



Positively Legal: How to Make the Most of Working Abroad

Skills and Professional Development



Banner artwork by AVA Bitter / *Shutterstock.com*

“If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps fewer activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest — in all its ardour and paradoxes — than our travels.”

Alain de Botton

My earlier article on the [benefits of travel on our wellbeing](#), described how travel is more than fun. It is good for our mental health. Through rest, it resets our nervous system. It opens us to new ways of thinking and makes us solve problems to ensure the trip is successful — from managing money to interacting with different cultures and people. Neuropsychologist Paul Nussbaum [described the benefits of travel on the brain](#), “When engaging in something that’s novel and complex, your brain thrives.” Traveling takes us out of our routine and “It is when we get out of that and challenge ourselves that there’s benefit to brain health.”

But do we get the same benefits when we move countries for work? Do the benefits remain or do they tip over into stress, and how can we make the most of moving to a new country (and often bringing our families with us)?

I spoke with [Krystle Gardner](#), senior legal counsel and data protection officer at Capgemini Australia, who did just that, recently moving from Auckland, NZ to Australia.

In the spotlight: Krystle Gardner

What is your role, and who are your main stakeholders?

I am the legal business partner providing broad legal support to the Public Services Sector and Hong Kong business units. I am also the data protection officer for Australia.

What positive practices do you bring to your team and organization?

I personally enjoy power lifting, walking, beach, and time with my young family. I enjoy working in a team and I like to learn from everyone and contribute to that learning. I mentor a junior lawyer and I share monthly wellbeing tips.

When did you move countries — from which roles and where from?

In November 2022, I moved from Auckland, NZ to Sydney, Australia. I transitioned within the same company and performed the same role in the same team. Before moving, I worked approximately 16 years for the company and five months post-acquisition integration of the previous company I was working for (the current company acquired the previous company).



Roy_Photos /

Shutterstock.com

What made you decide to move?

It was for the opportunities I saw for my family, as well as my own career. Australia certainly provides so much more to establish a solid financial foundation for our young family, and we really wanted to focus on providing the children with an opportunity to develop a growth mindset through their

education and a large buzzing city.

How did you tackle moving to a different country and role from a personal/emotions/soft skills perspective?

I completely underestimated the impact of the move to Australia. It has certainly taken its toll personally and emotionally, and there have been many times (and still are) where I crave returning home to my community and friends.

I ended up having to change the frequency of connecting with friends, as the more frequent it was the more homesick I became. I also focused on building community through school (luckily my children are young, so it made it easier), joining local sports clubs, and getting a puppy!



Try to find hobbies you enjoy and participate in community events to distract yourself from feeling homesick.
GoodStudio / Shutterstock.com

It really has impacted our children more than we thought, so we have had to seek external support through a psychologist to help change the narrative on change and fear. This has been tremendous and it actually made us seek out external support early in the move. Never underestimate the advantage of this and don't hide the need either — it shouldn't be viewed negatively.

What did you do when you got the new role and tried to settle in?



Settling from transitioning to a new job may be difficult at first until you get adjusted. Viktoriiaasendorf / Shutterstock.com

As it wasn't a new role, it was a relatively easy transition since it was business as usual. However, it was certainly a change in work environment and the way of working. I went from having the mornings to myself and plenty of wellbeing and exercise time given the time zones, to starting early in the mornings to balance school drop off and having to treat my role as "shift work" so I could manage school pick up, homework, and dinner. I am now in the routine, but it was a challenge.

However, it was certainly a change in work environment and the way of working.

I love Team Tuesdays. Then is when the entire Sydney-based legal team goes into the office. While we are all busy, it is nice to connect and feel like a part of something.

How has moving countries helped you as a lawyer?

It really has given me a new world view of life and career.

It really has given me a new world view of life and career. The world is moving so quickly here compared to Auckland, and it is exciting and a buzz. It has given me a new level of motivation, and of course, there are all the events and opportunities to get involved in. It has cemented that career is about connections and relationships. While you can be a great performer, you can still end up in the shadows and the back-office processor. I've really had to come out of my comfort zone and learn how to socialize again post COVID-19 in a complete WFH arrangement, given the global company I work for.

What mindset did you use with moving? Do you think it is easier or not with different ages and levels of qualification?

I think that at the senior level I am at, it has been easy, because I can confidently present at social events, networking opportunities, in the office, etc. I am not busy trying to learn the role, learn how to

lawyer, earn respect, and demonstrate my skillset — that is just known and expected.

