

## Professionals reach the zenith at recent Pinnacle Awards

Congratulations to all the award winners of this year's Pinnacle Awards. We shine a spotlight on two of the NSW winners – Heather Spring, Credit Manager of the Year, and Chris Swanson, Legal Representative of the Year.

### Credit Manager of the Year: Heather Spring

An overwhelming desire to develop excellence and understanding within her team has seen Manpower's Heather Spring named Credit Manager of the Year at the 2017 NSW AICM Pinnacle Awards.



With her 10-member-strong group finishing runners-up in Credit Team of the Year category, the achievement of her own peer-nominated accolade is recognition for her dedication to providing comprehensive professional development.

“For me, it was all about bringing that team together and getting them to understand that what they’re doing has great meaning within an organisation, and that credit management is not debt collection, that there is an art to it,” she says. “They’d never had the opportunity to understand what credit management was all about prior to that, and I was really happy to have the opportunity to show them. Winning this award is a major career highlight for me. To be recognised by your peers is something that doesn’t happen very often in many professions.”

With 30-years credit management experience to her name, Heather says that the knowledge required to excel in the role is what makes the job so rewarding.

“I always say it’s the best profession you can ever be in because you have to have a knowledge of different types of professions,” she explains. “You need to understand the legal side of credit management. You need to understand the communications side of credit management. You need to understand the insolvency side of credit management, and you need to understand the customer and the situation that they’re in. It’s not always about just

collecting the money. Credit management is the heart of an organisation. Without the heart beating, guess what? You can sell as much as you like, but if the money doesn't get collected, then you haven't got a business."

That's not to say that the role of credit manager had been a well-defined career objective from an early stage. Rather, it was a destination arrived at following a long period in another area of finance.

"It's not something where I woke up one morning and said, 'I want to be credit manager'," she laughs. "I actually started in consumer finance and worked my way up to become an auditor for Avco. From there I got into commercial finance and really developed an interest in credit management. I enjoyed both areas but I think the commercial world is a lot more exciting."

When it comes to identifying the biggest challenges for credit managers, Heather says it can still be a struggle to achieve recognition of what the profession can achieve for organisations and their bottom lines.

"I think the biggest challenge is still getting businesses to understand that we are a big part of their organisation, and getting people to understand that this is a profession – we're not debt collectors – that's totally different," she explains. "We play a major role within organisations, looking at the risk side of credit as well as the collection side. On occasions where sales teams are going out to win business, it would be great if they involved us a little bit more in regards to meeting the customer and working together as a team."

#### **Legal Representative of the Year: Chris Swanson**

Corporate litigation expert Chris Swanson has been named Legal Representative of the Year at the 2017 NSW AICM Pinnacle Awards.



The co-Principal of Swanson & Symonds Lawyers, the Sydney-based 62-year-old has been involved in commercial litigation for over 30-years. Having overseen thousands of cases throughout his legal career, his peer-nominated Pinnacle award is recognition of his outstanding work and achievements over the past 12-months.

“As a lawyer, my practice is primarily in commercial litigation, which involves chasing people for money that is owing on behalf of my clients,” he explains. “Often that means credit managers who are referring work to me to pursue a debt that they’re having a difficulty getting paid. Or it might mean advising clients on how they can perhaps better set up systems that might limit or preclude debts being incurred in the future. It might also mean making sure that the documentation they have in place when they sign with a customer gives them the greatest chance of getting paid and maximizing recoveries into the future.”

His recent accolade notwithstanding, Chris says the task of chasing down reluctant money is one that has continually provided a significant degree of job satisfaction.

“It can be extremely enjoyable,” he says of his role. “It can be very good to get the result that your client needs or wants. If you’re able to achieve that for them, it gives you a nice warm feeling. I also enjoy working with credit managers. They tend to be very practical people and you can run your matters quite effectively. It’s very much a team approach.”

Having harboured ambitions of a legal career ever since high school, Chris says a diverse range of experiences early on in his career enables him to bring an invaluable perspective to his current responsibilities.

“I’ve practiced in a lot of different areas and I like to think that they’ve all contributed in part to making me a better all-round lawyer,” he says. “I think the life experience of just observing and dealing with people for what is now 39-years gives me a good practical approach to dealing with matters and people.”

Not surprisingly, he says commercial litigation has changed throughout his time in the profession, with technology in particular offering the capacity for the process to be both faster and more efficient.

“Technological advances I think have made a big difference to the way things are done, especially for credit managers, who can now get reports and financial data at their fingertips,” he says. “That definitely wasn’t possible 20 years ago. Previously, they had to pore through ledgers and balance sheets manually to extract the required information. But as well as that, court processes have also been streamlined and it’s now a faster, more efficient operation getting matters into the court system and getting them dealt with.”

When it comes to pinpointing just what it takes to be a good litigator, Chris believes it’s important to understand that the needs and requirements of a client may vary depending on the type of industry they’re involved in.

“I also think it’s just being responsive to what those requirements are,” he says. “That means

either following the black and white of taking a matter to court and pursuing it through the court processes, or often identifying early on whether it's a matter they should limit their exposure to."

## **AICM PINNACLE AWARD WINNERS 2017**

### **NSW**

Credit Manager – Heather Spring, Manpower Group

Credit Supervisor – Neda Canak, Transurban

Senior Credit Officer – Robyn Whitehouse, Ecolab

Legal Representative – Chris Swanson, Swanson & Symons

External Collections – Chris Hayes, Elite Collections

Recruitment – Yseult D'Estelle Roe, Accountability

Consultant – Matt Jackson, Creditorwatch

High Five – Sev Indrele, Orange Hire

### **VIC**

Credit Manager – Stacey Feaver, Silverchef

Credit Supervisor – Kate Baker, Urbis

Senior Credit Officer – Gabrielle Forte, Australia Post

Legal Representative – Rebecca Fahey, Smith Leonard Fahey Lawyers

External Collections – Jeanne McArthur, McArthur Specialist Commercial Recoveries

Recruitment – Artemis Vrionis, Sharp & Carter

Consultant – Prudence Chang, NCI

High Five – Australia Post National Legal Recovery Team

### **QLD**

Credit Manager – Julie McNamara, Boom Logisitcs

Credit Supervisor – Greg Kotzadamis, University of Qld

Senior Credit Officer – Emma Purcival, Vinidex Pty Lts

Legal Representative – Mark Harley, Boss Lawyers

External Collections – Dale Hannan, National Collection Services

Recruitment – Lucinda Bell, Randstad

Consultant – Nicole Yeong, Rodgers Reidy

High Five – Toni Sawyer

## **WA**

Credit Manager/ Supervisor of the Year – Lisa Marr, Instant Waste Management

Credit Service Provider – Natalie Walker, Blitz Credit Management