

ATLANTIC RESEARCH TECHNOLOGIES, L.L.C.

Strategic Executive Search and Management Recruitment Worldwide

North America - Latin America - Asia - Europe - Middle East - Africa

INTERVIEW With "China Daily"

<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>

China Daily reporter Alfred Romann asked ART's Managing Director to offer his opinions about recent trends in senior management executive searches in Shanghai and China

Atlantic Research Technologies, L.L.C. (ART), www.atlanticresearch.com, is a global executive search firm, recruiting in the industrial, high tech and service sectors, for senior- and middle-management positions in general management, sales and marketing, finance, supply chain, manufacturing, IT, and human resources.

CHINA DAILY: What are the positions most sought in Shanghai? in China?

ART: "In Shanghai and throughout China, our client companies are most commonly seeking Chinese General Managers, Managing Directors, Presidents, CEO's, COO's, CFO's, and Sales and Marketing VP's. Our clients overwhelmingly are North American, European and Asian corporations --MNC's, medium sized market leaders, and well financed startups-- that absolutely require Chinese-English bilingual managers, ideally with experience working at similar world class companies. These managers must know the China market intimately – its opportunities and challenges -- and also understand the needs and concerns of foreign employers.

"In Shanghai, as well as throughout China, we also are typically asked to find factory managers and heads of procurement and supply chain. The profile is similar: local Chinese managers or fluent Chinese/English bilingual managers from other countries, trained in world class methods."

CHINA DAILY: Are there any clear changes in the positions people are looking for, or that employers are looking to fill?

ART: "Several years ago, companies were often asking for Chinese managers who knew English and who had some job experiences at multinational corporations. These were sort of universal 'minimum' job requirements, and what resulted from this simplistic profile by some companies was a whole series of mistakes in hiring the wrong people for the wrong jobs. You would see absurd situations where companies making industrial products, such as automobile parts or machine tools, hiring senior managers from semiconductor companies, banks, software companies, or food companies, for example, just because they were big western firms. Some of these employers would be dazzled by good English skills or perhaps by candidates with MBA's from prestigious western business schools.

"In their home countries, these employers probably would not have considered as viable candidates for senior management people who did not know their markets or products. For example, should a US firm hire an American

candidate simply because s/he spoke English well? Is having an MBA without any relevant work experience really a good risk in choosing a senior manager running an important foreign business unit? In America, such hires would rarely occur, but in China, many western companies routinely based their critical senior hires on these simplistic criteria. I have seen European automotive or telecommunications companies hire people from firms like Danone - a yogurt company - simply because it is European firm. But telecommunications network equipment and automotive parts are not yogurt, and a person who only knows yogurt is not automatically qualified to work for every other European firm. That is true in Europe and it is true in China, as well.

“This fast and sloppy reasoning by some employers, in our opinion, was a great mistake, and we fortunately avoided such search assignments.

“We have seen that in the last few years, many foreign companies are coming to realize that hiring Chinese managers should be done using criteria similar to hiring senior managers in any other country. A firm should require that their top local managers understand their industry and have verifiable track records of success in that industry, or in a closely related one. Candidates also must understand the requirements of a specific business model and be comfortable working in it. For example, a startup one-person software sales office in Beijing is going to be very differently organized from a Microsoft office employing 1,000 or more people. A medium sized consumer electronics company is not going to need the same kind of person who runs Philips or Dell.

“Our approach to executive search in China and worldwide is uniform, regardless of location: the candidate needs to prove to us that s/he has already done a similar type of job at a similar type of company. We need to see a track record of success in a candidate's work history. Our clients do not have the time to train their senior managers to do their basic duties, and they do not wish to take needless risks in the hope that our candidates might be successful some day, as if by magic. Our candidates are expected to have been successful managers in the past, and they are expected to be successful managers in their new positions with our clients.

“Our Chinese candidates are almost always expected by our client companies to be the leaders, to provide the roadmap to success in the China market to them. Our clients require a significantly higher standard of executive search than that which is provided by most companies engaged in recruitment in the China market.”

CHINA DAILY: Are there any positions/industries that are either too full of prospective employers or lacking in people to fill too many job openings?

ART: “There is an ongoing need for Chinese managers who can assume the highest positions at foreign companies with Chinese business divisions. Because of the shortage of Chinese managers with world class management style, many other Chinese-speaking managers, from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the US, Canada, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere are recruited by us to provide additional choices of candidates for our client companies.”

CHINA DAILY: Are there any other trends you may think significant or worth mentioning?

ART: “Because the majority of foreign employers in China were large multinationals, most of the best educated, most internationally trained Chinese managers, are people trained at those companies, and most of these managers are probably best suited for management positions at MNC's. But in recent years, there has been a large influx of small- and medium-sized foreign employers. Some of these companies will some day become great MNC's, but in their current development stage, they often need Chinese managers who can run smaller, un-bureaucratic business units. A large number of our new clients entering China are seeking Chinese managers who could work as hands-on managers. In most large Chinese private and state companies, and in most foreign

multinationals, it is hard to learn how to run a business in this manner, but this is what many new foreign companies need. We feel that one of our specialties is finding this special kind of Chinese manager.

