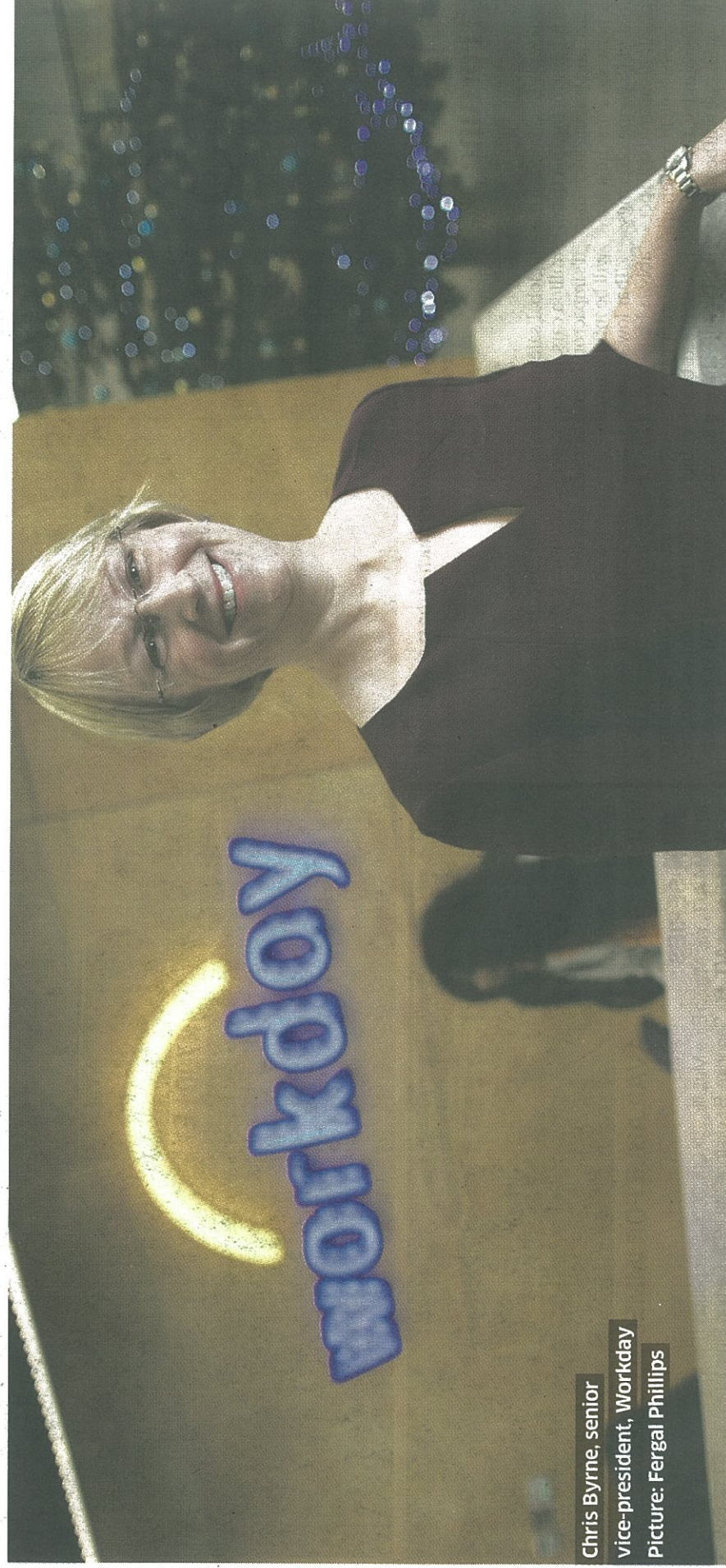


Getting ahead: my story so far



Chris Byrne, senior vice-president, Workday
Picture: Fergal Phillips

‘With every career step, I try to add new skills’

Each week, we profile one of Ireland’s foremost corporate leaders, tracing their career to date and exploring the lessons they have learned along the way. This week, we meet **Chris Byrne**, senior vice-president at Workday

As senior vice-president at Workday, Chris Byrne oversees 600 employees at the company’s EMEA headquarters in Dublin. Founded in 2005, Workday develops cloud applications for HR, finance and data analytics. A native of Kentucky in the US, Byrne started her career at the Johnson Space Centre with IBM. She subsequently worked with PeopleSoft, before joining Workday in 2006 as one of its earliest employees.

