

Sara S. Hradecky

comments on...

her last two jobs

Trade Program Manager
Tel Aviv, Israel
1993-1995

Consul General
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
1997 to present



How does your current position compare with your last one?

Pretty much like night and day. In Israel, I had one trade job that included both trade development and trade policy. During my posting, we began the long process of negotiating the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement. This time around, I am posted to Ho Chi Minh City as the Head of Mission, and there are a few thousand things in addition to trade work to keep me busy! Besides, we have a terrific trade team to look after the day-to-day operations of our very proactive commercial program. So my job here is less trade than it is political, cultural, consular, administrative and just about anything else you can think of.

Are there many cultural differences between the two countries?

Surprisingly, there are a number of cultural similarities between Israel and Vietnam: the importance of family relationships, the need to take the time to get to know and trust your business partners, even the hot climates and casual clothing (for example, wearing ties is rare for men in both countries).

There's also something like a "survival" instinct that has toughened up both the Israelis and the Vietnamese — having survived wars and known hard times in the recent past, these two nations' people are most definitely not going to be pushed around! Behind the open smiles, they are tough negotiators, and v-e-r-y determined. Not many Canadian businesspeople are used to the kind of protracted negotiations and rock-hard bargaining that they face in either Vietnam or Israel.

Can you suggest some tips on service?

In both Vietnam and Israel, trade staff recognize the importance of providing continuous and personal service to Canadian clients. This is really the key. Personal service means following up with the Canadian clients, and reminding them in turn to follow up with their local business contacts.

One thing I try to do is maintain regular contact with the Canadian company representatives I have met. It can be as simple a thing as sending them a newspaper or magazine article you think they might be interested in, a quick tidbit of market intelligence, or even a review of a restaurant where you had lunch together. While of course this all adds up to providing market intelligence, I find it also serves a very valuable purpose in grabbing and keeping the attention of Canadian companies that may have potential in the market.

What are the best things about your postings?

The best thing about both postings is without a doubt getting to know my colleagues. In Tel Aviv, I enjoyed learning about and celebrating the Jewish holidays with my Israeli friends (although having my appendix removed on Yom Kippur was one experience I'd rather forget!). In Vietnam, we like to pile into the official vehicle (yes, that's 10 or 11 people in one car, with at least three in the luggage area!) and go off to share a bowl of "pho" (Vietnamese noodle soup) or "banh xeo" (shrimp and bean sprout pancakes) for lunch.