

The Global Graduate

What is a global graduate? Someone who works around the world? Easy! We can all work with people from different countries. Can't we?

Perhaps and perhaps not. Yes, most of us have facebook pages peppered with friends around the world. And we've probably holidayed in different countries. But working internationally is very different and it is a complaint often voiced by business executives that graduates emerge into the business world often with a limited understanding of what it is like to work and live internationally. The outline below is intended as a guide – the points to consider, from the application and CV stage right through to the moment where you're about to step into your new office in a different country.

The Decision

Some of us know we want to venture out of our village or city and explore the big wide world before we even start school. For others, it is a much-considered decision that involves a mix of fear and excitement. Perhaps you have a company that you'd like to work for and the headquarters are in a different country, or maybe you'd like to work in a particular country and the company you work for doesn't matter? How selective are you about the country? Would you work anywhere? Are you going alone? Will you have to leave a partner or other dependants? When do you want to come back? What will motivate your career progression – the potential to live and work around the world, be the boss, have a large salary, have a work/life balance – all of the above?

Thinking through these questions at this stage may help to gain a better understanding of what you actually want from an international career. And the answers will help you focus your campaign and achieve your goals.

Marketing Yourself

After a bit of soul-searching, perhaps you decide you want to work in a particular country that maybe has the companies you'd like to work for or has always seemed interesting. You can now start to market yourself effectively and as a first step will need to research CV/resume templates online to ensure they are culturally attuned. For example, if you put your photo on the front page of your CV/resume and send it to different French companies you may get lots of responses. If you sent the same CV/resume out in the UK, you may not receive any replies, as a photo on a CV/resume in the UK would be culturally inappropriate. Most employers would like to see a mission statement at the top of the CV, but do they all want to see a list of Interests?

Cover letters also need to be well thought through. How do people write cover letters in each country? Although they will generally always be formal and focused,

consider the style of language used and adapt yours accordingly. You will also need to ensure that the writing is word perfect, avoiding any language errors.

Alongside the formal applications, you can use free, professional global networking tools such as LinkedIn. Ensure you enter as much information about yourself as possible and build up a range of contacts.

Finally, make yourself stand out. You may be competing with other candidates internationally, but also locally. They may have a greater knowledge and understanding of local business models and better networks. Consider the skills that you may have that others don't, particularly locals. Perhaps you speak many different languages? Maybe you carried out some work experience with one of their subsidiaries? Try and identify what the employer will want and make yourself the answer to their needs.

Preparing for an interview

If your CV meets their requirements, you may be asked for an interview. This may be a first round phone or video conferencing interview or they might want to interview you in their offices.

Phone interview

Speaking on the phone can sometimes be more challenging than meeting face to face. As with all interviews you will need to think about the questions you might be asked and consider suitable answers. Alongside that, are the presentation skills. How will you address the interviewer – Mrs Smith, Monsieur Beaux or just Jane? Consider the appropriate address within the culture. For example, in the UK and US, saying “Good afternoon Mrs Rogers” may sound too hierarchical and could make the interviewee appear immature. It may also be worth considering your tone on the phone. Have you ever been given any feedback about it? Perhaps people have asked you to speak up in the past or maybe you tend to waffle on and on and not know when to stop? Reflect on how you may come across when people can only hear you, rather than see you. If the interview is going to be carried out in another language, also consider your accent – will they understand you clearly? What will you do if they speak too fast and you can't understand the question? Always best to ask them to repeat it rather than answering in the wrong way.

Face to face interviews

All the questions above will need to be thought through for a face-to-face interview, as well as self-presentation. In most cultures, formal attire such as a suit, would be deemed appropriate. However, beyond that there are greater subtleties, depending on the culture of the company. For example, a snappy, modern suit that might impress an advertising company, could feel a little out of place in a traditional law firm. It is also worth contemplating the norms of the local, working culture. Are people assertive, where striding into the interview confidently may be appropriate? Or would a quieter, more reserved stance make your interviewers feel more comfortable? Companies often choose to employ people who are like them or who they believe will

fit into the company easily, so the more you are able to mirror their cultural tendencies, the greater the likelihood of success.

In addition, it shouldn't be forgotten that interviews are a chance for you, the interviewee, to consider what it may be like to work within that company, both on an organisational and cultural level. For example, are you someone who likes to be told what to do and would feel more comfortable within a hierarchical structure, generally more likely to be found within firms in countries such as India and China, or would you prefer to work in a flatter structure often found in Scandinavian companies? Books such as "When Cultures Collide: Leading across Cultures" by Richard D. Lewis or "Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands" by Terri Morrison can be useful guides for understanding business globally.

On a final, practical note, if you are zipping around the world attending interviews, find out who will be paying the bill. Most companies will pay for your travel to attend an interview, but it is important to clarify this beforehand.

Taking the job

It's taken a while, but you've finally been offered your dream job for a multinational, based in a capital city. Your bags are packed and you're ready to go. Anything to consider first?

Throughout the interview process, you will have hopefully been thinking through what it may be like to live and work within this new culture. Now it's time to also work out the practicalities. A new city can seem large and daunting and it may be tricky to work out the best place to live. Research on the internet and ask friends and contacts who might know the city well. Consider whether you'd like to be in the centre or suburbs, near an airport to get to your home country easily or a short commute from work? Think about the best way to make friends out of work – is it important to live near a gym, or a language school or a golf course, for example. What do local people enjoy doing and to what extent will you be keen to adopt those practices? Some people move abroad and make local friends whilst others group together with fellow expats. What will the cultural norms be within your new workplace? Do employees socialise together out of work hours or do people tend to keep to themselves? It's possible that your new company will provide some cross-cultural training which should answer these queries.

Repatriation

Invariably contracts come to an end and the time comes to return to your home country. This may be with the same company or you might need to leave to return home. Having settled in a new country, returning home can be a surprisingly challenging transition. The experience of being abroad may have changed you, yet at the same time the friends and circumstances you left at home are also likely to have changed.

As the world globalises, the benefits of having an international business perspective are immeasurable. A successful global graduate will consider moving and living abroad as a process, rather than a whimsical opportunity. It is not only about being skilled in a business area, but about being able to understand different levels of culture, work with people from all backgrounds and understand that effective companies are comprised of all different types of people who are working together to grow the business. A graduate with a sound level of education and this wider perspective on life would be an asset to any company.