



Where in the world?

David Harper, Fidelity International's head of enterprise risk, on the culture shock of moving to Russia and Bermuda.

BY ALEX WRIGHT

CHALLENGES DON'T come much bigger than being sent on assignment to Russia and Bermuda.

That's what David Harper CA found when he decided to step outside his comfort zone and take up the post of senior manager at KPMG's Moscow office in March 2008.

Having cut his teeth at the firm's New Zealand and Cook Island practices, he was on the lookout for a new challenge when the opening came up.

"Moving to Moscow was without a doubt the biggest challenge of my career," says Harper. "You couldn't be much further from New Zealand, and almost everything was different, from the environment and culture to the language."

The biggest adjustment Harper had to make, though, was the way he worked. In New Zealand, the focus had been on meeting project deliverable expectations. In Moscow, more importance was given to building relationships – something which came naturally, given his cheerful Kiwi demeanour.

"In New Zealand, if you needed to meet a deadline and you had to skip lunch, that's just what you'd do," says Harper. "But in Russia everyone stops for lunch together because of the importance of relationships with

their colleagues. Once I adjusted my thinking, I quickly came to appreciate the value of that change in focus."

Harper had already had a taste of life overseas, having completed the final year of his Bachelor of Management Studies in New York in 2000 before returning to New Zealand.

What attracted Harper to KPMG was the global opportunities of a multinational firm. In spite of the initial culture shock of his Russian posting, Harper went on to work in audit, advisory and consulting roles there, mainly in the banking sector. It exposed him to projects a smaller market like New Zealand does not provide.

"Despite the bad rap that Russia often gets from the Western media and the red tape, it was a great place to work and build my experience," says Harper. "I learnt some valuable lessons about people relationships, which have helped me throughout my career."

Then in 2010, a colleague from the New Zealand office who had moved to Bermuda flagged an opening there. The move to Bermuda created the opportunity to build a new practice specialising in forensic, risk and regulatory compliance, which he grabbed with both hands.

"I wanted to push my boundaries," says Harper. "The chance to create a new service line and team around that was too good to pass up."

Having made his mark with KPMG as a director, Harper was headhunted by Fidelity International two years ago for the role of head of enterprise risk. He saw the chance to use his abilities and experience to help deliver a significant change agenda.

"It was a nice fit with my skill set and in terms of the firm's size and ambition," says Harper. "But being my first move into industry, it was also a completely different challenge having to learn and adapt to a new work culture and environment."

On the home front, meanwhile, Harper juggles work with family life, with his wife Zetty and three children at home. He admits it can be hard, but he makes a point of turning off the phone and spending quality time with the family at weekends.

Who knows what Harper's next move will be? Whatever it is, given his experiences around the planet, you know it won't faze him. ●

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