



## Think, and Act, Globally

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I read a story about a pottery class where half the students were graded on quantity and the other half on quality. The quality students aimed for one perfect pot by the end of the class; the quantity students were graded on the number of pots they made regardless of quality. It came as a surprise that the students who aimed for quantity ended up with better quality pots. This was because they weren't afraid to try, fail, experiment, learn, and try again.

These ideals - 'more is better,' and 'trying, failing, and learning' - also apply to gaining international experience and a broad understanding of the world.

I grew up as an immigrant in America, and learned to speak English from Bugs Bunny cartoons (a cartoon that is produced by the same studio I now work for). Having experienced a number of different cultures before finally arriving in the States, I always knew I wanted to do international work. So, even though it wasn't part of some grand plan, I followed that direction.

I graduated from UCLA Law School in mid-1990, when the economy was just recovering from a downturn. In those days, when you apply to law school and, afterwards, graduate from law school, "you get what you get, and you don't get upset," to quote a nursery school mantra. I enjoyed law school for the most part; I continue to remain close to the school, serving as a board member of its alumni association. And to this day I seek the advice and wise counsel of the first and only 'big firm' partner for whom I worked.

Not having any set idea about what being a lawyer means, I embarked upon the "usual" path - I got accepted to the law review editorial board, published articles, clerked for a federal judge, worked at a NYC law firm, published more articles and, my annual billable-hour quota permitting, volunteered for *pro bono* projects.

But from there I took a risk and my path diverged from that of the "typical" associate.

As I started to develop a career, I was very fortunate to have another wise mentor, the late U.S. District Court Judge Linda McLaughlin, who took an interest in helping me develop a broad understanding of the law, of the world, and of myself.

Knowing that my professional interest was international work, the Judge encouraged me to tackle assignments that spanned the range of legal disciplines, from cross-border trademark disputes to multinational environmental protection. As a young, impressionable lawyer, this experience deeply influenced the way I went about acquiring the experiences that later would help me excel.

Judge "McL" (as the clerks fondly referred to our boss, our mentor) was an extraordinary professional who led an extraordinary life. She, too, was a pioneer, having been one of the earlier female graduates of the law school at the University of California, Berkeley. Her ability to overcome significant personal and professional challenges was what inspired me to clerk for Judge McL.

What I learned from the Judge extended far beyond the courtroom. I went abroad at a relatively early stage in my career. Not only did I go "in-house," I also joined a foreign company whose management and employees consisted, by and large, of non-English speaking engineers, located in a rural area in a country relatively foreign to me.

Undaunted, I resolved to learn as much as I could about my chosen field - the consumer electronics and consumer products business in Asia - by working closely with people who had more than twenty years of experience in the field. I ended up learning a lot more about this field than I ever could have had I neither lived nor worked in Asia.

When offered an expatriate assignment overseas, some executives jump at the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder, to expand their knowledge of the corporate culture, or generally to pursue their professional goals.

I took the practical view – seeing it as a first-hand opportunity to learn about our world. Besides, there was no other opportunity that offered me the same excitement and challenge of working in an environment in which I was a fish out of water. I wanted to do something extraordinarily different; and I got my wish. So I began to learn Japanese for fun. I traveled extensively, both within Asia and across the Pacific. At times, I was called away on assignments that required leaving home weeks if not months at a time. Hotel rooms became home; hotel lobbies became the office.

Part of my learning was the job that I accomplished for my employer; another part is that I was there personally.

As global business expands and markets integrate, international lawyers and businessmen are asked to become even more mobile, on-call. One reason that companies that manufacture mobile devices do so well is that there is a demand for services that enable people constantly to stay in touch even as they traverse the globe. The need to stay in touch can become so taxing that lawyers would stay up until the early morning to trade emails with clients in another time zone.

My advice to international travelers is to carry as little as possible (take the Blackberry, if you must), and to talk and to listen to the local people as much as you can. Even in business, the more you understand a place, its culture and its people, the more equipped you are at closing deals. Instead of giving souvenirs, try to give the gift of stories from your own culture. This allows you to take part in helping others, too, to see things from a different perspective.

After spending almost a decade of my professional life in Japan and Asia, I was invigorated with a new appreciation for culture, for family, for clients, and for colleagues. Living abroad also introduced me to new contacts, new communities, and new friends. During the years I spent living and working abroad, I contributed to helping a lot of companies open doors to new markets. The door that I was most fortunate to open turned out to be my own: the ability to think, and act, globally.