“Another trend that we are seeing is that Chinese offices of foreign companies are evolving from being headquarters of China operations into regional Asia-Pacific hubs. There is an additional challenge in finding China-based managers who could manage the entire Asia-Pacific region well, but we feel that with our candidates on six continents, in over 100 countries, we are prepared to meet this exciting trend.”

INTERVIEW with "Asiamoney"
(Hong Kong)
<http://www.asiamoney.com>

"Asiamoney is the leading financial magazine in the Asia-Pacific. For the past 10 years, Asiamoney has interviewed the people that matter and written about the deals and strategies that count. No other publication in Asia offers the in-depth coverage of the latest, breaking developments in Asian finance, banking, investment and treasury."

Full Interview by Pauline Loong, Deputy Editor with ART's Managing Director

Topic: Headhunting in the Mainland Chinese Market

Q1. How does recruiting for the mainland Chinese market differ from recruiting for other markets?

A1. Every market is a little different, and we do not find China to be notably different from most world markets in most respects. It's always the same question: "does this client's business model and expectation coincide with this candidate's experiences and career path?" The level of candidates that we recruit in China - mostly "C" level, VP level, Managing Director/ G.M. levels, and Director/ Manager levels - tend to be "global class" people. These are the same types of people that could and do operate successfully anywhere, be it in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei, San Francisco, New York, London, Zurich, etc. Most of these people have either lived, worked, or were educated in other parts of the Asia-Pacific, North America or Europe. These candidates might have known ART for years or might have heard about ART from trusted colleagues in China or abroad. They understand that the calibre of our candidates is high, and our clients' expectations of them are high. Such people usually find us, or we find them through our network of contacts. Generally, good people recommend other good people, so in recruiting people in China we place some reliance upon trusted referrals to steer us in the right direction.

Depending upon the specific job, industry or business model, sometimes there are shortages of specific mainland China profiles. In that case, it might be necessary for an employer to seriously consider Hong Kongers, Singaporeans, Taiwanese and other Chinese speakers from abroad. The most notable of these would be a VP or "C" level person for a small early stage China division of a small or medium sized foreign company. Foreign startups in particular typically are founded by people who have limited finances and who work very hard with limited staff. When they seek senior managers for new Chinese operations, they often look for the same type of "shirtsleeves" person to head their China groups. Such people, however, can be a bit hard to find in mainland China, particularly since most foreign-trained or foreign-company experienced Chinese executives come from large multinationals. So a person whose resume might suggest a high suitability for an American employer (i.e., s/he worked for U.S. multinationals, s/he received an education in the U.S.), that person might not automatically be suitable at all for a Silicon Valley-type startup firm. While a Chinese finance manager at a major U.S. multinational might be supported by a very large China staff, that person taking a job as a CFO of a startup China division, might find himself or herself alone in a room with the expectation of "doing it all." Most search firms operating in the China market do not appreciate this subtlety, and that is why many of their matches are not good fits for the candidate or the client. When we take on such assignments, then, we ask the employer to keep this factor in mind. When we discuss such jobs with candidates, if we do not see a lot of appropriate startup company experiences, we ask pointedly if such a job would interest her or him. We typically lay out scenarios: you will be expected to do all the work, you will not have a staff until business allows for hiring, you will have to do what ten others do at your present company, etc. We rather have nine candidates out of ten realize early that this would not be good for them, rather than to place someone in the wrong job.

Our focus in China tends to be people who are bilingual English/Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese) speakers who

are fully bicultural, which is to say that they are "at home" in China, familiar with mainland Chinese customers and business partners, and also are able to deal effectively with overseas companies, customers and business partners in the way that those companies would expect to be dealt with. Because China today is still a mix of people coming from state company experiences and domestic and foreign private company experiences, the overall numbers of Chinese middle managers and senior managers with the experience of running proper corporations or departments 100% along world class lines is still limited. In five or ten years, the expertise of Chinese managers will be truly outstanding, as today's junior managers and middle managers hone their skills. We recruit middle managers today for middle management roles, because we know that they are valuable recruits today and critical for tomorrow's CEO, CFO and VP placements. Right now, we are seeing in China many fully able world class managers, a larger number of managers with hybrid Chinese and foreign business styles, and a larger number that only could perform within their existing Chinese business models.

