



HR professionals – globally mobile

While HR is a discipline that travels well, it has often lagged behind other professions such as accounting, and the law in terms of global mobility. Are the doors finally open for HR practitioners to be finally considered “globally mobile”?

The strength of the markets

As most HR professionals know, the demand for HR talent has been strong in many markets around the world for the past five years. Along with the UK which is the traditional offshore market for Australian and NZ HR professionals to gain overseas experience, the Asian and Middle East markets are now actively interested in employing HR talent from the global market.

To look at the demands for Aust/NZ HR professionals in the UK/European and Asian markets, ‘In step’ asked two of the heads of leading offshore HR recruitment firms that are members of the Global HR Network (www.hrglobalnetwork.net) for their views. These leaders – Richard Letcher MD from Profile Search & Selection in Asia and John Baker MD from Macmillan Davies Hodes (MDH) UK – have some interesting insights into how real the opportunities for HR practitioners to be globally mobile actually are.

What is the current state of play?

Is the strength in the UK, Asian and Australian HR markets translating to real opportunities in HR for offshore HR practitioners? The answer would seem to be an emphatic “yes!”

As Richard from Profile observed, “the number of HR expatriates who work in Asia has been on the rise for the last four years”. He went on to say, “As the economy has grown in Asia, the size of the pool of local talent for prospective employers has diminished in relative terms, so there has been a growing openness to expatriates. HR in Asia has often been seen as behind the curve globally so best practice experience from Australia and the UK as well as the US is being viewed favourably”.

The heat in the market has also seen the UK market more active in both importing and exporting HR talent. As John from MDH added, “as many markets experience an HR war for talent there is perceptibly a greater willingness to both source and hire HR professionals from overseas”.

So which areas of HR travel well?

Most areas of HR have seen strong levels of demand in Australia, the UK and Asia, and opportunities have existed in all these markets. As John from MDH suggested, “any professional who has

good academic and blue chip experience to offer will find that their mobility between markets is fairly unrestricted – visa issues aside”.

While demand is strong across the board there are some hot spots in most HR markets that are quite similar. The areas of specialisation such as comp & benefits, OD and recruitment as well as generalists at the mid-tier levels are all in demand. Richard from Profile added that there has been “real demand for all types of HR professionals who have had exposure to best practice HR and who have been well mentored”.

Also, both John and Richard indicated that either financial and/or professional services industry experience travels well as these sectors tend to have global-style management priorities and approaches.

Are companies recruiting offshore in HR?

Certainly the Asian markets are very open to offshore HR professionals and as Richard from Profile said, “there is an openness to recruit offshore candidates, particularly in the financial and professional services fields compared to other industries where some language skills may be required”. John from MDH added that, “companies are happy to look at the best HR talent who are willing to relocate to the UK”.

How do HR candidates improve their chances in an offshore market?

Both Richard and John agree that to obtain roles in both the Asian and the UK markets the most important thing to do is actually travel to the desired destination and meet people on the ground. As Richard said, “sitting back in your home city and expecting jobs to come to you just doesn’t work!”. This sentiment applies to the UK although John added, “working with the members of the Global HR Network means we can prepare the groundwork before a candidate arrives”.

Richard also offered that these days candidates driven by money and big expatriate packages (a thing of a decade ago unless you relocate with your bank) tend not to find roles. The focus should be on the bigger picture; wanting to work overseas for the experience should be the main driver rather than thinking that it’s all about the short-term \$\$\$. The low tax regimes in Asia and the sometimes greater promotion opportunities can mean that an individual is usually better off in the end.

The final word

With a global slow down a real potential down the track, the timing of a move to get some offshore experience in HR could be right in 2008. At the moment, options exist for Aust/NZ trained HR professionals to broaden their horizons and gain experience overseas but only if they are prepared to put in some effort to make it happen!

For more information on Profile Search & Selection or MDH in the UK, please refer the Global HR Network website at www.hrglobalnetwork.net

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