

ORGANISER

Extraordinaire



CAROLINE BASHAM started her career in Hong Kong as an investment banker but after being made redundant in 2009 had to find a new niche for herself. She created the personal management service **Caroline B** after helping out a friend with some personal admin.

This unique service gives Caroline a chance to use her skills – she’s practical, detail-orientated, motivated by finding solutions to problems, and great at getting through a daily to-do list – while keeping Hong Kongers organised. We chatted with Caroline about what she offers and who she helps.

What is personal management?

The best way to describe personal management is like a concierge service, but much more personal and customised. We aren’t driven by a commercial model to sell other’s services or products – we’re independent, acting in the client’s best interests. Clients are often surprised at the range of things we can do, big and small. At one end, we can help navigate a client through the whole process of selecting the right international school, to visa and passport applications, to simply sorting and scanning the mail while they’re away.

What we do is often very "hands on" and the service is tailored to your needs, no matter how small. Just a few examples of things we do: running around Hong Kong fetching and carrying between storage centres, shops, homes and offices; managing home repairs; managing appointments and bookings; making travel arrangements; processing expenses and other book-keeping matters; helping manage domestic helpers, before, during and after signing a contract.

The archiving of documents and creation of digital photo libraries are also popular services, and we do a lot of work on home internet, Wi-Fi and audio-visual issues. More and more people are asking us about how to make all their digital devices work together, from smart TVs to smart phones. Our technical manager loves this sort of challenge!

A recent trend is enquiries from expats renting out their properties on a short-term basis through sites like Airbnb. We can help with some of the associated tasks when owners are not in Hong Kong.

How does it all work?

Our clients are either individuals or small businesses, and we work with them on a retainer basis. At any one time, we have between 12 and 15 active clients. With Caroline B, you access a close-knit team with five levels of staff with different skills and charge rates to match; we have an assistant, administrator, senior administrator, manager, tech manager and director. The manager is your daily point of contact who then delegates to more junior team members as far as practically possible. I keep close oversight of all accounts, check work and undertake some of the more complex tasks.

What are some of the more unusual jobs you've been asked to do?

We've done a lot of interesting things over the years, like shipping pedigree cats without the correct identity chips to London, creating typhoon protection netting for a vertical green wall, and sourcing fresh kimchi direct from Korea!

As a busy businesswoman yourself, managing the lives of your clients, how do you stay on top of everything you need to do?

Thankfully, we're not a 24/7 operation so I do get most evenings off! That said, if we grow much further I will need to find another me, or rather someone with skills that complement mine. I think that is the next challenge.

Who are Caroline B's typical clients?

Caroline B clients are organised, good at delegating and understand the value of their time. They value our local language

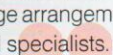
advantage, Hong Kong know-how, and experience of how to get things done effectively.

Our small business clients are entrepreneurial and need to stay productive and focused on developing their businesses. So Caroline B becomes their back office. The main attraction of using us is they get the continuity and scope of service required that might prove impossible with a single PA – and clients value the confidentiality and privacy that we offer.

Ultimately it is about trust – building that relationship with a client where they trust you to do the right thing.

Clients' perspectives

What started as an assignment to open an MPF account for my Nepalese driver has now spawned into a full-fledged relationship that has become, at this point, indispensable. Caroline Basham and her team are a part of my daily life, taking care of everything from corresponding with my landlord to coordinating my various social events and activities. Being an expatriate from New York City, I was accustomed to dealing with many variables, from booking restaurant reservations to my children's birthday parties. What I didn't account for, here in Hong Kong, is the difficulty it takes to get through some of the simplest tasks, such as opening a bank account. Thankfully, Caroline and co. have come to my rescue! Every week we have things to work on; this week, for example, we're purchasing Katy Perry tickets for us and our pop music-loving daughter, getting a leak looked at by the landlord, securing wait staff for a charity fundraiser I am organising later in the month and also for the vendors for my son's upcoming birthday party. Whatever task it is, whether large or small, Caroline and her team take it all in their stride, allowing me to focus on other more enjoyable aspects of my life in Hong Kong!

I have a regional role at a bank and it involves a lot of travel; my wife also works, and we've recently had our second child. So, life is full and busy. I've now been with Caroline B since May 2014, and they have provided comprehensive support on managing a wide range of tasks: the school selection process for my daughter; identifying and sourcing gifts; shipment of goods from Europe; reorganising my Hong Kong storage arrangements; and connecting me with certain education and financial specialists. 

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