

Why Global CEOs Should Live and Work Globally



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Within any corporation, there's an inevitable focus, both inside and outside the organization, on the chief executive's actions. Every move is scrutinized, its impact exaggerated.

That spotlight isn't surprising, of course. No matter how large the organization or how strong the management team may be, there's only one chief executive officer. So the CEO sneezes, and people around the world wonder if he's got pneumonia or if the company is ailing. If she's in a good mood, employees and outsiders alike assume that the business is humming.

This inevitable attention has important implications for every chief executive. From my own perspective, as someone who is leading a rapidly expanding global firm that seeks to redefine the way that the executive search industry operates, it's been essential for me to keep in mind that many matters, including my decisions about how I spend my time, reverberate throughout CTPartners.

I can't just tell our 350 firm members worldwide that a particular practice area, product line, or business region is important to our firm's development. I need to show them, by making tangible choices that illustrate my personal involvement and commitment.

Earlier this year, I announced to my colleagues at CTPartners that I would be relocating to London for two

months. I planned to attend client development pitches, participate in partner meetings, help bridge the continuing development of our London and Paris offices, and do much more while, of course, also performing my other responsibilities as the chief executive of our organization.



My goal was simple: During a period of significant worldwide expansion for our firm, I wanted to emphasize that we truly are a global corporation. Every region is essential to our success. Every professional can, and should, make an essential contribution.

Did I have any expectations about what it would be like to work and live globally, as a global CEO? Maybe it's more accurate to say that I had a hope: to do my job as usual while also allowing myself to become part of the fabric of the London office. Along with everything that this would convey throughout the firm, I knew that it would help me gain more penetrating insights into the challenges, opportunities, even frustrations that our European colleagues confront. That's invaluable.

I brought along photos and

knickknacks from my New York office because they helped show people that this wasn't just a run-through. Much more important, my wife Pam and twin daughters moved to London with me for those two months. This was another powerful way of showing my commitment. And I think that it had a great impact when Pam and the kids were able to spend time with other CTPartners families while we lived there.

For any global CEO considering a similar move, here's the good news: I was able to maintain the same pace of work, admittedly on a slightly different schedule, with complete consistency of my worldwide business communications. I led CTPartners through our expansion into Latin America, with the opening of three new offices. I traveled to a number of our international offices, including Singapore, Hong Kong, and New York. I was interviewed by members of the press. Nothing changed.

Or did it? One of our consultants who has worked for years in the Asia Pacific region tells a story about a global CEO who traveled to Australia for a vacation and never even bothered to visit his firm's Sydney office. What did his actions convey to people inside that overlooked office — and throughout the organization? I keep coming back to the image of being in the spotlight. The chief executive's actions, and choices, make all the difference. ■