



## EP274\_Jen Wischnowsky

**Lisa Nichols** 00:03

Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes. But each year in the United States, about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome, making them a person with Down syndrome. If you've ever encountered someone with Down syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you will ever meet. They truly have something extra.

My name is Lisa Nichols and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners in as the mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word. I have been blessed to be by her side. As she impacts everyone she meets.

Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world. While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are.

Join me as I explore this something extra in leaders from all walks of life and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities and in themselves.

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I'm delighted to have Jen Wischnowsky on the show today. Jen is the Senior Director of Data Analytics and Transformation at Ameren.

Well, Jen, I am absolutely thrilled to have you on the Something Extra podcast today. Thank you so much for making the time to be here with me.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 01:54

Thank you, Lisa, thank you for the opportunity. I'm really looking forward to the discussion.

**Lisa Nichols** 01:59

I am too well, you know, not to embarrass you, but you truly are a star. You're a star at one of our long-time clients, Ameren. But you and I met recently, really when you went through our Technology Leadership Experience.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 02:15

That's right. I am very grateful for you know, the Technology Partners helping to continue to build technology leadership skills here in the St. Louis area. I am. As we talk about my leadership journey, I'll explain probably at some point, but I love St. Louis, I love growing the city and the impact that the city can have. And so, it was a great program, I met a lot of you know, great peers, learned about challenges that were similar to ours and how they're dealing with them and, and networking and mentorships. So, I've really enjoyed that program. I've sent a number of my leaders through the program as well now so...

**Lisa Nichols** 02:53

I know I know you have and believe it or not, we're on our 13th cohort Jen, it's crazy.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 02:58

I think I was part of the first one, I think I was the first cohort.

**Lisa Nichols** 03:03

Yeah, I think you were, I think you were but, you know, I know that I would love to talk I want to talk all about TechLX so all I want to talk all about your leadership journey. But what I'd love to start with is how you grew up and I know, I think you went to Parkway Central.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 03:20

I did.

**Lisa Nichols** 03:21

So does that mean you're a St. Louis native?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 03:24

I am. I grew up in St. Louis. My parents actually are transplants. So, my dad's from Michigan. My mom is from New Jersey, they came to St. Louis for residency, and had children and you know, of course, St. Louis is a great place to raise a family. So, I grew up here, I left to go to the University of Illinois. And from there, I kind of left St. Louis for a while. And then I came back actually six weeks before we had our first son to raise our family.

**Lisa Nichols** 03:58

Yeah, I can't tell you how many people I know that are boomerangers. They go away for a while, and then they come back because St. Louis is just such a wonderful city. You know, Jen, we have listeners that listen all over the globe. And what people may not realize this is funny to me, because I'm originally born and raised in Kentucky. And then what brought Greg and I to St. Louis is McDonnell Douglas. We started our careers at McDonnell. We got recruited right out of college to come work for McDonnell Douglas. And you know, at that time we were like, oh, we'll probably be here two or three years and then we'll go somewhere else, we've never left. Because it is a wonderful place to, we've built our business here, we've raised our family here. It's a great place.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 04:42

It is a great place. It's it has, it really has everything that big cities have to offer but in a small town feel to it. It's easy to get to the professional sports games, and it's not gonna cost you \$500 necessarily and sitting in two hours of traffic and so just the museum's, the sports, the music, the arts, of course, the jobs that are available. And so and then to your point, it's just it really is a city focused on family. And yeah, being able to raise a family here has been one of, it was one of our goals that's why we came back. And we've loved it since.

**Lisa Nichols** 05:21

Yeah, I agree. I will never forget Shri Ramachandran was the CIO for Mallinckrodt, Jen, and he moved here from New Jersey. Now he's back in Boston, because he's working for Boston Scientific. But I remember talking to him one day, and he said we, St. Louis wasn't even on our radar. But when he got recruited to Mallinckrodt, he and his wife moved, and he said, we love it, because on the East Coast, you can do one thing on a Saturday. But he said here, I can go to a ball game in the morning and then I can go to the theater at night. But the commute is good. What people may not realize though, because we talked about Parkway Central High School, Jen, what people may not realize is the question that you get asked in St. Louis all the time, is "where did you go to school?" and I thought when we moved from, from Kentucky I thought - what an odd question, but it is it is kind of funny how people, because I think people were like they're looking for connection point right? Oh I went to Parkway, or whatever.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 06:31

It's a small city, right with you know, with it's a small town feel so knowing where you went to high school. It's like, yeah, I have a cousin that went there too.

