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Chris Black, Managing Director, Regroup Consulting

In this issue of The Voice, we profile a dynamic woman who has developed a career within a wide variety of cultures and personalities with over 16 years working experience in Japan, 2 years in Rarotonga, the Cook Islands and close to two years in Singapore.



Name: Chris Black

Nationality: New Zealander

What is your current occupation?

Managing Director of Regroup Consulting Pte Ltd, specialising in Executive Coaching, Career Coaching, Small Business Coaching, Life Coaching, Motivation and Self-Esteem.

How did your career evolve to where it is right now?

In 1982 I started my corporate career in Japan as the Executive Assistant to the Japanese President of Tohmatsu Awoki Kansa Hojin (today, known as Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu). Part of my role was to act as buffer and communicator between Tokyo and the global offices. The Japanese President was insightful enough to know that he held only a part of the jigsaw in making the global merger work. I subsequently worked for three other quality global corporates in Japan (Boston Scientific, Tupperware, and R.J. Reynolds) in Office Managerial positions. In 1990 I then returned to New Zealand and established a boutique recruitment company specialising in Personal/Executive Assistant appointments to CEO/M.D.s and direct report level only. This was a narrow market and was pioneering for the time. This experience was subsequently recognised by ABeam Consulting, Japan (previously Deloitte Tohmatsu Consulting). They were bringing on board expats from the U.S., many of whom would require bilingual and bicultural PA/E.A.s. My initial secondment was for three months. A year later, ABeam invited me back to establish mid-career hiring and handle the global Partnership on-boarding process. At that time I was also the HR Manager, Employee Relations for Multi-nationals.

My expertise in coaching thus evolved as a by-product of my early corporate experience and exposure throughout the years, especially in the area of multi-cultural human relations.

Describe a significant turning point in your career

Back in 1982 I was cross-posted to the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo after a two year stint with the NZ High Commission in the Cook Islands. I found my new Tokyo secondment lacking in excitement and certainly opportunity. Indeed, in the mid-70s Tokyo had been my first secondment and I had grown so much with the Cook Islands role – which was incredibly diverse and hands-on. So after five weeks in Tokyo, I resigned from the Embassy and joined the corporate world. I fell in love with the corporate environment and have never looked back! I found it to be a lot more real, tangible and rewarding – frustrating and challenging.

Throughout your career, what experience did you find most valuable to your current role as a coach?

There were two. Firstly establishing PA Search in Wellington gave me an invaluable insight into people – regardless of their status in a western culture. Secondly, my experience as an HR Manager in ABeam Consulting. When I was seconded in 1998 the company had 450 staff and was pulling itself into the 'global' arena; when I left in 2003, the staff numbered over 1,700 and was a broadly diverse cultural mix. (For the record this increase was not due to myself, I played a very humble role in increasing the numbers, however I am mindful of my contribution to ABeam). I was continually challenged with a wonderful cross-section and range of issues on a daily basis – from briefing Partner candidates about the consulting and company culture, managing external recruiters at head-hunting level, to working closely with a new consultant who was homesick, or indeed Japanese staff who preferred to confide in me in English.

Key lessons you learned in your profession

First, I'm a firm believer you've got to have a sense of humor – an ability to laugh at yourself! Sometimes that's all you live with when things get tough. It's really important not to take yourself too seriously. Mind you, walking the talk is not always as easy. The required basics for a position – academic, skillset, experience – they are a given; the real challenge is the chemistry mix/culture mix that fine-tunes the running of a business. So much hinges on these essentials, but are not always necessarily appreciated.

Second, to be successful in one's career there needs to be a good blend of 'book-smarts' and 'street-smarts'. I've been privileged to work with, and meet very successful and intelligent individuals at one level, while at another level they struggle with life and relationships on a daily basis.

Third, I definitely know who I am and what I am. Being true to myself is essential. If you can't have a good relationship with yourself, how can you have a good relationship with others? Having said that, I am mindful that I need continue to strive to do better each day. Reality dictates some days are better than others!

Successful people know who they are and what they are. They 're content within their own skin.

To find out more about Chris Black and Regroup Consulting visit



Interviewed by: Rona Puntawe, Editor, The Voice