

JETAA.NY

Newsletter for The
Japan Exchange and
Teaching Program
Alumni Association,
New York Chapter

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LET'S HAPPY JOB SEARCH

an issue dedicated to providing JET alumni with some helpful advice for pounding the pavement and planning their futures

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Off to Work for a Japanese Company?

by John G. Crum, President of ima consulting, llc.

The news is not good; the U.S. economy seems set to slip into another recession, the national and New York City unemployment rates are inching up to 5.7% and 7.7% respectively, the Japanese economy continues to trudge along, mired in bad loans and companies kept on life support for appearances sake.

This is not the best time to be entering into the job market. Still, it's not the worst either. There are things you can do to land your dream job and things you can do further still to thrive once you are actually hired. This article will deal mostly with the latter and seek to provide with you clear picture regarding what your new employer, specifically your boss at a Japanese company, in this case, will expect from you and how you can succeed in your new role.

You're excited...full of pride. As well you should be! You've just landed your first "real" job upon returning from Japan. The company, a famous Japanese trading firm (or bank, insurance company, manufacturer, take your pick), chose you over a number of other qualified candidates.

It seems your new employers were impressed with your Japanese background and language skills. The interview though, was not what you expected; you prepared for a battery of tough questions and were prepared to be grilled on your strengths and weaknesses. Instead the two Japanese managers who interviewed you did not really give you a good sense of the job you were applying for ("sales assistant") instead, they focused on small talk such as whether or not you learned how to use chopsticks and what type of Japanese food you liked the most.

Your first day on the job, the question still begs to be answered: just what the heck does a "sales assistant" do anyway?

Based upon my 15 years of experience working in Human Resources with the Japanese, the situation described above ends invariably in either one of two ways. I will try to short-circuit the many unnecessary frustrations and challenges you will have, as most JETs have had frustrating or challenging cross-cultural

experiences during their one, two, or three years in Japan. The following two hypothetical scenarios are cases in which the corporate cross-cultural frustrations can either be overcome... or not.

Case #1: Uncertainty Leads to Unhappiness

The big day arrives. You take your place in the very quiet, somewhat messy office in the cubicle next to your new boss. He has introduced you to the rest of the section and has given you a very brief orientation. Your coworkers are a mix of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and other Asians. Also, you notice that most of your coworkers are middle-aged. The computer you are using is more than 3 years old. Also, you've just learned management continuously monitors the Company's e-mail system. Even so, you feel excited to be starting your new job and the morning flies by.

Your boss and the other members of your section take you to lunch as a way of welcoming you to the company. A nice gesture, to be sure. Yet, you feel a certain uneasiness as you watch how these people interact with each other, and with your new boss. There seems to be no team spirit or camaraderie. Instead, there is a sense that your coworkers may fear your boss and are vying with each other during lunch to get on his good side. Immediately, you sense that you may be in over your head as far as office politics are concerned.

Fast forward to one month later; you have finally begun to get down to work. By now, it's clear that a "sales assistant" does little sales, and does a lot of assisting! Your position entails many routine administrative tasks, such as answering the phone (the only time you've used your much vaunted Japanese), typing up reports, sending faxes for your boss, and greeting guests when they enter the office. Your boss even had the nerve to ask you to serve tea!! This is NOT what you graduated university and spent two years in Japan to do. You feel this gnawing feeling in your stomach that you've

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LET'S HAPPY JOB SEARCH.....

This issue for all JET Alum out there, whether you've been back for three months or a decade. We would like to send out a little hi-ho and arigato for all of you who sent in your wonderful contributions to this issue. Happy Job Search! Jody and Steven

SKILLS? WHAT SKILLS?(Why yes, there are JET transferrable skills!)

by Co-Editor Jody Mousseau (Kagawa-ken, '97-'00)

You've spent one, two, maybe even three years in Japan as an esteemed member of the JET Program, stunning all of your students and colleagues with your master knowledge and your status of being the best English speaker in the world. And now you're back in the U.S., where almost everyone else can speak English and your status as a great English teacher does not really mean much (unless you actually are an ESL teacher).

Let's say that you left for the JET Program about a month or two after graduating from university. You went to Japan and, for one, two, or three years, played games with students, performed skits and acted as a human tape recorder at times, got to know the culture and the people in your town or city, and maybe even studied Japanese. Now you're back in the U.S. and are on the emotional rollercoaster of readapting to American culture.

You sit down to your computer to write your new and revised resume, which will help you to land your first "real" job. You start writing the descriptions of your skills and qualifications and the various tasks that you performed as a JET that will convince some company out there to call you in for an interview so that they can see in person what a wonderful individual you are. Then you realize that your friends that got their first "real" jobs right out of university have spent the same one, two, or even three years that you spent in Japan out there in the real world workforce building the practical business, computer, and other job-related skills that they will need to grow professionally. And while they've been doing this, you've been in Japan, not doing those things. This epiphany hits you like a ton of bricks and you wonder what you have to offer potential employers, aside from your witty charm and more than slightly off-beat sense of humor.