**Lisa Nichols** 06:41

Yes yes.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 06:42

It does help build the connections for sure. And my kids are now in the Parkway system. So yeah.

**Lisa Nichols** 06:49

For those of you who are outside of St. Louis Parkway is a wonderful, wonderful school district, very Blue Ribbon Schools. Great school district. But now did you grow up with siblings, Jen?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 07:02

I did I do. I have a younger sister and I have two older stepsisters. So, I kind of had the experience of both having a small family and then more of a larger family. And so, I loved the loud, crazy, chaotic field to the larger family. And now I have four children of my own. And I will say sometimes I do wish it was quieter but it is a lot of fun. And so yeah, that's where we have a big family now as well.

**Lisa Nichols 07:30**

I love that. I love that. Well, I just talked to someone earlier today, Jen. And he was telling me his dad had 13 brothers and sisters. Yeah, that is a really big fam. I can't even imagine the family gatherings with that many people.

**Jen Wischnowsky 07:50**

No, my dad was one of seven. My mom was one of five. So, when I say we have a big family it feels like it but yeah, there's that's not a comparison to some of the families out there.

**Lisa Nichols 08:01**

Right, I love it. What would you love to do as a little girl? What were you in sports? Were you in music? Were you what, what did you do?

**Jen Wischnowsky 08:09**

I did I feel like I did everything. So, my dad's from Michigan. So, you learn how to ice skate. Like you learn how to swim raise like life skills. So, I figure skated for a long time. Girls didn't really play hockey back then. But I did figure skate. And I played soccer. I played softball, I played lacrosse, I played the violin growing up for many years. My parents were both very focused on academics. So, I focused a lot on my school as well, which proves to be helpful, you know, down the road, my career. So, a lot of everything. I love watching sports, we spend a lot of our time at the rink now, all three of my boys play hockey, so it's fun to pass on those things down to the next generation.

**Lisa Nichols 08:59**

That's awesome. That is awesome. Well, you've already said this, but you went on to U of I in Champaign, Illinois, a wonderful, wonderful University. You start with a marketing degree, but I learned something about you, Jen, by the end of your sophomore year, you had finished that marketing degree. And then you decided you didn't want to leave school yet, so you went on to get an accounting degree. So, I'm like, okay, this woman, high achiever, overachiever, certainly high octane. What in the world? I mean, what was the impetus for accounting?

**Jen Wischnowsky 09:32**

Yeah, so a few things. One, the accounting program at University of Illinois was number one in the country at the time, and, and Enron had just collapsed. So actually, all the accountants were getting jobs because Sarbanes Oxley was gonna roll out in and so I thought to myself, I don't really want to do sales, you know, overall, the economy's not in a great place, but accountants are getting hired and it's, it's the toughest program in the country here so I should probably go and do that. So as kind of one of the leadership principles I still follow is you don't have to be the genius in the room just copy the smart people around you. I saw all of them getting accounting degrees, I thought, okay, I guess I should do that. So got an accounting degree never, never planned to be an accountant for life. But I did start out my career in accounting in New York City at PricewaterhouseCoopers and I was there for four years. And then and then I transitioned to Chicago with PricewaterhouseCoopers. But it was a great place to start my career, I'm, I would encourage anyone, you know, considering it to do so. And then I actually stayed in accounting for a number of years thereafter.

**Lisa Nichols 10:44**

I could not agree more with you on the PwC. I always say so. So, you and I see, you didn't know this about me, but I have a bachelor's in accounting.

**Jen Wischnowsky 10:55**

Oh, my Gosh

**Lisa Nichols 10:57**

I did not practice public accounting, I went corporate. So, I went to McDonnell Douglas as an internal auditor and was in cost accounting and property and did a lot of different things when I was at Mac. But it is that is not an easy major, Jen.

**Jen Wischnowsky 11:15**

No.