One somewhat different aspect of China recruitment is finding people who are suitable for joint ventures. While JV's are found in every country, there is a perception by some clients that entering into a joint venture in China with a local partner is a "high stakes" proposition, bringing a potential of high gain along with potentially high risk. So when we look for a General Manager or Finance head who is to be the prime contact person with the JV partner, a special person must be found. Some people can work perfectly well in monitoring a JV with a state partner, while others only would be good with a private sector JV partner. Also, the goals of JV's in China can vary significantly: it could be a transition for the foreign company to buy out a local partner, it could be a pure partnership, or it could be primarily a mechanism for funding or modernizing a local partner in return for a stake in future profits. JV General Managers or Finance Directors anywhere are always in a sort of high risk business model, regardless of the country, but in China, where cost accounting, manufacturing cost, and balance sheets are somewhat new concepts, it sometimes is hard for a prospective partner to fully understand what the local partner brings to the table, can bring to the table, or what it might take off the table. Each type of business model requires a manager suited to those ends. Most important is that the person be a trusted monitor and negotiator on behalf of our client's interests.

Q2. Is there still a "hardship" premium for postings to China?

A2: We are very leery of any foreign candidate in China or any person seeking a position in China who feels the place is a "hardship posting." In remote provincial areas, some special allowances might be quite justifiable, including for Chinese nationals relocated to those jobs, but in Beijing or Shanghai, a person calling for "hardship" premiums is probably someone that we would not be able to help.

It kind of reminds me of the story that used to circulate a decade ago about how a cost of a cup of decaffeinated coffee in a Tokyo hotel restaurant was \$20. My comment to that is either don't order decaf in a Tokyo 5-star hotel (drink tea instead), or don't leave your country if you exactly want to recreate every shred of your past life, brick by brick, in another country. Certainly don't expect that a prospective employer is going to happily coach you on to extract such benefits from their budget. A person who starts out feeling that China is a hardship posting probably should not be in China. There are benefits and problems in living in every city in the world. To a degree, "everything is negotiable," but if the China job seeker is primarily focused on expat benefits, we get nervous that they might be more interested in locking in big amounts of cash and a luxurious lifestyle, rather than concentrating on the bottom line: making our client's mission successful. Success involves commitment to a market, and success involves some sacrifice and risk taking. If the person comes into a tough job with all the comforts locked into an ironclad, long-term contract, where is the motivation to work hard? If an employer had to choose between two very closely matched candidates, one already living in China who only wanted a good salary, bonus and decent benefits package, versus another candidate who wanted all that plus a hefty expat package, which candidate do you think that the employer might regard more favorably? No employer is in a position to give away free money. If they are offering an expat package, it's likely because that candidate was the best candidate interviewed for the job.

Many international executive search firms sometimes seem to push high cost expat candidates on their clients without even seriously considering capable local candidates with bankable credentials. We do not specialize in

expatriate recruitment. Some percentage of our placements involve expat assignments, but every job search that we take on, regardless of the country, assumes that we should first try to find candidates already in that city or country. In some cases, a client can consider bringing in people from other cities or countries, and they might be willing to consider reasonable expat benefits on a case-by-case basis. Some candidates might have requirements such as school fees or housing allowances, but these candidates might be competing with very good local candidates who don't need the employer to pay their food and rent, and who do not carry with their candidacy other such up-front burdens. The decision to consider one candidate with a reasonable total cost versus another with a higher set of requirements is left to the employer. We leave it to the employer to weigh the pluses and minuses of each candidate. Since our candidates are in 100 countries, we have a broad database of people to consider, depending upon the client's budget and needs. If the employer has no budgetary limits to bringing in managers from abroad, that is not a problem for us, of course.

Nowadays, we see people in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, North America and Europe who are willing to take a job in China and who do not even ask for the cost of a plane ticket, because they perceive that there are great opportunities in mainland China. The person who might speak of a hardship premium for a posting in Shanghai or Beijing these days might be a person who is only half interested in the place or the opportunity. This more than likely would be a person who overestimates his or her own current market value, or underestimates the capabilities of his or her competition.

Q3. What are the main attractions of a China posting for candidates?

A3. The most obvious attraction is probably the vastness of personal career opportunities. Just to discuss finance jobs, a person who is currently a finance director at a hum-drum job might be pegged for a China VP of Finance job at a multinational engaged in financing a vast China market expansion plan, or a very exciting startup that might make him or her a millionaire. Currently, the economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, the U.S., Europe, and Japan have been slow, so many foreign firms are seriously focusing their attention on countries like China. This interest, as well as an expansion amongst local Chinese companies, causes there to be many interesting management opportunities for Chinese nationals and foreign professionals alike.

Having good work experiences in China is seen as an asset in most resumes of senior and middle management candidates. If you are a foreigner considering a job in China, the likelihood is that when you return to your home country after a China assignment, your profile might possibly be raised in the view of employers. It is one thing to "think global," and it's another thing to have actually "been global."

