

This month Sid Cass profiles Caroline Lim, Global Head of Human Resource and Corporate Affairs, PSA International

You have worked hard to get where you are today. Was this career the one that you planned or did it just happen?

In a way it just happened. I was born in Singapore and was brought up in a typical Asian family. From an early age I wanted to be an artist or a fashion designer – anything, in fact, to do with the Arts, despite being constantly told that I could never make a living as an artist and that I really needed to think about being a teacher or a nurse.

Driven by the practicalities of life, after my studies, my main concern was to get a job to supplement the household income.

My first job in 1976 was with a small company that dealt with oil rigs in Indonesia. There, I worked as a “Girl Friday”, which was good learning for someone just starting out.

In 1981, I then joined Apple Computers, which had just opened a manufacturing facility in Singapore, as a Human Resource Officer. Even before joining the company, I had heard so much about it, especially its founder, Steve Jobs. His “One man One computer” vision epitomised how forward looking Apple already was at that time. While there, I was fortunate to progress through all its HR operational aspects – Compensation & Benefits, Learning & Development and Recruitment, to name but a few. I have to admit that the US culture in which I was operating shaped me and my way of thinking, and still a major influence on my management style today.

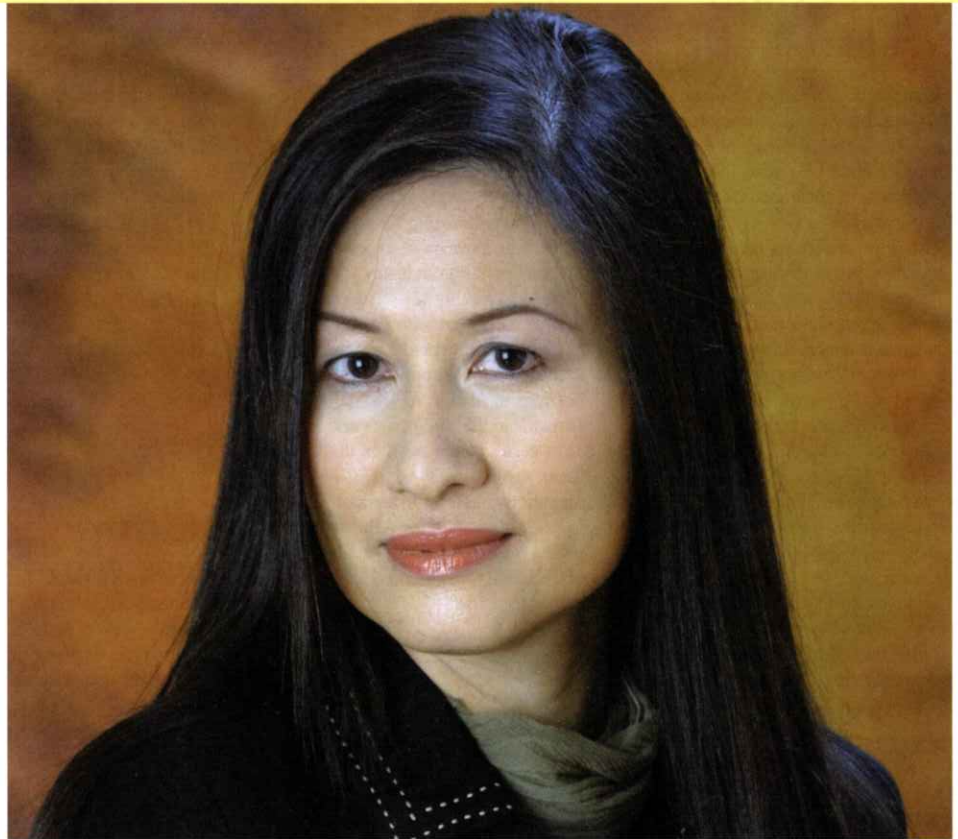
Thirteen years later in 1994, I left Apple to work for Duty Free Shops (DFS) but after two years I was itching to move on and try my hand at heading my own HR department. Thus when a headhunter came a calling with that opportunity, I jumped at it and joined Ernst & Young Global Client Consulting (later merged to become Cap Gemini Ernst & Young).

It was at Ernst & Young that I had my first regional/global experience having been given the responsibility, as regional vice president, to set up an HR infrastructure across 13 countries in Asia Pacific spanning New Zealand, Australia, South East Asia, India, Korea and Japan. Besides this, I was also part of the “Global HR Steering Committee” of Ernst & Young.

With 13 countries reporting to me and travelling over 50% of the time, I literally lived out of a suitcase. However, this was one of the most exciting periods in my life – during which the learning curve was very steep and where I met truly exceptional people.

This was a major turning point in my career, and was instrumental in changing my HR perspective from an operational to a more strategic regional/global role and which unknowingly, probably prepared me for my global role in PSA.

I was then headhunted, and subsequently



joined, PSA International in 2003 as Global Head of HR. The PSA job was not something I had actively sought. Indeed, I had been contemplating retiring, but when PSA invited me to join them, I felt that the job challenges were too attractive to resist, despite the fact that I had no experience in the port/shipping industry.

The same applied to my subsequent corporate affairs role as well, which came about when my colleague was posted overseas to head up PSA’s business and operations there and the Group CEO needed someone to fill the post. While it was an honour, having no prior experience, this was a huge challenge to live up to, but it has been tremendously rewarding so far.

You are a great one for philosophical ‘one liners’ with seemingly inexhaustible quotes for everything that life can offer be it good or bad. Can you give a few to the readers?

Sure - How about “Life always has a way of figuring itself out”. It never fails to amaze me how with time, situations, more often than not work themselves out and things fall in place - planned or unplanned. We should always be flexible enough to be able to go with the flow, whatever the circumstances.

Consider also my belief that with regard to teamwork, “None of us is as strong or as smart as all of us”. Trust is critical to team members working well with each other. As a leader, I have to trust and support my teams to deliver, without peering over their shoulders all the time or

criticising them behind their backs which happens in many companies today.

Another truism is that “Life should be more than just work – it should be about making a difference to the lives of others as well.” True work satisfaction comes from helping my people grow professionally and personally, being there for them, and guiding them in their walk and growth.

Although not a ‘one liner’ in the true sense of your question, can I just add that although I have often been asked if it has been difficult being a woman in a predominantly male industry, my simple philosophy is that good professional qualities should never be dependent on whether one is wearing a skirt or tie.

Apart from work, work, work and travelling – what do you do in any spare time that you might have?

I like to paint – I started out learning water colours, even though it was one of the toughest techniques to learn. And for the future, I would like to pick up ‘oils’ if I can spare the time.

I am also into pottery, but regrettably, due to the exigencies of my career lifestyle, it has been some time since I have been able to get at my “potter’s wheel”, which is now collecting dust.

Other than that, I spend a lot of time in art galleries or at auctions buying art - mainly of South East Asian artists, particularly those who lean towards a more contemporary style.