**Lisa Nichols 11:16**

I remember my friends were out like having fun. And I'm sitting studying because we had so much homework, right? In accounting, and you've got to, you got to practice right to understand and so not an easy major, but wow, so important for whatever you do.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 11:34

Yes. And my parents were both doctors, as I said, so it's kind of funny. I loved science, but I, I very much respect the profession, of course, but I saw the stress, right that that profession brought to them. And so, I thought, well, I don't I don't think I want to be a doctor. So, but I want to go into business. And that really, I mean, that was from high school on I was in Future Business Leaders of America and marketing class in high school, and then that just translated all the way through. For the first half of my career, it was you know, in some form of marketing or accounting.

**Lisa Nichols** 12:10

Yeah. And I love that you started at PwC. Because I think that is an awesome way to see a lot. In a short period of time, you see many different industries, you see how other companies deal with challenges. And I just think it's a, it's kind of like an MBA on steroids.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 12:31

It was a great place to start your career. There are so many lessons I learned from PwC. I mean, from one standpoint, I was leading people by my third year out of school, right? So, you learn people leadership skills very early on. You learn how to work hard. You learn about different industries to your point, I worked a lot of hours, but I learned a lot in those processes, and then actually trained out of audit into their merger and acquisitions practice. I had one of those quarter life crises, right where I thought to myself, I did accounting because everyone else was doing it. And it's, you know, as good a great job. And what if I'm never going to be happy as an accountant. Now, all I had done was auditing at that point, which is great. I was not going to be a lifelong auditor, I wanted to be the one making the decision. And so, they said, PwC actually said, go take a leave of absence. And look at other areas of our firm, which again, back to how great PwC is in terms of supporting. This is years ago before leaves of absences were even very popular to do. So, I, I actually I took a flower arranging class and ran a flower arranging business on the side for many years after that. I thought I wanted to be an entrepreneur, we could go into that. But, I traveled as the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, I took the GMAT. And then of course, I you know, interviewed and stayed with PwC in a completely different part of the company where I got to work on really, really neat projects. I took one of the largest energy companies in the world. I took their US business public through an IPO. One of the largest telecommunication companies in the world had gone bankrupt and we're selling off and buyers you know to buyers all over the country all over the world. So, it was just really great experiences that I would not have been able to replicate had I not take, you know worked at PwC.

**Lisa Nichols** 14:23

Well, I see I did not know that. What that says so much about PwC for them to say take a little leave of absence think about it. And, and you know probably because of that and you being able to kind of get to know yourself a little bit more and look at these different areas. You ended up staying with them. I know that it did have a lot of travel though, Jen and so you, you did finally take a job with Exelon in Chicago and you got to do some really cool stuff there too. I think Exelon bought Constellation Energy Group and you were asked to take the leadership role on that integration. In fact, I think you filed the first 10k.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 15:05

That's right.

**Lisa Nichols** 15:06

For the combined companies, which is really cool. How, you know, it just one thing builds on another, doesn't it?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 15:13

Yeah, I, I loved my time at Exelon and other great company, it's kind of funny when I had decided to leave PwC to your point was not because of anything other than the travel, I took 100 flights two years in a row, and there was no end in sight to that. And, you know, I mentioned I had moved back to Chicago, well moved back to the Midwest, I was living in Chicago, but I wasn't really living in Chicago, and I thought, okay, you know, I really do want to live in the Midwest and see what that's like. And so, so that job at Exelon, you know, as accounting policy and research roles when I came into and PwC is like, are you sure it's time to leave, you know, you don't want to be bored. And I will tell you, I was not bored. For even a day. I learned so much at that company, and really, you know, a leader in the in the power and utility space. And so, they still are today. And so, I you know, I got to do accounting policy integration during the merger to your point. And then after the merger, was leading the external financial reporting team. And yeah, the first 10k I say was a succinct 500 pages that we wrote, but it was, it was a great experience and I learned a lot. And again, you know, the only reason I left Exelon was to come to St. Louis to raise our family.

**Lisa Nichols 16:33**

Yeah. Which brings me to where you are today. In 2014, you moved to Ameren, I was looking Jen and I counted up, you've been there, since 2014. I think you've had seven different roles.

**Jen Wischnowsky 16:48**

I haven't counted. But that sounds right.

**Lisa Nichols 16:51**

Seven different roles, which is crazy. But you came to set up the first technical accounting group and Ameren actually created that role for you. Did they see the need for this group? Or did you kind of have to sell them on needing this?