The quality of the work in China, again only discussing finance jobs, can be very exciting. This is a country where much of the groundwork of creating formal finance structures, institutions and systems has only barely begun. A person who in his or her home country might not have the opportunity to make deals with the big players, much less help create financial systems, institutions and mechanisms for a country or industry, might possibly have the chance to do so in China.

Some people come to China because their family origins are in China and they would like to broaden their understanding of China.

Some people are returning migrants from abroad who, after several years working in foreign countries, feel that their best prospects are in serving as bridges between the country of their birth and the country of their professional lives.

Some people go to China in search of the proverbial proposition of selling their product or service to a billion people. These people might be motivated by big dreams or big money - or both.

Q4. What are the main drawbacks of a China posting for candidates?

A4. This answer really depends upon the location and the candidate. There can be a wide variety of issues that could make a China posting wrong for any one person. We therefore would highly recommend that a foreigner who has some interest in a China posting do a lot of research about the place in advance of considering applying for a job in China. In a thousand ways, life in China is not the same as in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore, and even having Chinese fluency does not guarantee that one would be happy working in China or would be successful. Because of the many personal variables involved in such postings, ART tends to recommend to its client companies people who are already well experienced in or well established in the target city and market, be they Chinese nationals or foreigners. We think that by focusing on such candidates, we help minimize everyone's risk of failure.

Q5. Can you give an estimate of the increase/decrease in demand by international firms for candidates willing to relocate to China?

A5. Our firm specifically prides itself on trying to present local candidates on six continents, so most employers coming to ART seeking managers for mainland China or other countries usually do not look for us to present them with people who are not already in the country where they need the person to be based. Often, in fact, many employers contact us to help find the replacement for their past or current expat managers. Typically it is a situation where the person being replaced is the "first generation" manager being rotated back to the home country. In other cases, it is a case of the person simply having failed, often due to lack of local language skills, lack of local business contacts, or a limited understanding of local business culture. If anything, we are seeing a greater demand for high calibre, internationally trained or internationally experienced local Chinese managers to run Chinese operations. There can be quite a challenge in finding these candidates, but they will be the future, and companies that are lucky enough to snatch these people up will have, in our opinion, a much better chance of success than putting in charge a foreign manager who might describe himself as a "China expert," but who, shockingly too often, is usually a person who is not even capable of reading the day's weather report in a local Chinese language newspaper.

Q6. Any other issue you feel may be of interest to international employers looking to place staff in mainland China?

A6. Too often executive compensation in China is tragically misperceived by foreign companies without regard to either the supply and demand of appropriate candidates or without regard to the value that a really good local Chinese candidate can bring to a foreign employer. What we sometimes see is this potentially reckless and simplistic thought process by some employers: "Wages in China are a fraction of our own, so a Chinese general manager's salary should therefore be a fraction of a general manager's in our own country." Yes, it is true that the average general manager in China is much lower paid than the average general manager in most industrialized countries, but in China, an average general manager is someone who does not speak English well or at all, has never worked for a foreign company, and whose conception of profit and loss is one that a foreign company would never consider acceptable in running their China business unit.

The profile that most foreign companies seek for China is not the "average general manager." Rather, it would probably be something closer to the average one-tenth of one percent of the Chinese private sector industrial managerial class. These are the people who might have U.S. MBA's, who might have worked or lived in Europe, the US or Singapore, whose English is fluent, who perfectly understand foreign conceptions of business success and failure, and who have successful track records in China working as senior managers or general managers of foreign firms in China. Their salaries are high by Chinese standards because they are worth every penny, and their skills are constantly sought out by foreign firms. The first, easiest and worst mistake a foreign employer can ever make in entering the China market is to underpay their top local management team. Either you will not be successful in hiring the best managers that you need to shepherd your products and services properly into the Chinese market, or you will soon find that your key managers are giving you notice, because of the many opportunities offered them by your competitors and others, who do understand the value that their knowledge,

skills, contacts and personal integrity can bring their companies.

INTERVIEW With "CFO Asia" - a publication of The Economist Group

<http://www.cfoasia.com>

CFO Asia editor Jennifer Lee asked ART's Managing Director to comment on recent changes

Atlantic Research Technologies, L.L.C. (ART), www.atlanticresearch.com, is a global executive search firm, recruiting in the industrial, high tech and service sectors, for senior- and middle-management positions in general management, sales and marketing, finance, supply chain, manufacturing, IT, and human resources.

CFO Asia: How will Bank Negara's newly announced involvement in helping Malaysia's banks to check out their CFO candidates affect the ability of these banks to recruit for the posts of CFO?

