

Empowering Expatriate Women

When Dorota Klop-Sowinska of DoSo! Coaching and Counseling says she has “been there, done that”, there is neither flippancy nor arrogance in her statement, simply the fundamental basis for her very specific coaching services.

Dorota has taken her own experiences - as an international executive and as an expat wife, employed as well as unemployed - and used them to create tailor-made coaching services for women dealing with transition; be it physical or emotional. Her particular focus lies in assisting women who are going through change, be that the result of a move, career switch, or motherhood. As she points out, “...some transitions are more obvious than others, but there are few that don't require some form of external support.”

The Expected Path

Like many of her compatriots, Dorota, who is originally from Poland, took the expected route in her studies. While in her heart she wanted to study psychology, this did not seem like a practical choice at the time. A degree in Economics from the Warsaw School of Economics eventually led her to a career with an international car leasing firm. After years of an ‘up in the air’ work and lifestyle, Dorota eventually settled in Amsterdam. As many before her, the ‘love pat’ syndrome played a large part in this decision. Following the birth of her daughter in 2007, Dorota realised she did not want to return to her former work patterns but rather wanted to pursue something she was passionate about.

Pursuing Passion

To follow her passion, Dorota did what she now ‘preaches’ in her coaching: know what you want and pursue it wholeheartedly. When she applied to the Nederlandse Academie voor Psychotherapie (Dutch Academy for Psychotherapy) her application was sceptically taken under consideration. The fact that she was not a native Dutch speaker, plus her past professional training and background were of concern to the admissions board. Determination, dedication, and ‘pulling

everything out of the hat’ won the day, though, and in 2009 she graduated from the Academie as an accredited Coach and Counsellor. In her own words, “...I am proof that it is never too late, nor impossible, to achieve something you truly dream about.” As for her language skills, she is able to provide her coaching services in Dutch and English, as well as Polish.

During an expatriate posting to Brazil, Dorota took advantage of the opportunity to apply her skills to those she most wanted to help, expat women. On a small local scale she started workshops for women to assist them in finding an answer to the questions “who am I?” “what are my talents?” “what do I want?” - in this transition to being an expat wife and/or unemployed and/or a mother. The workshops were met and reviewed with success, and since her return to the Netherlands, Dorota has been expanding upon these services, offering individual and group coaching sessions for women with the aim of helping them during their transition to who they are - by finding a way that they can make the best of the opportunities the transition offers. DoSo! is not simply an abbreviation of Dorota's name; it is a play on words regarding the mission behind her purpose: to support, encourage, and assist expat women so that they can make the best of their transition.

Inspiring One Another

Dorota's ambition for 2011 is to organise various events which will bring expat women together. The underlying theme for these events is personal development, but as Dorota says “... it is also very important that expat women have a chance to meet each other, exchange their experiences, share knowledge and inspire one another”. In January 2011, Dorota will be starting new group coaching sessions, Woman on Her Career Path, tailored to expat women who want to further develop their career. The sessions will be geared towards women

who are looking for new professional challenges, who want to start their own business, or who want to find a career that travels with them wherever they go. Another project Dorota is developing is a Retreat weekend where women will have a chance, without distractions, to focus on themselves, their dreams and goals for 2011.

Corporate Package for Individual Growth

Dorota has learned from the experiences of her clients, as well as her own, how vital the well-being of a partner and family is to the functioning of a new expat employee. "An unsatisfied partner is essentially a distraction for the employee," says Dorota, "and this can be anticipated and overcome if businesses invest in ensuring that their employees' partners and families settle in well in their new country." And with 'settling' Dorota is not referring to the obvious steps such as finding housing, schools, arranging paperwork, etc., but rather all that follows once the obvious is done. In her opinion, providing partners with assistance in dealing with the tangible issues is not enough. Increasingly, the partners are also highly educated women who have left a career behind, and who are struggling to find and discover opportunities for themselves. These opportunities may be employment in a new country, but could also be discovering new passions, and exploring new directions. Without a strong personal network it is even more difficult for expat women to find the path towards opportunity.

Dorota has put together a corporate package *Making Holland Your Second Home*, that allows forward-thinking businesses to offer their employees' female partners with the extra 'settling' services they may require to truly settle in at an expat posting - here or elsewhere. The package she has put together consists of building blocks. For those arriving in the Netherlands there is an acculturation block. All the other blocks lend themselves for use not only by those who arrive here, but also for instance for Dutch employees heading out on a first-time expat posting. From her business background, Dorota is able to see that it "... simply makes sense to invest in the partner, so that you can benefit fully from the employee".

Opportunities vs. Restrictions

Particularly for first-time expats, the fear of the unknown can be very inhibiting. For Dorota and many successful expats, it is discovering opportunities rather than focusing on what is being given up that is the key. From her own experiences - the 'been there done that' mentioned earlier - she is able to open the doors to opportunities that await her clients, thus reduc-



ing the fear of the unknown, and preparing expat women for what lies ahead. It is all about empowering expat women to discover who they are and to become 'that person' - wherever they may be.

Expatriate women face many transitions which include, though are not limited to, relocating to a new country, giving up or losing a job, motherhood, and divorce. DoSo! provides the tools and a process through which each transition can be used in such a way that women are empowered. Dorota's own personal experience as well as her innate ability to listen and take a holistic approach to the individual means that she will help you find balance and discover opportunities.

DoSo! Coaching and Counseling is based in Amsterdam but offers services in The Hague as well. For more information visit www.dosocoaching.com or call Dorota on 06 132 536 55.