

**Opportunities to work overseas are increasing rapidly as the global search for talent rises.**

**Carole Goldsmith speaks with a number of seasoned professionals about trends in the international talent marketplace and their experiences working overseas**

Asian conglomerate, Jardine Matheson Limited (Jardines) employs 239,000 employees globally. Its diverse group of businesses includes engineering, construction, transport services, motor trading, property, retailing, restaurants, hotels, financial services and insurance broking.

Twelve and a half years ago, Geoffrey Brown and his wife, left the sunny shores of Brisbane, to travel to Hong Kong (HK), where he had accepted a position as assistant treasurer at Jardines Corporate Treasury.

After ten years working in accounting and finance at Mount Isa Mines in Brisbane and completing an MBA, Brown was ready for international challenges. He was approached by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and recruited to join Jardines. The recruitment process took four months and included interviews with the country chairman of Jardines Australia and Jardines' group finance director in Hong Kong.

"Jardines is very good at moving people on assignment from country to country," Brown says. "They flew us to HK and transported our furniture and possessions there. Our housing in HK is included in my package. In 2000 we were also transported back to Sydney with our children and housed when I was Colliers Jardines' regional group finance director in Sydney for two years."

Now Brown is finance director of Hongkong Land, one of Jardines major listed companies. This is his fifth position at Jardines, and he travels extensively across Asia as part of his job. "One of the many benefits of working for a conglomerate like Jardines is the opportunity to change jobs and areas of work," he says.

### **Recruiting international talent**

Ritchie Bent, group head of human resources at Jardines, says: "We are very active in recruiting international talent, but because we are such a large organisation, with 239,000 employees, we have a huge internal talent pool which we can draw from," he says.

"At holding company level, in 2007, we are currently focusing on 211 key position holders, identified during our annual HR planning process conducted from September to February, where the findings are presented to the chairman."

These key position holders are drawn essentially from a pool comprised of the chief executives, the two levels beneath this position, the finance stream, the HR stream, and identified 'high-flyers'. In some cases they will be the same people.

"Of this group of 211, around 50 per cent are transferable around the group; that is to say, their skills can be deployed in different industries. More than 80 per cent of key senior positions are filled internally," Bent says.

"However, when we recruit for senior key positions, we will benchmark against the international market. To illustrate this, in the case of Geoff Brown's current role, finance director of Hongkong Land, we used one of the major search firms to identify

three external candidates who could do the job.”

The company identified three internal candidates, who were then compared and Geoff ultimately emerged as the favoured candidate. In the process, however, the firm identified a particularly good candidate who, while not suitable for the Hongkong Land job, was eminently suitable for another role and was subsequently hired.

Brown’s former position was taken by an internal candidate from the group audit function, with the audit role filled by someone from the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, and Mandarin identified someone from the open market, Bent says.

### **Developing and managing talent**

Brown was selected to participate in the company’s executive leadership development plan and found it very beneficial to his management and career progress. As a key component of this plan, CEOs of each of the group’s companies discuss the “promotability rating” of key managerial staff with their direct managers annually. They are then assessed and promoted if suitable for the position.

“I participated in the group’s general managers program in 1997, held at a UK management college. After that we worked on projects, applying the skills we had learnt to the businesses we were working in. The direct development initiative is another program I joined. Director-level people from Jardines’ businesses visit corporations globally and examine organisational change and their business operations. For example, we went to Ireland and the UK, visited BP and British Airways, and learnt from their CEOs and senior directors,” Brown says.

Jardines also offers reciprocal arrangements, where they welcome senior managers from other companies to speak with the CEOs of their different businesses.

### **Pros and cons of Hong Kong**

“I enjoy working with Jardines and across Asia. We love the diversity of culture here and HK is a very fast exciting and dynamic place to live,” Brown says.

“As an Australian living in HK, it is quite easy and close to return to Brisbane for the weekend when we get homesick or have a family celebration. Also, we have a house on the Sunshine Coast and we love spending holidays there.”

“A downside of living in HK is the pollution. One of the biggest challenges for HK to remain competitive, and continue to attract new international businesses and talent, is to clean up the environment and to drastically reduce the high air pollution levels.”

### **US and UK for Australian lawyer**

An Australian female lawyer, (who prefers to remain anonymous) recently returned to Australia after almost ten years working both in New York and London. She is now employed as a solicitor in advocacy and practice at the Law Institute of Victoria in Melbourne.

Following the completion of a master of laws degree at New York University, she worked as a lawyer for two years in a large New York law firm that employed around 400 people. She then moved to London to start a new position as a staff lawyer for a non-government organisation (NGO) that had around 15 employees. Three years later she was promoted to acting director.

“I was paid market rate as a US attorney and the salary at the time was higher than I would have earned in Australia. My experience of working for an Australian law firm for over two years assisted me to get the New York job.”

She loved working in New York and says the local people, including work colleagues, were very friendly and helpful. “I worked together with highly qualified law professionals and they were very client and business focused. As a young woman, I was fully respected for what I could do and I really thrived in that environment”.

The NY law firm also encouraged pro bono work. During her New York posting, she undertook pro bono work for asylum seekers and for an organisation that helped abused women.

“I went to London to take up the opportunity to work on international environment and human rights law and policy in the not-for-profit sector. These are areas of great concern for me. The salary was lower than for the NY job, however, the work was very rewarding,” she says.

### **Australian lawyers sought after**

“I know that Australian lawyers are highly regarded in the USA and UK, and are actively sought by law firms there,” says the lawyer.

She says the only negatives of working internationally are being away from your family. “Living and working internationally opens your eyes to all sorts of opportunities and new ways of living. This enhances your understanding of people and of the world.”

### **Expats over compensated?**

Thirty-eight per cent of companies believe that international assignees are over compensated; according to KPMG’s 2006 Global Assignment Policy and Practices, Tax survey. Furthermore, 48 per cent of organisations feel that too much time is spent administering assignees; while there was a 54 per cent increase in short term assignments compared to last year, said Achim Mossmann, national director, global mobility advisory services, KPMG International Executive Services. At least 900 organisations have participated in some of the surveys since its inception eight years ago.

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