



Xplore helped Sophie to maintain life balance as she moved towards her career goals.

Be open and receptive to every opportunity

Sophie's incredible journey starts at Baker & McKenzie, a distinctive global law firm. It was here that Sophie had begun her career as a commercial property lawyer having graduated from Monash University, Melbourne.

At five years out of law school, Sophie was in an Associate role with Baker & McKenzie, she felt at this point that she wanted to gain a promotion to Senior Associate. She had reached a point in her career where she had the technical skills needed in the role but needed some assistance with understanding business and 'how to play the game'.

Sophie approached the Professional Development Director of Baker & McKenzie for guidance on how to promote herself with the organisation and develop a vision of where she wanted to head with her career. She was recommended to undertake the Xplore Career Resiliency Program, which is a mentoring program for professionals to develop themselves and their career resiliency skills.

It was during the next 6 months that Sophie would realise her potential and make positive changes to her life. With a "wonderful group of ladies" from very diverse backgrounds she was able to increase her self-awareness – personally and professionally. Directed by Di Ryall and Andi Pert, the group became an important sounding board and support group to Sophie.

Sophie achieved her goal of promotion to Senior Associate one month before the end of the program. She remembers fondly the moment that she shared her success with the group, "I really felt that my promotion had been a team effort and I was excited to share my news. Everyone cheered and congratulated me in the most sincere and warm way. I felt like I had wings!"

This success was particularly significant to Sophie as she was working part-time trying to juggle career and family. Xplore had helped her to maintain life balance as she moved towards her career goals.

As Sophie immersed herself in her new role she made sure that she put herself in front of senior people within the organisation. She also participated in a mentoring scheme to encourage others to understand their own career visions. It was this self-promotion that led Sophie to the offer of a transfer to Baker & McKenzie in London.

Sophie saw this as a prestigious honour, one that not everyone gets a chance to consider, so she agreed to the transfer without a moments thought! She believes that you make your own luck and that if you are open and receptive to opportunities you will attract them.



Xplore Case Study

Sophie Callander

Sophie felt that the culture difference and amazing people that she met were key to her growth.

Around the time of this offer Sophie had been thinking about returning to a full-time position and seeing as this one-year transfer to London was a full-time role, she was ready for the change.

In 2006, Sophie embarked on her journey to London.

Although the role in London was an enormous challenge, Sophie felt that the culture difference (London was far more internationally focused than Melbourne) and amazing people that she met, were key to her growth.

Ten months into her one-year transfer Sophie was faced with another surprising opportunity. A former partner from Melbourne had moved to Dubai and suggested that she apply for a position there. The partner forwarded Sophie's CV to the General Counsel of a Government owned property developer. She was asked to go to Dubai for an interview and was captivated by Dubai's staggering property boom and the breadth of projects under construction. To her delight, she was offered an in-house legal role within a start up asset management company, tasked with managing all of the company's projects once completed, i.e. half of Dubai!

Although Sophie felt a bit conflicted – she loved London and working for Baker & McKenzie – this was an opportunity she couldn't miss. With thoughts back to the openness and receptiveness that she had learnt from her Xplore program, she accepted.

In 2007, Sophie packed up her life and family and moved to Dubai.

As the role in London had been a change for Sophie, so too was the role in Dubai. She moved from a private practice organisation with a long history, to in-house with a 'start-up' organisation. This is something that she had considered in her career vision that she would be open to at some point when the right opportunity arose.

Sophie found herself "in deep water" and under enormous pressure, but it was also incredibly exciting. Dubai was booming and things were moving at a rapid pace.

It was at this point that Sophie got in contact with Di and Andi at Xplore to let them know where she was and to "put my hand up for help!" She had not managed a large team before, so was interested in practical ways to manage and guide her team to achieve effective outcomes. She embarked upon an executive coaching program with Xplore.

Andi was on a personal visit to Dubai so she met with Sophie for an intensive one-on-one for a couple of days. They continued to speak over the telephone every month for up to a year after they had commenced the program, for a one-hour update, and they met face-to-face again when Sophie returned to Melbourne on her "annual trip home". Sophie regarded Andi as her personal business tutor.



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Sophie was pleased with the support that Xplore gave her during this phase of career. She didn't feel as though she was fully experienced to lead and manage but the opportunity arose and Xplore guided her through this transition. Yet another example of openness to opportunities.

Sophie's experience in Dubai came to a sudden climax in October 2008 when the global financial crisis hit Dubai hard and "the bubble burst". Within a two-week period the whole property market came to a standstill. Sophie was forced to make redundancies, which understandably she says was the hardest part of her management role. The company shed 80% of its workforce and restructured in early 2009.

Sophie found it increasingly difficult to lead and motivate her team through such depressing times. She decided to manage her exit from the company and Dubai, taking redundancy in February 2009. She had no regrets. She had been able to "work with some of the most amazing and inspiring people you could ever meet".

Sophie's husband took a job back in London, so she followed with the family shortly after. At this point she had decided to take a "year off" to focus on her family and her own personal development. In some ways she needed to "get over the whirlwind of Dubai and come back down to earth".

In fact, this career break couldn't have come at a better time as Sophie's daughter was diagnosed with learning difficulties. She was able to identify the issues and support her daughter at this critical time, becoming actively involved in support groups for children with learning difficulties. Her priority became her daughter and what she could do to secure her future.

Sophie still has her eye on the target of when the year is up and is thinking about what she would like to do next. She continues to draw from the things she learnt from Xplore – to take opportunities, build her networks and maintain life balance.

About Xplore For Success

Xplore offers a range of programs, workshops, professional coaching and consulting services. These services offer a unique opportunity for professionals to develop strategies to build their own skills through individual and/or group sessions led by our experienced and insightful facilitators. Participation in any Xplore program automatically connects you to the Xplore alumni, which currently includes over 3000 people in over 250 organisations. Xplore is committed to offering a positive, open, supportive and non-threatening group or individual environment