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Independent Study & Mentorship

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Interview Assessment #2

Name of Professional: Ms. Chelsea Garza

Profession/ Title: Global Assignment Coordinator

Business/ Company Name: Cultural Awareness International

Date of Interview: October 19, 2017

Continuing my research in the field of International Business, I had the pleasure to interview Ms. Chelsea Garza, a Global Assignment Coordinator for Cultural Awareness International. Since I seek to understand more about the impact on the the lives of cross cultural employees who have to assimilate into the customs of a different country, I was able to significantly broaden my perspectives through my meeting with Ms. Garza. Cultural Awareness International is a business that provides destination services through different companies in the relocation industry. Given the increasing globalization of the economy, many businesses are constantly relocating their headquarters in order to maximize their budget and priority to their customers. As a result, these companies invest in relocation services that help with moving and settling in a family to a new city or even a country. At Cultural Awareness International, most of

the clients are primarily from different countries, so there is ample exposure to different countries.

As a Global Assignment Coordinator, Ms. Garza is responsible for managing the cases of different families. As a result, she never meets the clients, so different contractors and fieldworkers are employed to partake in the personal interaction with the families. Being someone who enjoys meeting people and being able to get firsthand interaction, I feel as if I would work best as fieldworker helping families. However, one interesting aspect of Ms. Garza's job is that she has the opportunity to deal with clients from all over the world: even though her office is situated in Dallas, she is able to coordinate the relocation of families from foreign countries to different cities, such as New York City or even Los Angeles.

Further interested in the direct impact made on clients, I inquired about the different services that Cultural Awareness International offers. Ms. Garza talked about how since her company is a third party service that companies hire for their employees, the services that she offers to her individual clients differs based on what the client's employer have agreed to. The primary package consists of helping foreign families open a bank account, get their social security card and driver's license, and manage departure obligations, such as cancelling different subscriptions and rent, etc. Another popular add-on service is a "looksie trip". A "looksie trip", as Ms. Garza described, is essentially a tour of the city that the employee is considering moving to so they can make an educated decision on whether or not they want to take up a job in a different city or country. As a result, a consultant meets the family and gives them an area tour that details the city life, schooling system, and any other important information that may be valuable to the client.

Some companies also choose to include cross cultural training for their relocating employees. Cultural Awareness International strongly recommends cross cultural training for international clients, because it covers even the most trivial matters that truly help the client feel comfortable. For example, Ms. Garza described how once, one of her clients from Australia was confused by the idea of tipping, and a consultant had to explain how it is a common practice to tip approximately 20% of the total price. This was surprising to me because even though Australia and the United States are quite similar, there are still subtle, yet important differences between them. Through the cross cultural training, clients are assigned to an individual trainer who carries out the "Living and Working in the USA" program in approximately one to two days. The time and place for the meeting are all decided at the convenience of the client. In fact, there are two options available to clients: pre-departure training or post-arrival training. Most people receive their training pre-departure so that they have an expected idea of what is to come. Furthermore, many families feel comfortable being able to communicate and learn about their new home in their native tongue. However, another factor that plays a role in when the training occurs is the availability of trainers. Since New York City has about four trainers available, it is often easier to do the cross-cultural training there than it would be to at a more remote location, such as Sweden. However, despite the numerous benefits, not many companies invest in this add-on, as they often have to stay within a certain budget.

During my previous interview with Mr. Jerome Del Porto, we talked about the lack of resources available to communicate and overcome the cultural barriers between different countries. However, after Ms. Garza explained the significance of the cross cultural training, it became evident that such programs do exist, but there is little emphasis on them in the market.

Perhaps through a more strategic marketing approach which opens cross-cultural training to also include business professionals who just travel often, this program can become more popular.

