

## **Careers in International Business**

The world is a global marketplace creating great opportunities for careers in business, trade, government and non-government organizations (NGOs) for professionals with good business and technical skills, as well as cross-cultural capabilities.

International business (IB) careers can involve:

- Living and working in the US for a company that sends you abroad for business travel, or
- Working for a company that sends you abroad to work for a number of years at a time.

### **Option 1: Living in the US and travelling abroad for business**

Most careers in IB involve living in the U.S. and traveling overseas for weeks at a time. Foreign travel is generally used for:

- Research – to analyze foreign markets, identify market opportunities, evaluate the financial impacts of foreign projects, etc.;
- Identifying and negotiating with foreign buyers, sellers, and partners; or
- Providing consultation services for clients in foreign locations.

### **Option 2: Living and Working Abroad**

Long term work abroad is less common and requires more planning – but it is highly rewarding for the right person. Careers are often with companies selling or buying overseas, multinational corporations, financial institutions, and consulting firms; they involve going abroad to represent the company, manage a foreign subsidiary, direct foreign operations, or provide consulting services.

Companies usually prefer to send employees who are fully trained in their domestic operations before taking a foreign assignment, so starting an IB career usually means starting with a global company and working domestically first.

If your goal is long-term work abroad, you need to demonstrate your potential to be adaptable and self-sufficient overseas. You can demonstrate this with a history of studying, volunteering, and/or working abroad. Experience in working abroad is especially valued by potential employers.

## **Strategizing to Pursue an International Business Career**

### **1. Possess Good Functional Knowledge**

It is important to display good knowledge that provides specific, concrete value to your employer.

#### **Strategies:**

- (1) Find a local internship or volunteer opportunity that will develop and/or demonstrate skills that are similar to those valued by your targeted international organizations. If you want to work in

- international marketing, provide strategic marketing services for a local nonprofit. If you want to pursue development work in a poor country, begin by writing grant proposals for a local nonprofit.
- (2) It is important to have one of the following: (a) an undergraduate degree in a technical field such as engineering or a business discipline such as marketing, finance, information systems, or accounting; (b) significant on-the-job training or experience that demonstrates concrete value creating expertise; or (c) targeted courses in the MBA program in a business discipline like those listed in (a). In any case, be sure to highlight this on your CV.

## **2. Possess Strong Cross-Cultural and Personal Skills**

The ability to work effectively with others – in one-on-one and group settings – is key for pursuing a career in IB. You also need to be:

- Adaptable – You will often find yourself operating within a foreign context;
- Flexible – Plans and projects often don't work abroad as expected; and
- Innovative – Unexpected obstacles and opportunities are likely in foreign markets.

### **Strategies:**

- (1) Take any opportunities to work abroad – including volunteer work.
- (2) Pursue study- and work-abroad experiences. Find study-abroad classes through SPU; talk to your faculty or academic advisor; and consult books from the Career Center or the Library
- (3) Volunteer for hosting/mentoring opportunities with [ACE Language Institutes](#)

## **3. Know the Key Issues/Trends in IB – and for the Sector/Region You are Pursuing**

When you converse with mentors, network, and interview, you must display (1) solid knowledge of the political, economic, and social forces shaping the world plus (2) specific awareness of the key issues and trends that are relevant to the sector, company, or region in which you have a career interest.

### **Strategies:**

- (1) Read the weekly *Economist* magazine on a regular basis.
- (2) Read other news outlets and books that address either the business environment or issues in specific sectors you are pursuing or, if you have a regional focus, the region of interest.
- (3) Attend activities of the [World Affairs Council](#) or one of the many other local [Commerce Councils](#)

## **4. Develop a Strategy for Starting your Career**

### **Strategies:**

- (1) Prepare a short, focused pitch to explain – clearly and concretely – what you want.
- (2) Develop a CV that highlights your unique (relevant) educational accomplishments and internationally-oriented experiences. If you are applying for a job in a foreign country, use the internet and library resources to ensure your CV is tailored to the local culture. If you are applying for a job opportunity written in a foreign language, respond in that language.

- (3) Obtain a mentor with IB experience and ask questions such as:  
“Given my education and experiences at this point, what would you do next?”  
“What strategies to get into international business did you find that were the most successful?”  
“If you were to do it all over again, is there anything you would do differently?”

