turned 50, which I did. Now we run in a club and do one marathon a year. My wife and I also love to go dancing.”

VACATION: “We usually visit my wife’s family in Hong Kong and my family in Canada, about once a year on average.”

EDUCATION: “A BSc in mechanical engineering from Imperial College and a MSc and PhD in ocean engineering from University College, London.”

DREAM JOB: “I love learning on the job. I like the challenge of walking into a job where I have little ‘domain knowledge’. The very first job I had was as an apprentice in the Swan Hunter shipyard in Newcastle in north-east England.”



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is evident from what he calls "aggressive deleting" of e-mails – a packed inbox depresses him, he says. Meetings with clients are inevitable, but Patrick makes sure he does not clog up his diary: "I like to have some 'thinking time', as well as the chance to walk around and talk to people."

Patrick identifies three challenges that he believes are the most important: balancing demand with capacity (what he calls "doing the right things"); executing on this and improving project management discipline ("doing the right things right") and nurturing talent ("getting the right people to do the job").

"When I first came to the bank, there was a mismatch in terms of demand and capacity," he explains. "We needed to do fewer things, but do them well, rather than trying to do everything badly."

His final challenge – that of nurturing people – is one he finds particularly rewarding in a bank that values its staff. "Standard Bank has very progressive thinking in personnel matters and runs an extensive graduate program. In South Africa, it takes a leading role in formulating the Financial Charter in support of black empowerment, which it sees as crucial for the country."

TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Managing relationships with vendors is also an important aspect of Patrick's job. Standard Bank is an extensive user of SunGard systems, having recently signed up for Adaptiv Credit Risk as part of its plan to build a common platform for credit risk processing for all group wholesale banking activities. Standard also uses FRONT ARENA as its credit trading platform, intelliMATCH for reconciliations in the back-office and Infinity for interest rate trading.

WORK LIFE

BUSINESS HOURS: About 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Around the corner from Cannon Street station in the City of London.

OFFICE: "Standard Bank runs open-plan offices, both in London and Johannesburg. This enables people to interact and communicate."

DESK HYGIENE: "I am a minimalist – I don't keep any paper on my desk."

PERSONAL ORGANIZATION: "I use a Blackberry when I am traveling and at home I use an iMac – it's a great technology."

DRESS CODE: "We dress down on a Friday, but the rest of the week we wear more formal business attire."

CORPORATE CULTURE: "As a South African bank, Standard Bank is very open and apolitical – it is OK to be open, honest and express your views."

"Standard Bank is a small bank by international standards, but it has a significant relationship with SunGard because of the systems it uses. Managing that relationship – not as the classic 'buyer and seller' scenario – is important, and I do spend a lot of time on this because systems such as Adaptiv are mission-critical."

At 52, Patrick continues to get a buzz from coming into work. "One of the reasons I came to Standard Bank was that I liked the people, and as a small international bank I can feel the direct effects of introducing changes. It is great to be part of a small but ambitious team that has a clear plan for growth."

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