



A WORD FROM RELOCATION SPECIALISTS

Welcome to our end of year edition of Relocation Topics for 2008. This year seems to have passed even quicker than the last. Relocation Specialists and Crossing Cultures have been exceptionally busy, helping families from many different cultural backgrounds and experiences find new homes, get settled, and adjust to their new cultural environment.

This newsletter covers a variety of topics that I am sure you will enjoy:

First, Julie Hanley the principal in Sydney has submitted a very topical article on rent rage, its causes, and how relocation consultants can help avoid the stress of finding a rental property.

Secondly, Monita Mascitti-Meuter gives an overview of two theories on organisational culture, and finally, Barb Bland, one of our new cultural trainers in Perth writes about her experience and culture shock moving from Melbourne to Perth: a story that shows she has a lot of grit!

As always we welcome your feedback and comments.

Happy Reading, and a wonderful festive season to all!

Anita Fernandes

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FEATURES

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Do you work in a *cross cultural* or *virtual* team?

If so, then talk to us about a new program we offer to increase the effectiveness and productivity of that team.

Call Anita Fernandes or your local office to discuss.

Quote of the month

By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death.

Octavio Paz

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Rent Rage: Fact or Fiction?



There are many reports in the newspaper about thousands of applicants storming overpriced accommodation every Saturday morning for 'open for inspections'. Whilst this is somewhat true, there is also a lot of 'media hype' surrounding these tales. So, while out in the field last week with a client, I spoke to a number of agents who confirmed these reports.

There are many factors determining this situation. As strange as it may seem, the property rental business is seasonal. There are certain times of the year when supply exceeds demand and there are price ranges and property types that contribute to this.

January/February are the critical times when everyone seems to be out and about looking for somewhere to live, and relocatees are moving over in the Northern winter to begin new jobs in the New Year. In Sydney in particular, with the start of the new school year, there is extreme pressure on



Written by
Julie Hanley,
Principal Sydney

houses on the North Shore and in the Hills District where the public schools are good. In the inner west and south city areas, the increased demand from university students during February and March puts another strain on the housing supply. With European and North American schools finishing their academic year in June/July we often see another squeeze on houses during August/September as families with younger children move to Australia during this time. Added to all this, the rise in interest rates have more people renting than ever before as owning a home has become unaffordable for a lot of people.

Houses do not move as quickly as apartments. The 2 bedroom apartment for \$400-\$500 per week is in great demand especially for couples and this is where the rent rage occurs. Interestingly enough, however, there are never enough houses in the \$700-850 range that have 3-4 bedrooms.

So why is a relocation consultant necessary?

It can take hours to contact agents to discover which of the properties advertised on the internet are

- Still available
- Suitable for the tenant – for instance families with young children generally need a bath rather than a shower. Tenants with pets require extra time to short list properties which will take a pet. (I would normally dedicate at least a day to this task so a person moving without a relocation consultant would either have to do this themselves which means taking a day out or else waste a lot of time at inspections where the application will never be approved.)

- Available to view at a private appointment at a time that is convenient to the relocatee and his/her family rather than in a large group of people for 10 minutes on a Saturday morning.

Most importantly, the relocation consultant can create a well planned itinerary for the day with a selection of the best properties available to meet the clients' needs. An internet search that throws up 80+ properties might, after extensive research, only yield 6-10 that are actually suitable. Also, local knowledge cannot be undervalued and all the tools such as Google Earth and Street search cannot possibly replace knowing the area and getting out and seeing the property.

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In addition, if a consultant has been working extensively in one area, the relationship that is built with the agents is invaluable for both getting suitable appointments and presenting the clients in the best possible light. Often agents will also advise a consultant of properties before they are posted on the internet. Agents like corporate clients as they are generally easier to deal with.

An independent Relocation Consultant is in a position to introduce the client to the agent and explain something of their circumstances. As most relocatees have not lived in Australia or NSW (in my case) previously, they have difficulty completing the application form. It is important that the agent has a sense of who they are and that they would be a good tenant. Not only is it often impossible to get to talk to the agent at a Saturday 10 minute opening, for some people from a different linguistic and cultural background it is also difficult to put their case forward to the agent in the same way that the Relocation Consultant can. In addition, all relocatees have been properly briefed on the supporting documentation required to put in an application so that they are ready to go when they find a property they like.

Finally, most Relocation Specialists consultants have completed the REI Property Practice Course, so are considered professionals, which means that the agents treat them

as a partner in this process, which can only be of benefit to the client. With immense uncertainty in the financial markets at the moment, there will continue to be a shortage of good rental properties and landlords will want more rent to cover their additional costs.

The value of a professional Relocation Specialist to the relocatee cannot be underestimated in terms of the smooth transition to life in a new environment. Employers know and understand that the sooner a relocatee especially the ones with families get settled the more productive they will be.

Julie Hanley

Organisational Culture: A cursory glance



Written by
Monita
Mascitti-Meuter,
Cultural Trainer,
Melbourne

Often when explaining the complexity of culture in a cross cultural training session, pressures of time cast the discussion of organisational culture to the side, as host and home culture take precedence. In truth, however, it warrants much more attention.

Ask yourself these questions: does your company see change as a challenge, how do the diverse groups communicate with each other, how is the relationship between upper management and middle management? And how do these values differ between your host and home national cultures?

