



Women at Work in Hong Kong

AWARE IS DELIGHTED to launch a new series on people who work in Hong Kong. This could be in their own business, as a one-woman band, in a corporate environment or as a volunteer. We want to cover all sorts of activities and to understand how working in Hong Kong is different to or the same as other places where our members have worked. And most importantly we are also interested in hearing about all sorts of unpaid and volunteer roles.

This is not about selling a company or a product, but rather about sharing experiences with other members who may be trying to find jobs or who are inquisitive about a different side to living in Hong Kong.

We launch this series in April 2014 with very interesting pieces from Edith Terry, Sarah Sanesi and Caroline Basham. If you would like to contribute, please contact AWAre.org.hk. We look forward to hearing from many of you over the coming months.

Edith Terry

Managing Director, Cotton Tree Advisors

I came to Hong Kong as an expatriate hire in 2000, at the age of 40, after a varied career working as a foreign correspondent, in think tanks, and business in Washington, DC, Beijing, New York, Toronto, Tokyo, Honolulu, and Singapore. Within four years of landing, I set up my own consulting business. I provide research and advisory services across the range of my skill set, from interpreting East Asian economies and politics to public policy and media. My clients are largely in Hong Kong's large and diverse financial community, but I have also done projects with think tanks, the arts and design community, and companies outside Hong Kong but limited to Asian themes.

I was fluent in Putonghua and Japanese before moving to Hong Kong and now am an ardent, if not particularly apt, student of Cantonese.

In my business, despite attempts to scale up through partnerships with other professionals, I have remained a solo operation, and most of my clients have come through word of mouth. My skill set is somewhat unbalanced, limiting my ability to expand. At the same time, perhaps nowhere else in the world would I have had such an interesting set of clients and projects. Currently, I am working to set up a centre for bioethics at one of the major universities, which gets into issues ranging from biotechnology and genomics to the accelerated demographic transition in Hong Kong and across Asia. I give credit less to myself than to the dynamism of Hong Kong in having such an opportunity.

Sarah Sanesi

Director, Maid For You

Born and raised between Paris and New York, moving to Hong Kong was an amazing opportunity. When I moved here, my father kept repeating how much Hong Kong made him think of New York in the 1980's: people were living the "Asian Dream".

Like a lot of women, coming to Hong Kong meant giving up my job to follow my husband. He had had been offered a great job here and I was fine with being the one putting my career on hiatus.

At first I decided I would spend some time doing volunteer work, the AWA is such a great platform for that. I volunteered with organizations such as Helpers for Domestic Helpers, PathFinders and even chaired the Education & Scholarship program at the AWA for 2 years.

It was a golden opportunity to get to know more about Hong Kong and to meet many interesting people. But two years and one baby later, the urge to need to work again kicked in.

I started investigating the various options I had and quickly realized that creating your own business in Hong Kong is easier than in most places. I had a business idea and thought that if I didn't give it a try here, I may never get another chance. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, I felt confident that I could see my project through. And so I gave birth to Maid For You, a domestic helper agency for expats. The first year was probably one of the hardest years of my life. I felt like giving up more than once, dealing with staffing issues, real estate costs and building up my network of clients and especially helpers. But the flexibility of having your own business, finally building an amazing team and bringing a new service to Hong Kong gave me the adrenaline rush I was looking for.

Caroline Basham
 Director, Caroline B
 Personal Management

After 17 years in investment banking I was made redundant in 2008 as a result of the global financial crisis. Finding another banking job was not an option. Financial headhunting seemed a logical career move, but after a year, I realized that the industry wasn't for me. So, I began to think about starting a business myself. The question was what would suit me?



It may seem an obvious thing to say, but your business idea needs to be something that you are really well suited to. For example, I came close to selling Monaco yacht charters to Chinese customers, but I didn't feel confident enough to navigate the yacht broking world and no matter how good my French, I wasn't French.

Then, out of the blue, I volunteered to help a Hong Kong based US friend for a few weeks with some personal admin support. She needed another me because of a demanding job and extensive travel whilst renovating an apartment. This led me to start researching the personal management service sector. Importantly, the core competencies required played to my skill-set: customer service orientated, love of detail and task driven. And as a result Caroline B Personal Management was born.

The challenge is that people tend not to delegate because they don't feel confident their instructions will be carried out correctly, professionally and in their best interests. This is particularly the case in Hong Kong. So it is our job to build trust by delivering a professional service, day in, day out. To do this, I have hired and trained experienced local staff. I grow the business through word of mouth recommendation and our online presence.

At the end of the day, I like to think that we help our clients achieve a better work-life balance. I know when I was working very long hours in the financial sector, this service would have given me my weekends back. And I enjoy helping others to regain time that was previously lost to stressful or mundane chores.