

VIEW FROM THE TOP - BEATRICE O'BRIAN



New York based solicitor and founder of Attorney Placements International, **Beatrice O'Brian**, left Melbourne seven-years ago to pursue her dream to work at a major Wall Street law firm. She realized this dream a few years ago, and along the way found a way to make it easier for ex-pats who have the same destiny in mind. She speaks with Matthew Smith about the semi-worn path for budding lawyers from Australia to Manhattan.

So what led you to New York in the first place?

I came to New York at the end of 2000 from Australia. I did it the hard way; basically I went around to every law firm [in New York] asking for a job... I found it to be a very tough path, especially with kids, to practice in a Wall Street law firm. First of all I was lucky enough to get interviews, which doesn't happen with a lot of candidates.

And you finally got accepted to a firm in New York?

I got offered a position with Cadwalader Wickersham & Taft, which to me sounded perfect because I was interested in restructuring and reorganization. Rue Rinsky, who would have been, and probably still is, one of the top players in the restructuring world actually headed that department, and I worked for him so it was great experience. I spent two-years or so there and decided it wasn't really for me.

Then what did you do?

While I was working I had a lot of friends from Australia and elsewhere asking me what it was like [getting a job at a Wall Street law firm]. I always got the sense that people wanted to have experience working overseas, and that London was easier and New York was a little harder. So while I was there I started developing a side business to help Australians get qualifications in New York.

So what exactly do you offer?

I offer two things, I created something called the New York Bar Review Quality Program, which I started at the end of 2003 to train Australian law graduates to pass the bar exams in New York and California. Six-months later I started Attorney Placements International LLC because of the demand for candidates to join law firms after completing the Bar exam looking for job opportunities in the U.S. and London. There was clearly a need for foreign qualified candidates with common law degrees wanting to be qualified in New York or California.

How many graduates have you helped pass the Bar over here?

Since the end of 2003 I'd say an average of 300 per year have completed the Quality Review Program. Sixty per cent of those are Australians, 25 per cent from the UK, the remainder from Hong Kong, with smaller proportion from places like Pakistan, India, Nigeria and Quebec. So far I'd say a little less than 1,000 people in total.

Are Aussies known as quality candidates to partners at U.S. firms?

A lot of companies here didn't expect the quality, but I am finding they are very surprised.

Do you offer some sort of guarantee for passing the Bar for people who do your program?

If the person fails, which we hope they don't, we say you can sit the bar again, free of charge coming from our program. So if they fail, we basically give them the opportunity to repeat it. We have had some failures, but only because they haven't studied.

What arrangements have you made in the US that enables you to offer this bar program?

I have exclusive agreements with various lecturers here in New York... I am a member of the Committee for Legal Education and Admission to the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. There are various universities that support this whole program, I am not comfortable going into any more detail there... The most important part of this for me was ensuring the arrangements are exclusive, and then having the confidence when I went to Australia to