What do you like the most about moving to a different country?

The opportunities available in Sydney, particularly around networking, building my personal brand, and building stronger professional relationships. It has certainly been helpful being located in one of the main Australian offices.



When traveling to a new country, attempt to find new opportunities and build professional relationships through networking. Hurca / Shutterstock.com

Tips to consider if you want to move overseas

1. Gardner suggests:

- Prepare yourself at a personal and emotional level, and don't over-control or over-plan. I was across every minor detail, down to the suburb, to find a lease. It just didn't work. We had so many roadblocks thrown at us, and we had to quickly pivot and change our expectations. I think it would have been a much easier transition if we were more relaxed, unstructured, and going off a loose plan.
- Expect to feel lonely (even if you move with your family or spouse). You will crave your friendship group and familiarity. Give yourself time and be kind to yourself. It will come, but it could take a minimum six months before you start to really find "your people," "your community," and "your lifestyle."

2. Use the time you are moving overseas to work on your self-concept clarity — [a Harvard Business Review article](#) described the benefits of living abroad beyond enhanced creativity and promoting career success. It described the psychological benefits of transforming a person's sense of self (The extent to which someone's understanding of himself or herself is "clearly defined, internally consistent, and temporarily stable.") Known as self-concept clarity, it has been linked to a host of benefits, such as psychological wellbeing, the ability to cope with stress, and job performance. People reflect on whether parts of their identity truly define who they are or merely reflect cultural upbringing.

Use the time you are moving overseas to work on your self-concept clarity.

3. Lean into creativity — According to a study by Adam Galinsky, a professor at Columbia Business School, those who have lived abroad are [more creative](#).

4. Lean into thriving when moving abroad — In [How to thrive when you move abroad](#), Clinical Psychologist Dr. Charlotte Russell describes how to thrive when moving abroad including:

- Make meaning with others in your family and friends unit of the move;
- Find a connection to the place you have moved; and
- Be intentional in reintegrating into a new community.

5. Be curious — neural pathways are influenced by environment and habits, meaning they are sensitive to change. Being curious about your new country is good for the brain (e.g., learning to speak another language or learning how to navigate an unfamiliar road). Consider [Todd Kashdan's, The Five Dimensions of Curiosity](#), and how you can bring them into your daily life:



Curiosity motivates individuals to seek out new experiences, information, and knowledge, which can be extremely beneficial when moving abroad. Alphavector / Shutterstock.com

1. **Joyous exploration:** the recognition and desire to seek out new knowledge and information, and the subsequent joy of learning and growing;
2. **Deprivation sensitivity:** pondering abstract or complex ideas, trying to solve problems, and seeking to reduce gaps in knowledge;
3. **Stress tolerance:** the willingness to embrace the doubt, confusion, anxiety, and other forms of distress that arise from exploring new, unexpected, complex, mysterious, or obscure

events;

4. **Social curiosity:** wanting to know what other people are thinking and doing by observing, talking, or listening into conversations; and
5. **Thrill seeking:** the willingness to take physical, social, and financial risks to acquire varied, complex, and intense experiences.

Moving overseas can enhance your career, build confidence, and develop character if you lean into it by pursuing networking opportunities to foster a sense of camaraderie within your team and broader community.

“What I found appealing in life abroad was the inevitable sense of helplessness it would inspire. Equally exciting would be the work involved in overcoming that helplessness. There would be a goal involved, and I liked having goals.”

David Sedaris

[Join ACC](#)

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

[Caterina Cavallaro](#)



Associate General Counsel

VGW Holdings Limited

Caterina Cavallaro is associate general counsel at VGW.

She combines technical legal skills with practical business understanding and a love of innovation, project management, and legal technology to improve ways of working within the legal industry. She is a member of the ACC's In-House In-Health and Legal Technology and Innovation Special Interest

Groups.

In addition to her legal skills she has a Diploma of Positive Psychology and Wellness and is a freelance writer. Her “Positively Legal” column for the *ACC Docket* focuses on the intersection of neuroscience, positive psychology, and in-house practice by interviewing experts and fellow lawyers and curating up to date quality research, podcasts and books to help lawyers learn to take control of their own wellness and support their careers.

Outside of work, Cavallaro loves traveling, snorkeling, meditating and spending time in nature.