RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
Office of Institutional Advancement
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Chance Meeting Leads Alumnus to New Career Path

Christopher Beck was studying History at Ramapo College and, like many other college students, had a job at a local store to help pay some bills. One day, a customer came in who would change the course of his career. The Oakland, N.J., resident graduated with a degree in History in 1997, but parlayed that chance meeting into a successful career in Information Technology. Beck is now the Global Head of IT, Enterprise Business Systems and Product Management Office at Harry's, Inc., which manufactures and sells men's personal grooming products.

What is the story behind your career in IT?

I had been working at Staples to pay my way through college - selling computers at the time -- with absolutely no technical background or knowledge-- and I was helping a woman buy a computer. We got to talking, and she found out I was going to college at Ramapo. She told me she worked in the Co-op/Internship office at the College, and she could certainly help find me a more rewarding job than what I was currently doing. I was skeptical, but decided to go see her the following week. She did, in fact, help me get a co-op at Volvo Cars of North America, training other newbies on how to use a computer. The rest is history. I stayed at Volvo through the rest of my time at Ramapo, and ended up making computers and IT my career. It was certainly a lucky coincidence that I was working that day and met her.

What does your position at Harrys' entail?

At Harry's I oversee our IT, Enterprise Systems and PMO (technical Project Management Office) teams globally. This includes the internal teams that support our users and infrastructure, as well as our enterprise business systems (Finance, Supply Chain, Product Development, Retail, Product Design, etc.).

Over the last year-plus, virtual meetings and communication became the norm, and in many instances is still an efficient way for companies to conduct business. How, if at all, has the pandemic affected your responsibilities?

The pandemic really kicked IT into overdrive. As a digitally native startup, IT was always critical to the success of the company, but now we needed to support our users in a more intimate and efficient way. I personally oversee global teams based out of the U.S./Canada, UK and Germany, so the video conferencing aspect tended to be business as usual. The biggest challenge was trying to manage and own large-scale technical projects where all of our users are remote and can't physically be in a

conference room to swap stories, brainstorm on white boards, and just celebrate successes. It requires more of the soft skills to ensure the entire team is feeling heard and appreciated.

Harry's Inc. website focuses on its products, of course, but also has a strong presence for the company's philanthropic efforts, specifically mental health awareness. Can you offer any comment?

Absolutely! Every year, we set aside 1% of our sales to donate to charitable organizations that share our ambition to bring quality mental health care to men everywhere. We do this because, actually, it is nothing short of an epidemic: Men are disproportionately affected by suicide. Each of our partners serves vulnerable populations of men in different ways. We also practice what we preach by providing mental health services to all employees, providing formal mental breaks throughout the year where the entire company is closed, and we allow all of our employees to donate time (5 work days a year) to work on the social causes they feel strongest about.

Your LinkedIn profile lists career highlights. Team Leadership is at the top of the list. Please discuss.

The term "team leadership" has changed much over the years. When I first started in my career, it was all about delivering results (especially in the financial sector). Now leadership means being all-inclusive. Your team needs to know you're supporting them 100%, valuing their input and opinions, and being totally transparent with them. If your team knows you will go through a brick wall for them, then they will do the same for you! Don't overlook team culture and a team's chemistry with each other. When I interview for new team members, they, of course, need to be able to perform the work required, but they also need to buy into the team and company culture.

You worked for several high-profile companies, and with a great deal of success. What do you feel you brought to the table when you joined Harry's?

I was able to bring my experiences with helping to scale and grow technical teams to Harry's. We have an amazing IT team and I've been lucky to have been able to triple the size of our team since I started. More important, our team routinely has the highest scores in our company employee engagement surveys. Also, I've been able to introduce some processes and systems to help our company grow. Startups like to buck the trend and be different, but in some cases, formal processes and systems can introduce efficiencies and automation required for any company to continue to grow.

What advice can you offer Ramapo students who are preparing for their future careers, in IT or other fields?

Always remember that at the end of the day everything is about people and your relationships with them. Many people in technology get very focused on technical knowledge and training, but they can sometimes forget about the "soft skills." You truly need to know how to work with people - whether it be managing a team with many different and wonderful personalities, or trying to understand what your end user/customer needs to best achieve their goals. You will never be able to achieve everything you want on your own, in a vacuum. Networking doesn't mean exchanging contact information with strangers, but truly building relationships with people. I've been fortunate to have worked with some amazing people, both in technology, and outside of it. Try to be as well-rounded as you possibly can.

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding.

The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice; is recognized as the state's top college on the list of Best Disability Schools by *Great Value Colleges*; was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondeNast Traveler*; and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger's*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on Niche.com, and is designated a "Military Friendly College" in Victoria Media's *Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a post-master's Doctor of Nursing Practice.