ART: "The Central Bank already had the power to approve CEO's and board members, so perhaps we should not be shocked that the oversight loop is now closed with the vetting of CFO's. One problem, however is that there's a theory that whenever government wants to tell you who manages your company, it's time to leave that country. There's a possibility that Bank Negara's honorable stated desire to enhance transparency and corporate governance, might inadvertently drive out investors, as well as the most promising Malaysian banking executives, just when Malaysia needs them. There are already many places in Asia to invest, and this new regulation runs the risk of causing the best and the brightest to go to more open markets. Developing countries such as Malaysia have been trying to improve corporate governance and transparency in order to make their countries better for their national industries and more attractive for foreign investment. One hopes that in this case, the regulators will be playing the role of honest umpire in the process of evaluating CFO's, so that management can pick their own team, while the country can expect that their banks will be properly and honestly managed. In that scenario, if managers are to be chosen according to their competence and honesty, then everyone should be better off."

INTERVIEW with "The Business Times"

(Singapore)

<http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/home>

Full Interview by Lynn Lee with ART's Managing Director

Topic: "Choosing an MBA Programme"

Question 1) Do all employers look for postgraduate qualifications? What is the most preferred qualification?

Answer: "Corporations typically call us in to help them identify people who are already in the upper management or middle management ranks. When recruiting these candidates, most companies, large and small, Singaporean

and international, usually look first and foremost at the candidate's employment experience, and at his or her achievements and management style. A person with a truly outstanding employment record can get a great senior management job without an MBA or other advanced degrees, but sometimes companies might decide that they only will interview candidates with MBA's or, if they are looking at candidates with similar achievements and abilities, they might give an edge to the one with the MBA. For manufacturing, operations or supply chain jobs, an engineering degree coupled with an MBA sometimes is more favorably viewed for management jobs than master's degrees in technical fields. In IT, engineering and R&D, technical master's and doctorate degrees are highly regarded, but, in some companies, technical people with MBA's are often given top opportunities for management, even over Ph.D.'s."

Question 2) Do candidates who have an MBg *the Righ*

A degree stand a better chance of being hired?

Answer: "Candidates with MBA's almost never suffer by having an MBA, but it doesn't guarantee that it will get one the job. When interviewing for a job that requires an MBA, it might be interesting for the candidate to ask the employer why they think the MBA is important for the job. Their answer might then serve as a springboard for the candidate to feed back evidence of how indeed she or he has developed these favored attributes through business school training. It might give some useful insight into the management style of the company. Some companies might just see the MBA as a trophy, while other companies might have very specific beliefs about the value of b-school case studies, finance training, management theory, etc. and their relevance to the job to be done.

"Throughout the world, our firm particularly prides itself on identifying local, as opposed to expatriate, senior and middle managers. Many of our worldwide clients - Asian, American, European, Latin American, Middle Eastern and African - often regard the candidate with an MBA as a person with a more "modern" or "American-style" business outlook, and since this type of business model is currently in favor, in Asia, Europe or other regions, a management candidate having an MBA might be offered as evidence of one's commitment to a more "aggressive" or "world class" management style. In countries where socialistic, paternalistic, old fashioned or hierarchical business management styles have dominated, an MBA can be valuable not only as a personal window on a different way to do business, but it might be of tremendous value in convincing top employers to consider one seriously for substantial management responsibilities.

"There are some industries and job titles in which not having an MBA degree will likely keep one from reaching the highest ranks. In many large multinationals and in most high tech startups, it just seems that very few CFO's do not have MBA's. And it is very rare to see a VP of Sales and Marketing at a large multinational without an MBA. For the very top corporate positions at many North American companies it can be considered a red mark against a candidate if he or she does not have an MBA. The same also was true in the Internet industry, where dotcom executives having top MBA's became a tremendous cliché. The sad irony here is that the Dotcom Bubble is a great example where the MBA was used as a trophy to lure investor confidence and money, while, at the same time, the lessons from business school in creating sound business models seemed to be ignored in favor of pure greed. Nowadays the surviving internet companies are scrutinizing management candidates far more closely, and they are more interested in people whose ideas might bring long lasting stockholder value, rather than a "fast buck." They are much more open now to people without MBA's, because in that industry, a whole lot of very well educated people showed that degrees in themselves cannot replace solid business experience and logical judgment."

Question 3) Does it matter where you received your MBA or the duration of your course? Do employers tend to prefer those who have MBA's from prestigious institutions?

Answer: "Too much depends upon specifics about the hiring manager's own background and it might be difficult to know how one's MBA is going to be viewed by a hiring manager or by the various decision makers at a company.

We have seen all sorts of scenarios. You might believe that, for example, employers having top US MBA's themselves might absolutely want to see candidates only with MBA's from those schools. By the "one hires in one's image" rule, this might be so, but we have also seen a lot of these managers look more to the personality or work experience of the candidate than the "brand" of MBA they possess. Perhaps coming from these "top" schools themselves, they know first hand that not every one of their classmates was particularly smart, practical, or the kind of person that they would want to work with. Then there is the type of hiring manager who is just plain jealous of the person with the MBA from the prestigious school and he or she cannot see beyond his or her own prejudice in evaluating the pluses and minuses of the individual.