So what is Organisational culture? It can be defined as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organisation and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization." [Charles W. L. Hill, and Gareth R. Jones, (2001) Strategic Management. Houghton Mifflin.] It is seen as distinct from corporate culture, which is a culture whose values, ideas etc. are seen to be things that can be imposed upon the organisation. Organisational culture just is.

Geert Hofstede's early work on how national culture affects the workplace was probably the most significant research in determining a way of understanding organisational culture per se. Although outdated, some of the parameters still ring true. His initial proposal to focus on four main cultural orientations (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism,

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masculinity/femininity) have proven to be invaluable in understanding how national cultures work, that work-related values are not universal and by extension what possible cross cultural interaction or potential conflict can be better managed by understanding the values involved.

Edgar Schein, on the other hand proposes that organisational culture is something that develops based on the way that an organisation has had to adapt itself and change in order to resolve problems. He divides organisational culture into three levels: firstly the aspects which can be seen (eg, facilities, offices etc); secondly the values of the company as they are expressed through mission statements, slogans etc; and lastly the basic underlying assumptions.

Already by casting a cursory glance at these two models I hope it becomes apparent that organisational culture is not something that can be taken for granted by those newly entering into a new position in a new country. Only when we make that effort to peel away the various layers of the onion we call culture will we get that little bit closer at bridging whatever gap there may exist between our national, individual, organisational or corporate culture. In our next newsletter I will look at a few more theories that have come to the fore more recently.

Monita Mascitti-Meuter



Sand in my Bones

Written by Barbara Bland,
Cultural trainer, Perth

Australia was booming. There were jobs aplenty. Just bite the bullet and move. But we wanted some security this time. My family wanted me back and I wanted to be back bringing with me my children and husband so that they could understand and be connected to a country that meant something to me. Preferably Melbourne (my hometown). Next in line- Eastern States.

Steve had some consulting work to tide him over while he got a job. "Easy" we thought. The job applications kept on going out and the interviews ended the same, no job offer or him not interested. Frustrating. And demoralising.

Then Steve came home smiling. A fantastic interview. The most amazing job in the world. I was

excited, he hadn't been this happy since before he had arrived in Melbourne. We sat down and talked. It truly was exciting- a marine job, taking samples in the oceans, diving, counting turtles, writing papers, travelling to remote areas. The 'Dream job'. He would be a fool to pass this one up. I was thinking "... okay ... it is Queensland ...people will visit us...a couple of hour's flight time...same time zone...I could poss..."

"It's based in Perth."

The party was over, it would mean starting over again. One more move or two? Did I have it in me?

"You'll love it...a chance to explore ... see new things ..."

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meet new people... new places." I had done that for the last twenty years having happily shifted all over the world for myself or for him. I didn't want to go. Melbourne isn't perfect but it had my family. I was angry and upset, I had asked only one thing, and he had switched sides.

This was his opportunity to develop a marine section in a large company. The offers in Melbourne were not as good. Tears and anger spewed forth from all of us, Steve could not fathom why we should be so upset. We had moved so often, what was one more move? Didn't we understand?

Unfortunately, we did understand but he wasn't going off without some good venting! We had to readjust our lives and move. No other choice. I needed to look for the silver lining instead of sitting under the storm cloud.

Desperate to start his job as a marine scientist he happily left me with closing up the house, packing and Christmas. We said our goodbyes but always in the back of my mind, I had "We can always go back to Melbourne."

And so it began after Christmas last year. Neither of us knew much about where we were going but that had never stopped us before. Read a lot, ask lots of questions, hope for the best, and be aware that things are not always going to be good for all of us. Unlike ex-pats or senior executives, we did not get much assistance with our move. We settled for safe.

We enrolled our three children (8, 6, and 4) in the local schools. As the outsider, I was once again forcing my way into the pack of mothers whether they liked it or not. I joined the committee of the Kindergarten, volunteered for most things at the school, and constantly had children over to play. It was exhausting. Sometimes I was getting somewhere. Sometimes I was getting nowhere. I wanted local friends not foreigners who leave all the time. Instead of a world opening up around me I felt the door being bolted and someone was trying to throw the key away.

I was in the downward spiral and my children were coming along with me, as they too could not fully understand these people and their ways. We talked glowingly of life back in idyllic Elwood amongst friends and family.

A foreign friend invited me to a gathering and as I was sitting with a group of mothers (all foreign at some stage) in the playground and one said, "You eventually get used to the sand." It struck me as odd and I scoffed to myself about it, "I would never get used to it!"

It was everywhere and I could never escape it. I cleaned up and five minutes later, it would be back. The sand, this place, was ruining my life and taking over my life.

Steve, meanwhile, was blissfully happy travelling, exploring new places. Meanwhile I was stuck in suburbia with people complaining about the lack of help and how much they had to pay for it.

I had few friends here and was miserable. We felt we tried so hard. Sometimes I would wish I looked obviously foreign, somehow, that might make them think I was interesting. Yet we have persevered and slowly begun to make new friendships at school, be invited to other people's houses, and adapt.

The other day there was sand in my house and it did not bother me so much. Sometimes I clean it up; sometimes I leave it for the next day. I don't care anymore. The house we bought provides security. And when the next move occurs, we will pack up and sell.

There is a lot about this place I don't like but flip the coin and I can see a lot of good. Work satisfies us both, our children are open-minded, adaptable, and friendly, and we have good friends.

Another pile of sand is walking through the door.

Barbara Bland