**Jen Wischnowsky 17:08**

Well, this is a funny story about being a mom and being a leader. So, I had moved to St. Louis, I had a, you know, one year old world, actually an infant child. And my husband was still traveling for work. He's a consultant. And I thought, well, I'm not sure I should take the level of role that I had at Exelon. I'm a new mom, I don't know what that's gonna be like. So, I actually purposely interviewed for a couple levels down from where I was, you know, at Exelon at Ameren. And I came back from my second interview, and I'm interviewing with the controller. And I remember thinking, well, this is odd, you know, the controllers interviewing for this revenue accounting role. And they said, so you interviewed for this role, but we would like you to take this role instead. And it was to set up their technical accounting policy group. So, it sounded like they had had a desire for a while. At the time, there's a lot of changes going on in the accounting world, a lot of new regulations coming out. And so, I thought, I said, "Yeah, I can do that. I've done it. And so I'm happy to do it. But I'm not going to do it for life, if you're okay with that", you know, so I came in, it was a good three years, I got to set up all the practices, you know, that we have in place still today in terms of adopting new accounting guidance, how to think about accounting for new transactions, and judgmental accounting areas. So that's really what, what that focuses on. And so, it was a great experience. And I have had an opportunity to your point to have many other roles since. So, it's been a good journey.

**Lisa Nichols 18:41**

It's been a great move. Well, tell me this, I really want to kind of move into this because you're doing this today. But I want to talk about the transition from accounting into technology. And I believe it started, Jen, when Ameren had set up five different innovation centers. And you were tasked with looking at different ways to evolve the business model. And I think you were one of the ones that was on, you know, one of those taskforce or something and is that kind of the way the journey went?

**Jen Wischnowsky 19:18**

Yeah, so I actually applaud Ameren for doing this. It was one of the probably most interesting opportunities I've had in my career. They took high potential coworkers from across the organization and put them together on these cross functional teams. And the task was to think about different aspects of Ameren's business 20-30 years from then, and what it would look like and what we needed to prepare for. And so, I was working directly with engineers, with people from the IT organization, you know, people that I wouldn't have otherwise met and actually some of my close friends and leaders that are still there today. And one of the opportunities was to pilot robotic process automation for the organization. And so, there's a big opportunity within the finance organization to adopt that form of technology to automate a lot of their manual processes. So, it worked out well, because I understood the finance organization, and I was working, you know, in cross functional teams with the technical folks in the IT organization as well. So, we did that pilot, and then about, I would say, nine months after that, they said, okay, we're going to adopt this technology, and we would like you to lead, you know, the center of automation, officially, and we adopted an enterprise level. And so that was my first role that I would say it was sort of a techno functional role, right? I was responsible for using technology to drive business changes. That was announced the same day that Bhavani was announced is Bhavani Amirthalingam was announced as our new Chief Digital Information Officer at Ameren. And so fast forward two months after that, I was reporting out our strategy and our approach and our roadmap through my leader as well, as you know, Bhavani was in the room, Mary Hager was in the room. And it was kind of clear that the this group was going to transition into digital the digital organization under Bhavani. And I actually thought I didn't have a job, you know, you know, if they took this team, right, my, you know, what I had been doing before that had already been given to another leader, right. And, thankfully, Bhavani, took me with the program and expanded my role fairly significantly. And so that was my first. Yeah, my first exposure into the technical world was, I can't believe it's been almost six years ago now five and a half years ago.



**Lisa Nichols** 21:49

That's crazy. Well, I've got so much there's so much packed in there. But I want to back up RPA. Tell our listeners for those who are not technical, what is robotic automation processing? So, tell our listeners a little bit about that real quick. And then I've got a couple of other follow-on questions.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 22:06

Sure. So robotic process automation is technology that can mimic if, then, else type tasks that humans do. And it can do it across a number of applications. So, for example, it can open your email, open a PDF attached to that email, take the information off the PDF, log into a system, update the system with the right information from that PDF, you know, and then create sort of a ticket that it has completed that job and move on to the next job. And then of course, it tracks exceptions as well. So really, if you think about they call it swivel chair technology, you know, moving from application to application, as long as there is logic that you're going to explain, okay, if this says that, then you do this, you know, it follows that, you know, and actually, we've had a huge amount of success, leveraging that technology at Ameren. We have returned over 100,000 manual labor hours back to the business just with that technology. And it's so funny how the world changes. It wasn't that long ago, when RPA was new. And we you know, we were trying to implement it at Ameren and they said, Well, you can't call it robotic process automation, because robots scare people. And now, you know, thinking about how the world has changed. It's funny.