"Right at this moment, we are presenting a candidate to run a key marketing group for a multi-billion dollar American corporation. She graduated from a leading Asian university and then went on to a top US business school for her MBA. But that is not why they are interested in her. It is rather that she has many years' of achievements in their industry and that she could be an immediate contributor. The excellent overview that her business school training provided her perhaps helped shape the way that she evaluated certain business situations and how she responded to opportunities or problems that came up in business, but her success in business is really because of her mind and innate management ability and exposures at the companies where she worked.

"Our recommendation to people interested in pursuing advanced studies is simple: study what you do well in and do the best you can, alongside the best students and professors possible. In our experience, the people who really do the best in their fields and who are given top managerial jobs, regardless of what schools they attended, are those who most enjoy their work. Their enthusiasm and creativity spurs them toward greatness and naturally makes them leaders. If you are a really good engineer or computer scientist and love improving your technical knowledge, go for a technical graduate degree, and if you are naturally inclined toward management, your talents will be recognized at the right company. If you are in business and people are telling you that the path to management is only with an MBA, don't listen to them, particularly if you hate statistics, accounting or management theory. An MBA alone does not guarantee or teach anyone to be a good manager. The companies that we represent on six continents like people with active minds and they usually have programs to encourage people to pursue higher studies and training, to better their managerial and technical knowledge base, but also to keep these great people happy at the company."

INTERVIEW with "Science's Next Wave"
(Singapore)

<http://nextwave.sciencemag.org/sq/>

Full Interview by Dr. Jennie Wong with ART's Managing Director

Topic: Preparing Oneself for an Ever-Changing and Increasingly Tight Job Market

Question 1: In an increasingly technology-driven economy, is there a trend towards preference for multi-disciplinary trained personnel in industries?

Yes, and this is what people often are referring to when they say, "I wear a lot of hats." It used to be that startup firms, due to lack of resources, required a single person to fulfill several managerial or technical tasks. But now, that culture has crept into large multinationals, as well, and it is not uncommon to see people with multi-disciplinary experiences or training. In fact, these people often are those who are promoted through the management ranks. For example, in an electro-optics engineering group, a person whose training is in Physics (Optics) might also have a Mechanical or Electronic Engineering degree. That person might be considered a good candidate for Manager of an Optics group, because it is thought that such a person could better see all sides of the

technology, and therefore be able to relate to all groups in the department. Now, taking this further, if that same person chose at some point to move into a manufacturing orientation from a purely R&D role, then that person might later be seen as a good candidate for a Director or VP of Engineering and Operations, and this as a stepping stone to COO. Now, on the other hand, if the R&D/ Engineering Manager had a particular flair for understanding customers and was a very good communicator, perhaps that person might go into a technical marketing role, even perhaps picking up an MBA, and advancing later to head a Sales and Marketing group. In many technology firms, technical people who become heads of Sales and Marketing are often prime candidates for CEO or CTO roles. In a very large number of firms, the resumes of the CEO's, COO's, CMO's and CTO's belong to people who tend to be "multi-disciplinary" in their education, work experiences, markets or job titles.

This is not to say that one who wants to focus on being "the best" in a very specific field or technology should derail their dreams simply for the sake of trends. Multi-disciplinary backgrounds often help provide more job opportunities, but it all depends upon the person. The best advice that I could give would be for one to follow one's own interests and abilities, and always keep an eye on current job trends. It's important to keep some sort of perspective on reality, and to also know that it is possible also to become so over-multidisciplinary that one might be considered "a jack of all trades and a master of none" -- that is, a person with so many varied experiences with thin experiences in each, and then be considered less desired in the job market. "More isn't always better." Quality is what really counts.

Question 2: Do you think that getting an additional qualification in another discipline, rather than in one's primary discipline makes a graduate more employable?

This greatly depends upon the field and the industry. Sometimes an employer wants to see a very intensive and narrow specialization, while others might like to see diverse experiences. For example, if you are applying for a scientist job at an electronics firm that specializes in signal processing, that company might not like to see that person spend time during the interview talking about their business or accounting training. They might wonder if the person's best interests would be served in that job in the lab. But, say, if that same company did research that required significant customization and visits to sites around the world, a suggestion that that person had both a mind for science and for business might be very well received.

Question 3: Is super-specialization out of favor in today's increasingly cross-disciplinary approach in science and technology?

Clearly there are more requests for people with a cross-disciplinary approach, but there still are needs for really good "super-specialists," - the "gurus." Sometimes in fact an industry might seem to be recruiting all at once thousands of people who only know one very narrow specialty. This is especially true in the software world. But in a business and technology environment that is changing very rapidly, there are more career risks with hoping that one's specialization will forever be in demand.

Question 4: In your view, what type of skills set will be in greatest demand in the next five to ten years?

