



Leading Across Cultures

**NBS ALUMNI GLOBAL EXPERIENCES**

**JAPAN**



**“THE TEAM THAT PLAYS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER. WE WERE ALL VERY CLOSE, WE WORKED HARD, AND CELEBRATED AS A FAMILY.”**

**Tan Hung Chua Clarence**  
Bachelor of Accountancy, 1992

Country of Origin: **Singapore**  
Lived in: **Cambodia, Japan, Thailand, USA, UK**

**Why Japan?**

I am born and bred in Singapore and only attended local schools. I am married with four kids and we now live in Singapore since January 2015.

I have always wanted to experience different work environments and cultures. Having missed out on overseas training in Pricewaterhouse, I took the next opportunity in Cambodia with Raffles International. It was a very humbling experience working away from home. When the opportunity to grow my career in IHG in Japan came along, my family and I did not hesitate.

**The job search**

My first real job was with Pricewaterhouse. Having interned there during my second year in university, I was fortunate to have been accepted. I will be forever grateful to Pricewaterhouse for my first professional gig.



**Pro Tips**

**Living in Japan**

- Care through the tough times. The Japanese culture has very strong nationalistic embodiments. I witnessed the solidarity and relentless single-mindedness of the Japanese people during the 2011 tsunami recovery efforts.
- Personal and professional growth. Our family's outlook is broader and more adventurous and we see life through a different perspective.
- So many things to be thankful for – the seasons, the weather, the food, the fruits; the efficiency, the infrastructure and the safety.
- Cross cultural thinking and solutions. I learnt that to grow my career I have to be mobile and willing to explore new challenges.
- Adapt. Assimilate. Don't hesitate. Learn the language.



**Working in Japan**

- Patience always pays off. As I embarked on cultural onboarding, I found friendly but different ways of working—very traditional.
- It's a rollercoaster ride. From enjoying the new environment to managing a crisis, all in my first 90 days – the 2011 tsunami, earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. Then came the financial and economic recovery. Everyone chimed in to help each other, as did the Singapore embassy and I made more friends then.
- Learn the ropes. Quickly. The do's and don'ts and work ethics are vital. Local agencies along with my work predecessors helped onboard "Gaijins" or foreigners like me.
- Hierarchy is everywhere. It was a journey from CEO, the boss to a partnership through the crisis and now some lifelong friends. Japan is very hierarchical and when you try to mingle with the local managers, they are often uneasy and it takes a long while for them to warm up.
- Listen to the team, understand their culture, understand their constraints and work with them to unlock myths. Learn together and have fun.
- I managed about 40 hotels and had about 80 people in the office. It's important to make friends, appreciate the small gestures, and listen well always.

**Most sought-after characteristics in the workplace**

- A spirit of curiosity and adventure. Willingness to unlearn. Learn new experiences and gain knowledge.



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