Tell us about your career to date.

I studied applied maths and computer science at college. My modest goal was to become a computer programmer. While I’m a software developer at heart, I do enjoy the customer side of technology businesses as well as building teams. My first professional job came about in 1984, when I joined the IBM team at Nasa’s Johnson Space Centre. After that, I moved to Silicon Valley as a software developer, where I worked with my future husband. After IBM, I went to work for PeopleSoft for a decade, before joining Workday in 2006.

Today, I am senior vice-president of global operations and support, with responsibility for our 600-strong EMEA HQ in Dublin,

that maths fired my imagination, so I took advanced courses.

I also had a geometry teacher, Sister Sara, who encouraged me to consider computer science and go to engineering school. I think these two women, unknowingly, guided me to pursue a field to which not many women were exposed.

Another mentor was Dave Duffield, who pushed me to take on bigger and tougher challenges and think beyond just my core competencies, shepherding me into strategy, operations and leadership.

Based on your own experience, what are your top career tips?

When I graduated from college, there were just five women in a class of 30 people – so I think it is really important to speak up and be heard and do not be shy about your abilities or your contributions – if people don’t know what you’re doing, how do you expect them to consider you for a special task or project?

I also think it is very important for women to help mentor other women, and to encourage them to take risks and to seize opportunities when they come along. Put yourself forward for roles where possible – don’t just wait for opportunities to arrive.

How would you define your work style and how has this evolved over the years?

I come from a huge family and software development reminds me of a ‘big family’ dynamic. For every developer, there are probably eight roles around that person. So, while it may look individualistic, it is really more of a team sport. Collaboration is essential in today’s working life. I always consult my colleagues on major decisions to get their input.

First, be excellent at whatever you do – do your best. Secondly, I aim to

cross the goal line with every project – finish it, no matter what the hurdles may be. Thirdly, where I can, I try to lead and influence others based on my own ‘ups and downs’.

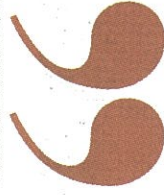
In terms of managing teams and individuals, what are your insights?

I would never ask someone who works for me to do something that I wouldn’t do myself. Strong companies value merit over hierarchy. As a leader, your real job is to set the guardrails and then give people the freedom to do their best work.

Technology moves so fast. The best employees are resilient, quick learners and able to work on the ‘now’, knowing how to get to the future. Hiring hard-working people and giving them new opportunities is essential, but that is not always easy. Leaders have to paint a picture of the future and bring people with them.

What about communication and negotiating the ups and downs of working life?

Communication has to be consistent with the culture of the company, how



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you operate as an organisation and how you treat your people.

Culture ensures strength and consistency as you grow – especially internationally. Hiring a diverse range of people that share your core values is critical.

Despite being a technology company, we don’t just rely on online tools to communicate. We still hold site-wide meetings at our Dublin office to give updates on our business, highlight great projects and listen to employees and what they are thinking.

I spend a lot of my time with new hires, both at orientation and afterwards through one-to-one meetings, to ensure they are integrating well.

Has networking played an important part in your career?

Definitely. I say to people that networking is not just external, it’s internal also.

Networking goes hand in hand with collaboration, which is a key part of success in a technology company.

Given the scope of Workday, I spend my time networking with peers in other offices, as well as with customers and prospects.

If you had to choose another career tomorrow, what would it be and why?

I think I would have to fulfil my childhood dream of being a librarian. My first part-time job, when I was 15, was in a library. I thought this was an amazing job, surrounded by all this colour and knowledge. I really loved books.

I dropped by Marsh’s Library in Trinity College a few weeks ago. It’s a beautiful place and a retreat from the ‘always-on’ world we live in today. If I wasn’t at Workday, I’d be quite happy to spend my days there.