**Lisa Nichols** 23:25

Yes, with artificial intelligence, and you know, all the different Chat GPT all the different technologies that are changing the way we work. It's crazy. Well, I want to go back to Bhavani. So, Bhavani, did bring you over to her organization, and I think she made you her chief of staff.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 23:45

That's right.

**Lisa Nichols** 23:46

Jen, what an incredible opportunity that was. So why don't you just for our listeners, what did that role teach you, you were able to really kind of have a seat at the table with that role?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 24:03

I mean, there's so many things, I guess I'll start with Bhavani herself is a change agent. And so, she came into Ameren was just a different way of working, which is exactly what Ameren needed and probably still does need. But you know, really the things that her expectations, her pace, all much heightened level compared to the you know, we were 100 year old utility, you know, at the time, but we were trying to go through a digital transformation. So, you need somebody who can lead you through that. And she was the right leader for sure to do that. So when, when her chief of staff role came open, you know, I met with her a couple of times, not a formal interview, necessarily, but I knew that there were other candidates out there and actually, Lisa I was not on a shortlist or the long list. I was not on any list.

**Lisa Nichols** 24:57

You weren't on any list. Oh my goodness.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 24:59

For that role and, and there were definitely candidates on paper that had, you know, more credentials and background than I would have to be a chief of staff. But she, based on, you know, a few meetings with me, and I guess she saw something that she wanted to also grow and develop in me. And, and so it was, it was just a great opportunity I came in, I had, of course, the center of automation team with me, but then I got to form the Digital Strategy and Performance Management function, which was really building out our long-term strategy for digital. Like I said, Ameren was going through a digital transformation, so we needed a clear strategy and roadmap that we were going to follow. And then on the performance management side, how are you going to measure if you're successful or not, and so we, you know, we put that in place with her. And I, I have learned, I still learn so much every day, from getting the opportunity to your point, having a seat at the table. You know, I went through my year-end review with her yesterday, actually, over my, over the last year, and really thinking about where I want to grow next, as a leader, as I think about, you know, 2024 and beyond. And the couple of opportunities I'm working on, one of the things is, you know, being able to report to her directly, is one of my top asks, because, you know, you're able to learn and watch and listen and see and even see her growth as a leader firsthand, has really helped me in my career and my journey.

**Lisa Nichols** 26:36

She is just, I told you and a sidebar conversation that very shortly after Bhavani came on board, I was able to sit with her in her office. And I was just blown away, blown away by her. And I have had the opportunity to sit on some panels

and have her do some keynotes. She's been a Something Extra podcast guests, but I cannot imagine, Jen, the opportunity that you've had to really work directly with her. We've got so much more to talk about. I've got I've got scads and scads of notes here, but we do need to take a quick break and we'll be right back with Jen on this Something Extra podcast.

**AD** 27:15

Hey there, in a challenging business climate like this, savvy leaders look to technology to find an edge. This can mean the difference between staying ahead of the curve or playing catch up. It's time to collaborate with the highly skilled experts at Technology Partners, our team of technologists draws upon decades of experience for your project, with each bringing a passion for solving problems, and a track record of success. How can we help you overcome your biggest technology challenges? Visit [technologypartners.net](http://technologypartners.net) to book a free consultation with one of our leaders.

**Lisa Nichols** 27:45

So welcome back everyone to the Something Extra podcast with my friend Jen. So, Jen, today you are the Senior Director of data analytics and transformation at Ameren. I'd love for you to tell me where are you seeing data and analytics having the biggest impact in the utility industry? And then specifically at Ameren?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 28:08

Yeah, of course. So, we really think about how we can transform customer, the customer experience, the coworker experience, and then the grid in our operations. So, we start with customer, which is at the center of everything that we do, we are using data and analytics to improve the customer experience by, for example, helping customers understand what's driving their energy usage at a more disaggregated level.

So, you can log into your account, you can pull it up and see is it your water heater? Or is it you know, other appliances? Is it the lights are always left on compared to you know, peers like you. And then you know, month over month, how is your, is your usage tracking. So that's helping our customers to get better at becoming more energy efficient, which is good for the environment, as well as you know, helping to have positive impacts on their bills. So that's one thing we're looking at and have enabled on the customer side.

