

Name: Etienne Geringer

Location: Brisbane, Queensland

Work role: Head of Internal Audit at the Public Trustee of Queensland

The Public Trustee is a statutory authority that provides a number of services to Queenslanders including enduring powers of attorney, free wills, investment management, executor services and financial administration.

The Public Trustee is a self-funded organisation which not only funds its day-to-day operations but provides a free will-making service, rebates for financial management clients who can't afford fees, a cash contribution to the Office of the Public Guardian, and community education activities.

The Public Trustee has been serving Queenslanders since 1916 and have over 600 staff working at a network of offices across Queensland.



Professional role: I am a qualified, CIA, CCSA, CFSA and CISA. I have been an IIA member since around 2002 and have worked across three continents – North America, Africa and Australia.

Community role: As a South-African born now Australian, I am a firm believer of the Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu is a Zulu term which can be translated as 'I am because we are'. This has driven me to contribute to the Internal Audit community through professional development events and seminars including:

- 2016 – 'Is Internal Audit killing or stifling innovation?'
- 2017 – 'It's not a popularity contest – perspectives on how to thrive on respect and resilience'

Working for an organisation that assists those who cannot help themselves has inspired me to use my knowledge and skills to give back. I am currently studying a diploma in financial counselling and hope to volunteer my skills to those in need once qualified.

How did you get a start in internal audit?

As with most children in South Africa, my Dad gave me a newspaper with all the job advertisements and told me to select a career. As a result, I started studying towards becoming an accountant as it seemed exciting at the time. I loved the idea of travelling the world and earning a decent salary. However, during my university days, I also had an interest in political science. I soon discovered that politics might not be the most effective way to bring positive change, so I decided I would rather be involved in holding people accountable for their decisions and so I completed my honours degree in internal auditing.

What's the coronavirus drama effect on you?

While it has been challenging for all, I have been focusing on the positives. In short, the pandemic has been a great catalyst for needed change. What was initially viewed as impossible or too hard has now occurred in a matter of days.

Working from office or home?

It depends on what the work requirements are for the week. It is nice to have uninterrupted time at home to get the big tasks done, but also important to have interactions and round table discussions with others in person.

How has coronavirus changed the way you work?

I am fortunate to work with a very dedicated and professional team. We have daily catch-ups and everybody knows what needs to be done by when, so it's mostly business as usual.

Every audit I have been involved with has been different. It involves lots of planning and having the ability to adapt to the challenge ahead. In my view, Internal Audit has always been well-positioned to adapt to working in a COVID world.

What risks would you say are heightened by coronavirus?

With a mixture of staff working in the office and at home, COVID can create communications voids and as a result, I am concerned that the risk for organisational silos may increase.

What is the biggest challenge facing internal auditors?

Staying relevant. A good chess player thinks at least five moves ahead. Great chess players always think at least one more move ahead than his or her opponent. The world we work in is changing rapidly. As a profession, we have progressed from sample selections to data analytics to continuous assurance. Are we in position to consolidate our past progress and still stay ahead of a rapidly changing landscape?

What has the IIA-Australia been doing lately?

I have a great relationship with the IIA–Australia and love the factsheets and white papers. I hope they can continue with their advocacy efforts post the banking royal commission.

What is your most memorable Internal Audit moment?

I honestly enjoy meeting people and hearing their stories. Internal Audit enabled me to meet people from all walks of life. For example prisoners, farmers, miners, academics, politicians, chief executives and company chairpersons. I have learned so much from each and every person that I have crossed paths with.

In addition, was it not for Internal Audit, I would not have been given the opportunity to see the less travelled parts of Australia such as Cunnamulla, Mount Isa, Charleville and Roma. I have even taken the family on a holiday to see some of these places.

What are you working on at present?

- Work – Trying to find new ways to break down silos in a COVID world.
- Personal – Completing my IIA Certification in Risk Management Assurance (CRMA) and studying to become a Financial Counsellor.

What are you reading at present?

As you'd expect, CRMA and Financial Counsellor study materials.

Book – 'Resilience Project' by Hugh van Cuylenburg.

What is on your desk right now?

The bare minimum – my laptop with two screens. I much prefer to work electronically from wherever I need to be. The only time I prefer paper is when it comes to books.

Concert or event you would most like to attend?

The Great Wildebeest Migration in Tanzania and Kenya. Nothing beats being out in the natural environment and seeing what it has to offer.