Especially for those interested in working and living abroad:

- (4) It is imperative to prepare for interviews by developing and keeping a written outline of your perceived costs and benefits of an overseas assignment. To demonstrate your seriousness to employers (and ensure a fulfilling career), consider the impact of living overseas for long periods on your personal relationships and lifestyle. Living abroad will impact your spouse (and his or her career plans) and children; it may be rewarding for them, but it will not be easy!

## 5. Network and Identify Potential Employers

First, you need to know if you have specific sectors, functional areas, and/or regions in which you are interested – and be able to demonstrate your knowledge about them (Strategies under Part 3), as well as know your strengths and have a good pitch for contacts (Strategies under Part 4). Now you are ready for your job search.

### Strategies:

- (1) Use mentors to provide you with contacts *after – and only after* – you know them well (and they know you).
- (2) Keep a journal to keep track of who you have contacted and when you need to follow up. Remember to send a thank you note to anyone who helps you.
- (3) Join and attend activities of the [World Trade Center](#) or other [Commerce Councils](#)
  - Attend conferences and other activities of the [World Affairs Council](#)
  - Host foreigners visiting the Seattle area through the [International Visitors Program](#)

Especially for those interested in working and living abroad:

- (4) Join and become active in a local organization with connections to the country or region of interest:
  - [Japan America Society of the State of Washington](#)
  - [The Greater Seattle Chinese Chamber of Commerce](#)
  - One of the [various](#) European-American Chambers of Commerce
  - [United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce](#)
- (5) Use the Port of Seattle to identify companies from your target country or region operating here at <http://www.portseattle.org/business/internationaltrade/regionalorgs.shtml>
- (6) Identify companies on the stock exchanges of your target region or country.
- (7) When considering companies to work for,
  - Decide which kinds of companies to target for employment – considering the match of your skills with their needs;
  - Consider where a particular company has operations and is likely to send you; and
  - Evaluate the company's policies for employees working abroad – and their families – and how much you are expected to live according to the norms of your host country.

## Helpful Links

### **IB Careers – Global**

**Working Globally (Wall Street Journal)** [www.careers.wsj.com](http://www.careers.wsj.com) Career site for IB (experience required)

**Monster Work Abroad** [workabroad.monster.com](http://workabroad.monster.com) Career advice, work abroad resources and the ability to search for jobs internationally; you can post your resume at no fee.

**Council on International Education and Exchange** [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org) Information about study, internship, and work opportunities throughout the world

**IB Careers and Jobs** [www.international-business-careers.com](http://www.international-business-careers.com) IB career and job information

**Overseas Jobs** [www.overseasjobs.com](http://www.overseasjobs.com) Search jobs, view employers and access career information

### **IB Careers – Regional**

**Jobs in Japan** [www.jobsinjapan.com](http://www.jobsinjapan.com) Jobs in Japan.

**Iagora** [www.iagora.com](http://www.iagora.com) Entry level jobs and internship in Europe

**Booz Allen Hamilton** [www.boozallen.com](http://www.boozallen.com) Global consulting firm offering jobs across Europe (need experience)

### **IB Careers – General Information**

**Goinglobal** [www.goinglobal.com](http://www.goinglobal.com) A realistic assessment of employment trends in business in 24 countries

**Transitions Abroad** [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com) Resources to explore information on working, studying, traveling and living abroad

**The Riley Guide** [www.rileyguide.com](http://www.rileyguide.com) Comprehensive set of resources on international careers

### **IB-Related Careers**

**U.S. Department of State** [www.state.gov/careers](http://www.state.gov/careers) Careers in U.S. diplomatic services plus internships and student work programs

**UN Careers** [jobs.un.org](http://jobs.un.org) Careers with the United Nations

**DevNetJobs.org** [DevNetJobs.org](http://DevNetJobs.org) Jobs in international development and the environment sector

**Idealist** [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org) Organizations across the world – for volunteer, internship and job opportunities

**InterAction: American Council for Voluntary International Action** [www.interaction.org](http://www.interaction.org) Volunteer opportunities for a coalition of U.S.-based voluntary organizations engaged in disaster relief, sustainable development, refugee assistance, advocacy, and education

**NGOabroad: Custom Fit International Work or Volunteering** [www.ngoabroad.com](http://www.ngoabroad.com) International humanitarian work and customized international volunteer options