Since it would take too much time to discuss each technical specialization's innovations and promises, and since technology-guessing would also require a crystal ball, I'll restrict myself to a discussion of general skills.

Strong communications skills are and will continue to be very important for technical people. In the "old days," there was a big chasm between the "engineer's mind" or the "scientist's mind" and the "mind of the businessperson," those people that scientists and engineers usually derided as "the talkers." Those were the days when literally, technical people and sales and marketing people rarely interacted, and they might actually have been housed in separate buildings or cities. Scientists in R&D and marketing people rarely spoke, and engineers never got to meet customers. During the '90's these walls really started to break down between departments. In manufacturing industries, it became clear that product excellence didn't come about by having sales and marketing in one place conceptualizing a product and telling engineering to design it, and then for engineering to design it

and to tell manufacturing to make it, and then for manufacturing to throw the product over the wall at the end and to tell the quality assurance people to "inspect it and make sure that it be passed on to shipping." Now, with costs of new product introductions and R&D being so high, and sometimes with razor-thin profit margins, companies want technical and business people to work together, to communicate frequently, to build quality in at the front end, and to think in terms of pleasing the customers. It is not uncommon for engineers in large companies to be rotated among marketing, sales or finance groups, in part to train them to be the multidisciplinary managers of the future, but also to provide immediate technical input to non-technical departments. In the case of startups or medium sized companies, it is now very typical for technical and business people to be working together intimately and constantly. A saleswoman might herself be an engineer who is overseeing product design, and an engineer might be sent out to a trade show to meet customers or investors. So as part of being a technical person, just as you might need to have taken calculus, you need now to expose yourself to making formal and informal presentations. This could be in a formal classroom setting, such as taking a foreign language course, including conversation modules (not just recitation of grammar rules), literature courses (which force you to read a lot and write a lot), or going for an MBA. Even extracurricular activities such as participating in a debate club, radio station, or business club could help expose you to opportunities to make formal presentations that will prepare you for your future career as a technical person.

International business will become ever more important, and in the case of Singapore, an ability to understand other cultures well will be more critical than ever. Solid English speaking and writing skills will continue to be important, as will solid Mandarin speaking and writing skills. And other Asian languages could be very useful for business, such as Japanese, Korean and Cantonese. Bahasa will become very valuable as Malaysia steps up as a major technology producer (and an employer of Singaporeans) and as Indonesia stabilizes as a major manufacturing center. Thai and Vietnamese might also become particularly useful as their industrial development moves forward. In Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Tamil, German and Russian each will be spoken by tens or hundreds of millions of potential future customers who need to be reached by expanding Singaporean businesses. Beyond learning languages, understanding the countries that speak these languages could be very valuable, and that might mean taking a summer session in another country or a year abroad. Not only would the experience be invaluable for personal enrichment, but also employers would see a greater receptivity to working with colleagues and customers. Not only in five to ten years, but right now, many companies are structured intercontinentally, with design or research or marketing or manufacturing groups spread across many countries.

This trend will continue, and Singaporean technical people who can communicate effectively with neighbors and people in faraway countries will be critical to Singapore's success. Once employed, it might be a very useful experience to seek an international posting. And it might not even be the most desirable thing to get a posting to Silicon Valley or Shanghai - where everyone else might be going. Imagine being the only Singaporean posted with a multinational in Brazil or South Africa? These experiences could provide you with insight that most other Singaporeans will never have, and in the process, you could make yourself potentially very valuable to employers. If you are looking for a marketing job in China or California, how much competition do you expect to face? But what if you are one of only a few in your field who really knows Latin America or Africa? In the next five to ten years onward, Singaporean industry and employees will face a lot of competition, particularly in the easy or obvious markets explored so far. Soon it will be critical for Singaporean entrepreneurs to have employees who really know the entire world. Simply knowing English and Chinese will not be enough, because millions of mainland Chinese will also be bilingual in English and Chinese in ten years. It's what you can do with these language skills that will matter. And it's important to always remember that yesterday's underdeveloped country is today's industrializing country and tomorrow's technological country, and at each stage of development, they are your potential customers.

Nowadays there is a lot of soul-searching about Singaporean competitiveness, because the discussions usually end up going for the line that "everyone is a competitor," but really, there are tremendous opportunities for Singaporeans if one's workforce is prepared to look for what is not so obvious. Singapore's potential customer base is vast, and that only a tiny percentage of them have been yet reached. Whether it's stringing solar arrays across the Sahara to electrify Africa, or selling tomorrow's version of multimedia products to entertain several billion world teenagers in the next decade, there are lots of opportunities for Singaporean technical people who see

the benefits of communicating with their customers.

Question 5: Under what circumstances would switching fields in early or mid-career be advisable? How should one prepare for the ultimate move?