We're also you know, considering how does the customer experience an outage and how can we improve that journey for them from the time that they are out of power? Can we use data and analytics to get better information around when they might have their power restored. And you know, which is helpful for our customers especially you think about some of our CNI customers when they're out of power there's a significant impact on operations. On the on the on the coworker side, you know one of the things that we are focused on is continuing to improve our safety culture and how can we use data and analytics to ensure that we are making the most safe crews that we can that we understand what you know attributes are you know, actually correlated to driving more unsafe acts you know, is it, the amount of hours you've worked or the type of job or and that can inform better training as well as better planning for our crews. So that's one thing done on the coworker side. You know, hot topic at Ameren.

And also on the grid side, you know, asset health analytics is really important because it helps to drive again, affordability and, you know, efficiency in our operations. We think about one of the use cases that we have in place uses drone imagery to see on our wood poles where we have woodpecker holes, and you know, based on that model, we can say, okay, you know, the criticality of maintaining or replacing that pole based on how many and where on the pole, those holes are, you know, so really improving efficiency of operations, improving reliability of our system through the use of data and analytics as well. All of those are key focus areas for us.

**Lisa Nichols** 30:52

Yeah, if you have any tips on keeping the woodpeckers off those polls, let me know. We have a barn, a Cedar barn and they wreak havoc, I mean, huge holes, you know, just the... yeah. So, if you've got some, some intel on that, I will take it. But Jen, in a *Wall Street Journal* article that I read, you were quoted as saying "Business strategy should drive analytics efforts, not the other way around".

**Jen Wischnowsky** 31:20

Yes.

**Lisa Nichols** 31:21

Can you expound on that?

**Jen Wischnowsky 31:23**

Yeah, it's, um, you will be surprised at, you know, the amount of times where I hear, you know, we have technical, amazing technical teams that know all the data that we have, and they want to jump to solving that problem with the data in a technical way. And I have to like pause and step back and say, "Why are we going to solve that problem? What value is it going to drive the organization? Is that the right problem for us to solve?" And by doing that, we're actually developing better solutions. Because sometimes we shouldn't build a dashboard. For example, we should build something differently, just enter the tickets into the work management system instead of a dashboard that tells you what to work on. So, understanding the business problem, it has been a big maturity for us in terms of how we prioritize our work, and using a values based prioritization to drive where we focus our data and analytics efforts.

**Lisa Nichols 32:17**

So good. Let me ask you this. How do you personally because things are rapidly changing, that's one thing we can count on, right, Jen? Is just the pace of change. How do you personally stay current? I know that you oversee an Innovation Center at U of I. I'm sure it's beneficial both ways for you, I mean, what you can bring to that, and then what you get from that. And also, I bet it's a good talent pipeline for you guys, I would imagine. But, you know, what are the some of the ways that you feel like that you're staying current?

**Jen Wischnowsky 32:54**

I mean, that is a good example is listening to the coworkers that we have around us, there's no one better than, you know, the people at the intern level at our innovation center to tell us what, you know, our future coworkers are going to expect the workplace to be like and what type of work they want to work on. And what our peers, you know, the other peers in that innovation space and research park at University of Illinois are Amazon, right and, and these other to Yahoo, and these other types of companies, and what we can learn from them outside of our industry and how they're innovating. So listening is, is a great way to learn and stay current. I also, I do read, or read a number of articles. I just finished *CEO Excellence*, which is more about me learning how to become a better leader, leadership skill standpoint, but it was a phenomenal book. So I do read, I read articles, I read books, I listen to podcasts.

**Lisa Nichols 33:50**

Especially Something Extra.

**Jen Wischnowsky 33:52**

Especially Something Extra. And, and then, and then of course, there's formal training programs that I think are important. And every year I do try to make sure that myself and my leaders have an opportunity to grow through formal training programs like the TechLX program, for example.

**Lisa Nichols 34:12**

Yes, I would love, well, thank you. That was a natural segue because I, you did go through I think you were one of the first cohorts to go through TechLX. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about that experience? What it was like for you?

**Jen Wischnowsky 34:26**

Yeah, I really enjoyed several aspects of it. You know, one was this focus on teaching technical leaders how to think from a business standpoint. And it's so important as I mentioned, even on the data analytics side. Well, you see it really across you know, the technical organization and digital where we focused on, we can solve that problem with technology. But being able to understand why you're solving that problem and then marketing yourself as to why you should solve that problem, were all good lessons learned through TechLX.

