

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with grey hair and a goatee, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred office interior with large windows.

redswan  
PARTNERS

**Rick Baek**  
Business Manager  
SGS Australia

# SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

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IN THE TIC INDUSTRY

# Rick Baek

BUSINESS MANAGER – AUSTRALIA AND PNG  
SGS AUSTRALIA

## CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW YOU GOT STARTED IN THE TIC SECTOR?

I have been in the inspection business since 2008, and before that, I was in IT for 20 years. In 2019 and 2020, I was a manager at a large TIC company, and I have now been with SGS Australia for five months.

I grew up in Denmark, where my father was an electrician, and I also began by working as an electrician. As a young man, I visited Australia, and there met an Austrian girl. Around this time, unemployment was very high in Denmark, so I followed her to Austria. There, I got into electronics, and then into computers, after which I worked in IT for 20 years. For the next ten years, I was in high-end IT and I learned the “games of large companies” here, Bank Austria being one. It allowed me to develop longer-term views of what’s happening, corporate meetings, strategy development, etc.

A meaningful project during this time was Y2K and the Euro conversion, for which I was the Project Manager. The challenge was that 700 million bank accounts were switched off in August 2002 for the conversion from local European currencies to the Euro, so if it went wrong, it would be terrible news. Thankfully, it went smoothly. During this time, I was on call 24/7 and after that I felt done with IT.

I moved the whole family to Australia, and a year later, I had my own Computer Company there, which I ran successfully for ten years. It was based at Noosa Heads and had ten employees. I sold the Company in 2011 and then got into inspection full-time.



***THIS SUCCESS COMES FROM WORKING WITHIN AND KNOWING THE INDUSTRY, WORKING WITH PEOPLE, MAKING CONNECTIONS, AND REFERRING OTHERS WHEN I CANNOT HELP THEM.***





## **ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE CUSTOMER NEEDS TO BE SERVED**

So first, on the tools, then corporate life, and then back on the tools! I realised, though, that I would like to oversee planning. When Covid hit, I lost my job on the tools and coincidentally got a call from another large TIC company... I was a Branch Manager again in a TIC company in Australia, where I took the Queensland branch from \$2500 per month to \$120,000 per month within 6 months. This success comes from working in and knowing the industry, working with people, making connections, and referring others where I cannot help them, even when there is no personal benefit. The customer remembers this approach and will come back to me later.

Bronte Gale from SGS Australia called in December 2023 and asked if I wanted to return to the office for what sounded like an exciting role. Since joining SGS, we have doubled the business in 5 months, executed some exciting projects and are working on more. We will also exhibit at every good industry exhibition in the next six months.

I have always considered myself to be a “service assistant” – it doesn’t matter who you are or what job you are doing, you must always remember that the customer needs to be served.

### **CAN YOU SHARE WITH US A SPECIFIC PROJECT OR ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF AND WHY?**

SGS Australia is currently implementing digital reporting for our inspection activities to improve speed and quality and reduce paper waste for our worksheets.

This whole project, from conception to going live, took three weeks.

In this example, I was the Project Manager on a

project with a customer who had a very repetitive inspection routine. It involved completing a form each time, and they completed 100s of these yearly.

Coming in with an IT background (and being “very lazy”), I thought there must be an easier way to do this.

SGS has a digital service, so we sent the customer’s form to a digital platform, which digitised it. The reengineering process took a week to generate a draft, but they had a finished product within three weeks. The benefits: before, you did a classic inspection—which was a multi-aspect process—and most of the inspectors could only do 8-10 per week. I tried a new inexperienced inspector on the new process, and he was able to do 33 a week! The App I developed also allowed the report part to be fully automated.

Next I was thought about how other standard processes (like travel bookings) are so automated, so why not apply this thinking to inspection processes?

We are now going to use this methodology to automate another two processes. This idea (the skeleton of it) will also be used in China so SGS can automate a range of different processes, improving business efficiency and customer satisfaction, using this same attitude (and agnostic to a particular tool). It is changing your mindset that is the key.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST FACTOR AFFECTING THE TIC INDUSTRY AT THE MOMENT?**

While technology is powering ahead in many areas of our lives, the TIC sector is slow in embracing the advantages that progress is offering. The challenge is to define the factors and investigate what solutions can be used to move forward.

The critical thing holding TIC companies back is a sense of “we can’t do that” or “but we have always done it this way”, i.e. a mindset of resistance to change. Someone cleverly said: “It’s not the big companies eating the small; it’s the fast companies eating the slow.” This is never truer than for the TIC industry in general.



### **CAN YOU SPEAK OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED IN YOUR CAREER AND HOW YOU OVERCAME THEM?**

Keeping the balance between work and family is a slippery slope that always needs monitoring and review, and I found it best to step away for a while to refocus on what is essential in life and how to achieve that balance.

A second digitising project example that is very challenging is a process a customer needs to do. Currently, they send an email saying what they think they want, and we send one back asking precisely what they are trying to achieve. This process goes back and forth to get the required information and clarity.

I had been thinking about the process of booking a cruise. When you make a booking, you look at all the various options available and select from a menu of services and options. Depending on your choice, they then ask you a few questions and ask you to upload relevant documents such as your passport, your COVID certificate, make payments, etc.

I am working on making a similar process for a TIC company, so my staff do not need to keep sending multiple emails back and forth to customers to get the project started and completed. Instead, customers are directed to a page that asks them which region the project is in and what they need and then, when this is done, and after the inspection process is completed, they can also download their project-

specific certificate from the same place. i.e. If selling to the EU, then get EU-compliant certificates.

To achieve this will be a more significant challenge, but one that will pay off in client value added client loyalty, and a competitive advantage, with profit increase.

### **WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND TEAM MANAGEMENT?**

I have been mentored throughout my career, and whilst I may not have understood the benefits I was given at the time, I do now. I try to accept that the people I mentor now may just see it the same way as I did when I was young.

Patience, understanding, and guidance are the keys to transferring skills, and then there is the willingness to let go and let young people run with a few projects.

### **HOW DO YOU PRIORITIZE AND MANAGE YOUR WORKLOAD TO ENSURE SUCCESS?**

Assess what I need to do and what can be delegated, and then delegate as much as possible. Keep yourself to your job, find people who know theirs and let them do their jobs.

### **HOW DO YOU SPEND TIME OUTSIDE OF WORK?**

I spend time with family, walk my two small dogs, and have an unhealthy relationship with my TV.

### **IN 3 WORDS ONLY - WHAT IS THE SECRET TO YOUR SUCCESS?**

**NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE**

(said my teacher to me in trade school)