

Fusion: Four former employees join together for better HR solutions

We caught up recently with four erstwhile, peripatetic colleagues from HR: Sheila Bates, Jean-Baptiste Jugand, Julia Kemp and Louise Richards. Since leaving the Bank a few years ago, they have moved on from jobs in large organisations, public and private, to now come together for a brand new venture of their own – an HR consultancy named “Fusion HR Solutions”, based in London but with a truly international perspective.

We met recently for a brief chat. Their enthusiasm for their new endeavour was visible and, I must say, a bit contagious.



Alumni '14 (left to right): Sheila Bates, Julia Kemp, Louise Richards and Jean-Baptiste Jugand

How and why did you come together to form “Fusion HR Solutions”?

The birth of the idea was a meeting in 2013 between Olivier Descamps, Jean-Baptiste and Louise. Olivier had been requesting HR’s help on retention issues for an EBRD client in Mongolia. At the time, we were excited about the prospect of helping them and felt we had plenty to offer, but there really wasn’t enough time in the EBRD work week for this extra task. But that was the moment that the seed was sown for the idea of going out on our own to form an HR consultancy. We began to think about a niche opportunity for consulting that no one else was doing. But, before actually leaving the Bank, it was at the level of mere conversation. Two years ago, we all left the Bank and took different paths – working at HSBC, Lloyds,

the EIB and with the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution.

We all went our separate ways but we kept in touch. In fact, we developed our own “mini HR-alumni association” and continued to exchange ideas and thoughts. We then decided to come together for a brainstorming session to see if we could collaborate and develop a concept that we could use to form a business. That was at the end of 2015.

And, as you see, we came to the conclusion that we could. We decided that the best way to deploy our talents was to do something in the realm of human resources. We felt that what was important for all of us was to work together to make a difference at the business level for organisations and (also important!) to retain an international dimension to whatever we did.

It is a big step to leave permanent jobs at large, secure organisations. Weren’t you anxious about taking that first leap?

It is a big step! Yet for each of us, it had been a longstanding ambition (and goal) to work for ourselves. We wanted more flexibility in our working lives and we wanted greater proximity to clients. We wanted to be our own bosses in seeking clients, in meeting their needs and in finding solutions.

We left our respective jobs in the first half of 2016 and we have now formed our consultancy with offices at London Bridge. We’ve been in business since April and we love it. Our team is active and nimble; we can each concentrate on what we do best. And we’re learning new skills every single day – skills that are necessary to run your own business.

What is the significance of the name you chose for your company, “Fusion HR Solutions”?

Fusion: We wanted to fuse our talents. And that’s the motto you can see on our website: “Fusion...the process or result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity.” In essence, this means that there is more synergy together, with our unique set of individual skills, than working separately. Our skillsets and experience run across the private sector and extend to international organisations. In our small “gang of four”, our collective experience encompasses the whole gamut of HR skills.

What kind of services do you provide?

We deliver bespoke advice, guidance and solutions for our clients, aligned to their business plans and targets. We provide consultancy on:

- compensation and benefits
- talent acquisition
- professional development
- dispute resolution and mediation
- HR projects/studies.

What sets you apart from other HR consultancies?

We are smaller than the big firms obviously – which means we're much more personal and we know that we can punch above our weight. Collectively, we represent (and have had) a range of experience in international organisations and private corporations, including the EBRD, the EIB, MasterCard, HSBC, Lloyds, Orange and Rockwell.

Our watchwords are personal attention, care and engagement; with our extensive experience, we can be much more practical in our approach. And, last but not least, we're very likable and personable! [Ed.: They are.] We attempt to build a real relationship with each of our clients.

Do you have any advice to employees of large organisations seeking to start their own business?

We are four and not just one – so we can support each other. That is something to consider. Timing is also the key to setting up a business. When we left the EBRD two years ago none of us really felt ready to branch out on his/her own. But with the experience we each gained in the intervening two years, and building on our EBRD experience, we deepened our confidence in our ability to strike out on our own. We realised that we, as a group, had something to offer. Important too: we had known each other, warts and all, for ten years or more, so we knew each other's abilities and talents and shortcomings. We know that we can have open discussions and can tap into our talents; we look out for each other and we feel that we collaborate more effectively because we know each other so well and can be brutally honest.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

As a young business just starting out, we can't openly name clients yet. One important project is with an international organisation in Asia where we are partnering on a gender initiative across a number of countries; we are also in discussions with an established training organisation based in the UK which would like us to run their HR training business. And EBRD-ites will be happy to know that the southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) region is no stranger to us – in fact, we are bidding for a salary survey for an Egyptian company that works internationally. We're also providing guidance to companies in the UK seeking to move from a five-day work week to 24/7 operations in the health care sector.

Any regrets?

Absolutely none. We feel younger, we feel we can really add value to organisations and we get more enjoyment out of our working day.

Is there a question you'd like me to ask?

Not really, but we would like to add one final thing. We have wonderful friends in the EBRD at all levels that have been tremendously supportive and generous with their time. So, in conclusion, we'd like to express and end with a hearty word of thanks to them all!

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