I've also enjoyed the ability to work together in a small team to, you know, address a real problem and come up with, you know, a solution ourselves as well as you know, there's business case aspects where we got to study a business case and report out on that.

And finally, the mentorship, you know, just having exposure to some of the very top technical technology leaders in the St. Louis area, is something that you would not get outside of that program. And just a great opportunity to learn from how other leaders at, you know, organizations think. I, my mentor was actually the CIO at Edward Jones. And just learning from him and thinking about how he thinks about his, you know, three year, five year roadmap and how he prioritizes and works through similar challenges we have, as we're all trying to transform digitally. So, it was a great, yeah, all of those were fun aspects.



**Lisa Nichols** 36:02

I couldn't remember who your mentor was, but your mentor was Frank. Boy, you hit the jackpot. I mean, all of the mentors are wonderful. But wow, I mean, it's so amazing to be able to learn from the CIO at Edward Jones, right? Do you feel like that you've been able to take what you learned, Jen, and apply? I mean, do you have any anecdotal is of something specific that you were able to bring back to the organization apply immediately?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 36:34

Yeah, I mean, I think I think one of the key takeaways for me is remembering to communicate with what's in it for me, to the to the business, when we're working with them. It really is a partnership between technology and the business. And oftentimes, it's hard to communicate across that, you know, gap, even though you're working together, on trying to solve a problem. So, learning how to communicate it and articulate it in a way that doesn't lose the business and brings them along, I think is a really important trait for all technology leaders to take going forward.

**Lisa Nichols** 37:11

Well, let me ask you this. And I hadn't planned on asking you this. But what if, because you came from the accounting ranks, you came from the business ranks, did you have any fear and trepidation about going into that program when you didn't have as much technology? And what would you, maybe there's somebody out there that is in the same situation, Jen, what would you say to them?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 37:36

It's a great question. And I'm glad you asked it. Because when the first cohort came about, I was in the room because I was Bhavani, Chief of Staff, and we were trying to think about who from the digital organization should we send from Ameren? And somebody said, What about Jen? And I remember thinking, no, no, don't send me I'm brand new to digital, I'm in this new role, you know, at Ameren. And I'm, I'm, you know, I'm just trying to learn and, and so I definitely did have trepidation. And but I almost immediately was not worried, you know, after the first, you know, meeting and learning about the different backgrounds that many of the leaders have. And there are challenges that even if you come from the technical background, maybe you need the business background to be able to solve better. And so, I think both sides, I think you build both through the program, and that's what's really important going forward is, is the growth of techno functional leaders. You know, we talked so much about the business and digital. And when I think about the future, I really don't think there's going to be a difference. There's going to be technical leaders across the organization, you're going to need to understand the business. And you're going to need to understand how technology can be used to solve those business problems.

**Lisa Nichols** 38:59

Yeah, great answer, great answer. Well want to ask you this, in 2020, you won the Public Utilities Fortnightly 40, under 40, Jen, congratulations! That is awesome. Can you tell us a little bit more about that award? I think that there were a couple, you know, I don't know how many winners in total. But you were highlighted and what an honor.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 39:23

It was, it was a great honor. So, there was 40, 40 that they selected under 40. Across the country, of course, across all, you know different power utility type companies. And it's funny because you know, you have these milestones as you get older, right? And you think to yourself, I want to achieve this by that time. And this by that time, and I knew I was turning 40 soon and I'd always looked at those 40 under 40 awards, you know, and I thought man, I would love to love to be able to celebrate what I've achieved in that 20 year period in my career, you know, and then look to the next one year period, which would probably be close towards the end right of my career. So, it was a great opportunity to be able to celebrate, you know, the hard work that I've put in. And my teams have put in and being able to have that exposure. So I was, I was proud. And I think it's good to be proud of when you win awards like that.

**Lisa Nichols** 40:27

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Is there anything? Knowing what you know, now, is there anything that you would tell your younger self?

**Jen Wischnowsky** 40:37

Oh, yes, so many things, right?

**Lisa Nichols** 40:41

So many things, how much time do we have, right?