Sometimes you have to switch fields in early or mid career and sometimes you just want to do so. It might be that your first job out of school was in a field or company or product area that you simply dislike. Perhaps it was an offer that seemed hard to ignore, or perhaps family or friends suggested that you take that job. If you really dislike the situation you're in, you need to leave it as soon as possible, because the more time that you spend in that job, the greater is the chance that employers will "type cast" you as being only good for that field, market or product. Similarly, if you are stuck in a job in a field or market or technology that is dying out or that is offering few good opportunities in the place where you want to live, you need to change jobs before it is too late. It might seem that the likely move is to go to a headhunter to hear about other opportunities, but since most search firms are paid by their client companies to find people currently experienced in the target job, not just people from other fields desiring to enter that field, you might find that headhunters cannot be of much help. The solution in that case is to look for a transition job, which will get you out of your current situation and toward your new goal, while still capitalizing on your strengths and current experiences. In these cases, headhunters might be of valuable assistance, because often their hardest to fill jobs are for jobs requiring a person with one foot in one field, and one foot in another.

Remember, always assume that you are competing with candidates who have done exactly what the employer needs. This isn't always true, but it's better to assume the worst when you are changing careers. From most employers' standpoints, no matter how desirous you are of changing careers and no matter how experienced you are in your departing career, if you have not done the job required, you are considered an "entry level" applicant. So if you have been working in engineering at a top computer company for five years and have a high salary, but you want to go into sales at a telecom services company, for example, you are really competing at the level of a person fresh out of school with the salary requirement that is way out of line for your experience in sales. An easier approach to entering the sales world from engineering, for example, is to seek jobs as a sales engineer, applications engineer or technical marketer. An employer then might really appreciate your technical training, even if it is in a different field, and they might like the fact that you want to be with customers in a sales environment. After a few years in this new role, you might apply internally for a job in sales, or you might be able to look elsewhere, now with some relevant sales credentials. By taking these transitional paths, you can avoid the pitfalls of unemployment or having to take pay cuts to get toward your goal. Also, by taking gradual steps toward your goal, you can gain actual exposure to your target career, and you might actually discover that years ago you made the right choice going into engineering or going for your Ph.D. And because your move wasn't a drastic one, it still might be possible to go back to your original career path, and this time, you might have even more options because employers often like technical people who are risk takers.

Question 6: With rapidly changing economic trends, widespread restructuring and job cuts in the private sectors and an increasingly competitive job market, how could one stay relevant and competent?

It is important to always listen to what your colleagues are doing at other companies in your industry, and to be aware of what might be happening to them. Sometimes headhunters also can give some insight into industry trends in your field. It is typical to find oneself submerged in one's daily work, to the point that it seems that there never is time to chat with old classmates, to attend industry conferences, professional organization meetings, or user group meetings, but these extracurricular gatherings might be the best way to hear specifics about industry changes that could be affecting your career even if it isn't obvious at your workplace. You could be working at a small company or even a large company that appears to have their own unique, almost insulated, business culture, and your boss could assure you that "you are a member of the family and will be taken care of." But in reality, no company, no matter how good or well-funded it is, can remain aloof forever to world trends in their industry. Your company might value you tremendously, but even if they wish you the best, your particular on the job training and exposures might limit your career opportunities. Remember, most companies view their employees as "parts of a

whole," as a team that together are to produce profits. In this simple formula, few companies seriously contemplate that by narrowly defining their employee's daily duties and experiences, they could be limiting that person's professional growth, and ultimately, creating a person whose skills could become too narrow, overpriced or outdated. When many companies decide to lay off such an employee, they usually only look at their justification for laying off a "square peg for a square hole" in an increasingly peg-less world, rather than examining their own years of neglect or short sightedness that never gave that person a chance to adapt to the new work environment.

Even if you love your boss and your boss loves you, you are the captain of your own career, and it is necessary to not assume that your company will train you or keep your skills up to date or will pay you what you are really worth. Try to request that your employer give you new challenges or assignments that could help you gain valuable experiences and exposures. Other times you might need certain state of the art equipment, instruments, or software that might keep your skills relevant and your marketability high. Further training or university studies might be valuable to keep skills fresh. In many cases, simply being around people who know more than you, or whose professional depth synergizes well with yours, can help keep you at your best. This might mean asking for a transfer to another department or company location.

In many cases, however, it simply is difficult to really grow professionally, and to keep your skills up to date, without taking a job at another company, sooner or later. In this job environment, it is difficult for most people to stay more than five years at any one company. In fact, even if one wanted to stay more than five years, most companies do not seem to last in their current configurations for five years. Mergers, acquisitions, product sell-offs, technology changes, and financial shocks, might suddenly cause an otherwise happy employee to suddenly be "on the market." That's precisely why one needs to keep one's skills high. And that's why it's always a good idea to have your best resume up to date and for you to be willing to consider superior career opportunities at better firms even if you have a job. As headhunters will tell you, "The worst time to look for a new job is when you need a job." But that's another story.