

Jane Lee
President and CEO
UNICON International, Inc.

Jane Lee co-founded UNICON International, Inc., in 1990 and ultimately assumed the role of president in 1993. Lee has grown the company to become one of the top IT consulting firms in central Ohio, with annual revenue of \$25 million.

UNICON offers a wide spectrum of IT-related services to clients nationwide in both the private and public sectors, ranging from project management, system analysis and design, and application development, to network infrastructure support and information risk management.

Lee ensures that her organization reaches out to the community and helps to support more than 12 nonprofit organizations through volunteering, assistance, and more.

You were born and raised in Taiwan. How did your upbringing influence who you are today? Growing up, I was always at the top of my class because my parents expected me not only to do well, but to be the best. I consider myself an overachiever; it makes me feel good to excel. The competition is very intense in Taiwan; you are up against many people to prove yourself. You have to pass a series of challenging tests to get into college. I was only accepted into my second-choice schools, and that bothered me immensely. I never had “second best” expectations of myself, so this was not acceptable to me. It was an awakening, though, and it taught me that there were more capable people out there and to be more realistic about myself. **You came to the U.S. for graduate school. What other realizations did you encounter during your transition?** Coming to the U.S. was a turning point in my life. It was a life-changing experience for me — a brand new world with completely different culture. Another defining moment in my life happened during graduate school: my father’s business was in trouble and he went bankrupt. When this happened, our family struggled financially, and I had to learn to take care of myself, especially in a whole other country. I had to learn all about personal financial management. It’s interesting, because again, looking back, I realize there was purpose in that happening. The bankruptcy brought my family closer, and gave all of us a more refined perspective on life. I learned to be more financially conscious and to accept bad with the good. **How did all of these lessons help you professionally?** I learned to work hard, to bear a good heart, and then trust the rest to the higher power above me. When I graduated, I took a position at AT&T Bell Labs. This job transformed me from a submissive woman to an assertive professional. It taught me that it took more than doing my job and being technically excellent to be successful in corporate America. Communication, organization, and leadership skills are equally important. I also co-founded Women at AT&T (WATT). During my presidency of WATT, I further facilitated a forum consisting of presidents from all AA groups in Bell Labs to share common concerns and to strengthen cross-group relationships. It was very important to me that a forum was created to help give women the courage to use their voice. I didn’t want others going through what I had gone through. **What challenges have you faced with your own company?** UNICON was founded on the basis of “partnership for success.” As an immigrant, I was without any social networks, and due to very limited funding, we struggled through business development and cash flow management during our early years, like most startup companies. Through our persistent focus on offering services with the highest value possible, we grew to become one of the top 10 IT consulting firms in the central Ohio area. After the dot-com bust, we lost a lot of business. This cost my company a lot, but we used this time to keep our people and develop new skills with better technology. We made them even more resourceful than ever and were ready to go when things picked up. It was proof that good things can and will happen during challenging times. Again, I found purpose in this moment. **How would you describe yourself as a leader?** I’m a people person, so when it comes to choices, my style varies. My style depends on the matter and the situation. I make sure I surround myself with people I can depend on; that helps me get my job done. I’ll give you the framework and then I’ll set a goal; it’s up to you to achieve. I think it all goes back to the expectations I was given early on in life, only this time around, I let people figure out their own style. **What gives you energy?** Knowing that I’m doing something meaningful gives me great energy. I certainly have my days, but every day, I try to remind myself to work hard and do the right thing. **What continues to inspire you?** I believe there is a reason I’m here in Columbus, Ohio. It’s a very conducive environment for doing business. Also, I’ve been given the opportunity to go through what I have been through in my life, and I am still figuring out what that is. **What’s next for you?** A lot of traveling! I’m going global with my business. We now have an office in Taiwan, and I want to be able to give more options to my clients. **What advice do you have for professional women?** Define your value proposition: what do you bring to the table? Find out what that is and run with it. And always be sincere in your approach with anything that you do.