**Jen Wischnowsky 40:42**

I would say, one for me that I did not learn until probably the last five years in my career, I would say was find your why. I am a big Simon Sinek fan. And, you know, understanding why you're doing what you're doing the whole outlook and perspective. And can fuel that passion, you know, in a way that those day-to-day challenges don't seem like challenges anymore. So, for me, you know, I lived in New York, which is a fabulous city, I love the energy, I love the people I miss that. And I lived in Chicago. But my why was growing in St. Louis. I love this community. And I want to grow St. Louis continue to grow St. Louis into a world class, you know, community and make the lives of the people that live here even better. And so, when I realized that, I knew that I'm working at a company that is a steward to this community. And so, working at Ameren, and I have a direct impact on the ability to achieve my why And so growing Ameren also helps grow St. Louis. And so, I do think it's really important to find your why and come back to that as you are working through because we're all going to have challenges on the day to day in our jobs.

**Lisa Nichols 42:13**

Yeah, and there's going to be days where it's not fun or days where you do kind of lose, somebody recently said, your juice. And so going back to the why of why you're doing it will help propel you right, I believe. So, I love that. I love that. So, Jen, you have a really big role. You have a big role at Ameren. You're married to John, you have four children. I'm actually looking at a beautiful wall of our work by your children, JP, Nolan, Scott, and Genevieve. Tell me a little bit about self-care, you know, what are the things that you do to take care of yourself so that you're the best version of you for all those people who are depending on you.

**Jen Wischnowsky 43:03**

It's so important to take time for yourself, isn't it. And as a working mom, it can be a challenge from just from a time management standpoint, it can be a challenge. You can have that guilt, right, where you feel like I'm not at work, so I should be with my kids, which means you're not necessarily giving yourself self-care time. And so, for me, I try to I work out two to three times a week. I have a studio that I go to that I love, don't take your phone in, you know, in, it's just for 60 minutes, they put the 60 minutes on the clock, and it ticks down. And for those 60 minutes, it's just for me. And if I can do that, you know, twice a week, I fuel myself back up, I feel better. I'm a better mom, I'm a better leader at work. So that's one thing I do prioritize. I love spending time with my children on the weekend, watching them do sports, that's another thing that helps fuel me. And then of course, my husband and I try every once in a while, to just sit down together.

**Lisa Nichols 44:11**

Right. A date hour or a date 30 minutes, something like that, right?

**Jen Wischnowsky 44:16**

Absolutely. It's often the date inside the house type thing, but that's just as good in my opinion because it's about the quality of time, so..

**Lisa Nichols 44:26**

Absolutely. Well and, and you've already said it but you're a reader. You listen to podcasts that helps probably fuel you and energize you. So...

**Jen Wischnowsky 44:35**

For sure one of the big things I did during COVID, because I was no longer commuting in the morning I would put on my computer was you know getting ready like TED Talks. Right? And I would even try to do a little workout on the side while my TED Talk was playing. And I learned you know, I am, here I am getting to learn from the top leaders. And same with like podcasting, same right and just being able to grow myself and recenter myself based on that knowledge is super helpful.

**Lisa Nichols 45:07**

I could not agree more. Well, Jen, this has been so much fun. Thank you so much for taking the time. But I have to ask you, this is called Something Extra. What do you believe is it something extra that every leader needs?

**Jen Wischnowsky 45:22**

Curiosity. So, I read an article recently, where curiosity is tied to being an avid learner, a problem solver, an active listener, having a growth mindset, you know, having stakeholder management skills, all of these things. And if think about it, you know, being curious is about being open minded, and learning from others. And I think it makes you a more empathetic leader, a more inclusive leader. And it gives you space to make your decisions better. And as somebody who likes to make decisions, it can, it can take a little extra effort to seek out, you know, opinions that are

different from your own. But it does make the decision better and it makes you a better leader. So, I think I think being curious and being open to changing your mind from that curiosity is what's very important.

**Lisa Nichols** 46:16

I love it. I love it. Well, and I have loved this time with you. So, thank you so much. I loved it. I can't wait for our listeners to hear from you, Jen. And I just wish you continued success. I know you are a bright star and you're just gonna keep shining brighter and brighter. I really do believe that. So, you've got a very bright future ahead of you.

**Jen Wischnowsky** 46:37

Thank you, Lisa. Thank you for the time I really enjoyed it.

**Announcer** 46:42

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