

The Secret of my Success:

🔑 *Emma Walmsley*



Emma Walmsley talks about her Winning Career and some of the decisions she has had to make with input from her family along the way

International experience and ‘lateral’ moves are invaluable for personal growth ...and ultimately career progression or even significant acceleration.

Each of us will define our ambitions differently but I would encourage everyone to think as creatively as possible about next steps, and if relevant for you consider international experience or perceived lateral moves – in both cases they have really accelerated my personal learning (through successes and big mistakes!), opened up some incredible experiences for my family and ultimately accelerated my career.

The decision to move to China in a lateral career move

The best example of this was when I moved to China to run L’Oreal’s consumer business there in 2007. At the time it was a quarter of the size of the global business I was running from New York, it reported structurally a level below where I was then and I had already had general management experience. Many thought I was nuts to consider it – that it might be seen as dropping off the fast track (this was just before China was seen as the hottest place to be in FMCG).

I was also 7 months pregnant with our fourth child when I was asked. We discussed it at home and agreed that after the baby was born we would head to Shanghai where I would complete maternity and we would take on this exciting, once in a lifetime family adventure together. Honestly, it was quite scary, but it was so worth it...

Professionally: I got the on the ground experience of running a highly volatile emerging market, completely new consumer insights, a complex distributor model, massive sales forces and route to market challenges. I was able to use my experience running global brands to really improve our effectiveness in getting the right innovation and advertising for China out of the global teams. I had to personally learn how to lead in a completely new culture, where I didn’t speak the language and everything was different. It was very humbling, I made plenty of mistakes but it was also one of the greatest professional learning periods of my career and gave me a great love and respect for China and her people, and we tripled the business.

Personally: It was amazing for the whole family, we travelled across Asia, all the children speak Mandarin (unlike their Mum) and our ultimate comfort food is still Chinese dumplings.

Acceleration of my Career

It was also in China that I met Andrew Witty and was ultimately offered the chance to come and lead GSK’s consumer business – in part, because of the global and diverse experience I had had over the previous 17 years.

So my advice is to be creative with career planning, don’t worry about status but do worry about learning and rounding out your skills. Of course, also do plenty of talking about what matters for you at home too, and make sure you take on roles where you can not only learn and contribute, but have fun!

Emma

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