Over the years, as the Dallas/ Fort Worth has become home to a growing number of companies, including Toyota and Kimberly Clark, Ms. Garza noted how she has been able to see an increase in the number of people relocating to the area due to their job. Especially since many headquarters are relocating, there are often many group moves occurring, which often include many high-level employees and their families. As Ms. Garza helps such families settle into the city, she talked about how she noticed a rising trend in which many high-level employees were choosing to live in cities such as Frisco and Plano. As a result, using these trends, Ms. Garza often creates predictions about where the client might like to live and thus she instructs the consultants to start their search in such locations. Through this, it becomes apparent that Ms. Garza has ample liberty to make decisions regarding her individual clients. Since I enjoy having different responsibilities and making decisions, this aspect of Ms. Garza's job is quite appealing.

As we further conversed about the cultural barriers and the initial euphoria of relocating to a new country, I tied in some of my previous research and had the opportunity to discuss the expatriate adjustment lifecycle with Ms. Garza. The expatriate adjustment lifecycle describes the typical phases that each new expatriate undergoes which goes as follows: preparation, honeymoon, cultural shock, and adaptation. During the preparation phase, clients and their families generally have mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety. Ms. Garza added how during this phase, undergoing the cross cultural training is beneficial since it helps ease some of the primary apprehensions. Following the preparation period, comes the honeymoon period, where the exposure to a new culture is viewed through a rose-tinted glass, and every activity seems

exciting and exotic. Ms. Garza talked about how many clients undergoing this stage of the cycle often feel as if there is no need for any support from differed third party companies. However, upon entering the cultural shock phase, many clients feel depressed as they experience discomfort with their surroundings. As a result, Ms. Garza highlighted how many of the consultants and field workers try to create a trusting relationship with the clients so that upon entering this phase, they feel confident enough to reach out for additional support. However, as time passes by, clients begin to adapt to their surroundings.

Slightly shifting gears to converse about marketing, a subfield of business that I am interested in, I asked Ms. Garza to explain how Cultural Awareness International markets its services around the world. Since the company's primary target market is other companies who are seeking to relocate, the marketing approach for Cultural Awareness International is quite unlike traditional manners. Often times, the marketing director of the company attends different conventions, such as the Global Mobility Network, which occurred in Chicago this past year. At these conventions, relocation service companies and businesses interested in relocating attend in order to get an initial idea of the process. Furthermore, the marketing department has to do ample research and stay on top of current events in the news to see which companies are interested in relocating. Upon discovering such companies, the marketing director makes cold calls to these companies to tell them about the multitude of services that Cultural Awareness International offers.

Often times, many companies explicitly seek out relocation services and they will tell different companies, such a Cultural Awareness International, to email them a general plan and

quote. Using these approximations and after meeting with representatives, the company seeking relocation services makes a decision.

After understanding the ins and outs of Ms. Garza's job, I wanted to know more about her personal opinions regarding her career so that I could get different perspectives on International Business. For Ms. Garza, the best part about her job is the fact that she has the liberty to manage different clients, while still having the support of her co-workers. She enjoys that even though she works behind the scenes, she is able to help out families and be recognized by them for the work she does. She also likes that not everyday is the same, for many new and surprising scenarios come up everyday. In my previous interview with Mr. Del Porto, he had emphasized how a career in International Business leads to each day varying from the next, and this trend is becoming more apparent. Since I am someone who enjoys having a variability in my work day, this further confirms my desire to go into International Business.

As some words of parting advice, Ms. Garza advised that I learn to prioritize so that my time and organizational management are above par. She noted how her job requires her to complete many different tasks in a short period of time, and because of this, she has been able to learn good time management skills. Furthermore, Ms. Garza told me that I should intern for different companies so that I can learn more about my interests. Referring to her childhood, Ms. Garza talked about how she has initially wanted to work in the nonprofit sector, but by interning at different organizations, she was able to realize that was not something she was interested in.

Interviewing Ms. Garza was a great opportunity to learn an often overlooked portion of International Business: the relocation industry. By meeting with her, I was able to expand my

knowledge on the actual experiences of international employees. In the future, I hope to further broaden my knowledge on International Business through interviews and research.