

Reflections on a Journey.....

I moved to Prague about 18 months ago from the UK. I had worked in a variety of senior HR and management development roles over the past 20 years and had relocated to Prague when my husband's job necessitated the move. I was both nervous and excited about the changes such a move would bring. However, it took a gathering of 100 other expatriate women in one room to make me realise the individual journeys we all take.

Sitting in the room at the International Woman's Association of Prague meeting in October 2004, I was struck that there were so many women with extraordinary resources, experience and impact sat together in the same room. My challenge was were they being used? Indeed it was Nelson Mandela who challenged that people playing "small" robs us and others of what we are truly capable of. Call it synchronicity but on the way home I saw a huge advert, saying "every day women change the world".

When you move to a new country as the accompanying spouse, (most often the woman) you have so many roles to play – be it wife, mother, career women, sister, or daughter. All these roles are easily impacted by the move. Interestingly, The Global relocation trend survey (2002) reports that 50% of accompanying spouses were employed before moving abroad and during the assignment the number dropped to 14%. That's a lot of people making a transition to not just to a new place and new cultures but also probably to taking up a new life role. I know myself that after 20 years in the corporate world, moving to Prague without a job, inheriting a dog and taking on my new role as the family glue, I was both an excited and less than intrepid explorer in the new space I found myself in.

Like many transitions in life – from childhood to adulthood or from being single to getting married, from womanhood to menopause it's a chance to reassess where you are heading and to ask oneself, "who am I"? The difference being that at these stages of our lives we often look to family and close friends for the support we need to help us through. Within your previously known culture and local environment such support might have been easier to find.

Moving to a new country is a double transition! It can challenge our basic values, assumptions, life balances and the way we think about ourselves and others. Not only do we have all the normal transitions which life throws at us, but we have to make a transition to a new country and all that it involves.

We need to be constantly flexible, if necessary, re-inventing ourselves, according to life stage and the location. Both you and the new people you meet are asking “who are you?” I found myself not being able to say anymore “I am a job title”, which had been so convenient for the last 20 years. Instead I became a dog walker (whatever the weather), a net worker, as I was starting from scratch in a new country and trying to create a business which would give me personally and professionally what I wanted and hopefully a better mum. (The better wife bit was a step too far!). Luckily for me when I went on my voyage of discovery I had a lot of the tools as my previous job roles had involved helping others make transitions in the corporate world.

All that time walking the dog, got me thinking. What if you wanted this challenge of coming to a new country to enable you to explore a new side of ‘you’? What if you had been in your “adopted” country a long time or had moved repeatedly and wanted to take time out to think about “what else?” Who would be there to help you figure this out and think about the impact?

Sometimes our lives are so filled with domesticity, routines and other clutter that it can be hard to listen to what our hearts desire. Sometimes it seems impossible to even find 10 seconds to make the commitment needed to set about any change, let alone the life change you want. All the books tell you that it’s never too late to think about living the life you really want, whichever country you may be in or whatever stage you are at.

So, let me share with you about some of the other lands I took the chance to explore as a result of our move to Prague. Exploring these lands helped me start to realise my full potential here and I am still journeying in my own way and revisiting these lands from time to time. Sometimes navigating my way there, the water is warm and welcoming; sometimes it’s freezing cold! As the Chinese proverb states – “a journey of a 100 miles, starts with one small step!”

The land of Positive Realisation – navigating our way there means having to look at what’s important to us? We can start by thinking about what we are good at, what we really enjoy doing and what comes easy to us. Essentially, it’s about identifying those situations where we feel good and at our best, wherever life’s journey takes us!

The land of Discovery – navigating your way here requires us to look forward not backward. Often we don’t get what we want because we are not clear.

This land focuses on identifying realistic, clear and freeing goals to achieve what we really want to do, whether this is a career, a hobby, a study course, making a contribution to society or making new friends. It's about what do I want, why do I want to do it and by when?

The land of Confrontation – navigating your way there means confronting what is stopping us from doing something and being honest about what area of our life plan has fallen off course? What is being tolerated? What needs to be present and what needs to be absent from our life? What will recharge our batteries?

The land of Opportunity – navigating your way there means being able to recognise opportunities and being able to decide whether to take them or not. However, just being clear on what we want is not enough, we need to be motivated, believe it is possible and have a plan! Here, we look at what are we willing to do today to move things forward? Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but the moments that take our breath away!

I have always been motivated in my “old” and “new” life to helping people get out of life what they really want, to build their confidence and share the life-changing skills that can be used wherever the next adventure takes you. Sometimes getting to visit these new lands is difficult or maybe we don't even know how to start the journey or find the time.

So let's come full circle to that room in Prague, full of talented women each on their own journey. We are all changing the world each day. We are more effective at this, whatever it is we are doing, if we feel it's what we want to be doing.

Happy exploring.....!!!

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