Well, stop worrying. During your time as an JET, you probably developed quite a few "soft" skills that are transferable from job to job. These "soft" skills are often a very important part of a candidate's overall profile. Japan-related companies will know what JET entails, but others may think that JET is some sort of airplane parts manufacturing company, and have absolutely no clue where in the world you were for up to three years, or what you did. The following are some examples of skills that you almost assuredly developed during your time as a JET, and can and will need to use in other jobs, whether in a Japan-related environment or not. Conveying these skills in your resume may help you to land that interview.

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SHOUT OUT FOR WINTER NEWSLETTER
CONTRIBUTIONS!!!!

If you have any ideas or suggestions for our next issue, the Winter Newsletter, or would like to contribute an article or piece of any kind, please e-mail Jody at mousseauj@hotmail.com or Steven at stevenwaseda@yahoo.com.

REMINDERS AND REQUESTS FROM JETAANY

CONTACT INFORMATION: If your contact information (address, e-mail, etc.) have changed, please send your updated information to database@jetaany.org.

RECEIVING THIS NEWSLETTER: If you would NOT like to receive this

JETAANY New York

Co-Editors

Steven Horowitz
stevenwaseda@yahoo.com

Jody Mousseau
mousseauj@hotmail.com

President

Shannan Spisak
president@jetaany.org

Vice President

Gore? Quayle? Anyone?

Secretary

Clara Kuhlman
secretary@jetaany.org

Treasurer

Jo Sonido
jsonido2@yahoo.com

Philadelphia Representative

Bill Higgins
phillyrep@jetaany.org

Webmaster/Database

Coordinator
Andrew Barnes
drewbarnes@hotmail.com

Job Announcements

Seth Werlinsky
jobs@jetaany.org

Please check out e-mail from our Secretary and the web site www.jetaany.org for updated announcements.

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Who? What? When? Where? And Why? JETAA NY SECRETS revealed...

Information from Our President, Shannan Spisak

When does someone become a member of JETAANY and how does that happen?

Simple. Once your contact information is received by JETAANY, you are considered a member. This only happens though, if you send it to us yourself! At this point JETAA chapters do not have a reliable system of tracking all those JETs returning to the US, nor do we have a way of keeping up with your information if you move. If you have just returned, or have recently moved, please send your name, address, email, years and location on JET, and phone # (if you're so bold) to secretary@jetaany.org. This information is used exclusively for JETAANY and is not sold or given to any other organizations. We send weekly updates via email, and quarterly newsletters via post – no solicitations, get-rich-quick schemes, or telemarketing calls (promise!).

Who decides what events are hosted each year, and are they always the same?

Most of the annual events are decided on by the officers when they organize the yearly calendar. They are usually based on what has been done in the past, but are not restricted to those activities and/or events. These events may change as demands from the members change. Just because an event occurred one year is no guarantee that it will happen the next! So, if you enjoy a particular event,

lend us your support in volunteering some time to organize it. Or if you would like to suggest a new one, let the officers know your ideas and we'll work together on creating something unique.

Why does NY have such a large membership and how can that support the organizations goals?

The JETAA New York Chapter has the second largest number of members (next to Northern California). Our territory includes our Sub-chapter, Philadelphia, and all of the past JET participants in our chapter are now living in Eastern PA, NJ, CT, and all of NY State! The largest concentration is among the 5 boroughs of NYC, making up about 50%. In addition, about 20% are located in NJ, 10% in PA, and 5% in both CT and "upstate" NY.

In order to support our goals of providing services to all of our members, we need your help! If you live outside of the city and would like to organize events for your area, let us know....the Japanese community would appreciate the outreach, and CLAIR would be impressed with our efforts.

If you live in the City, but you don't get out to JETAA events as

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often as you might want -- we need your help, too! It is a common misconception that because there are so many of us here, that there are bound to be more than enough people volunteering to organize and participate in our events. Unfortunately, that has not always been the experience, and often we are over-stepping the bounds of those few dedicated volunteers who lend us their time. If you are pleased with the events that you attend or even if you find that they could be done better, please step up and offer your time and advice to making sure they are hosted (or not) in the years to come! The best way to do this is to participate in our JETAA meetings on the first Tuesday of every month. They are all held at the JLGC (Japan Local Government Center) 666 Fifth Ave (between 52nd and 53rd) beginning at 6:30pm. The remaining meetings this year will be held on November 5th and December 10th (additional details will be provided in the weekly e-ouncements). We do realize that some of you can't make it into the City on a weekday evening, so we are prepared to address your contributions through email, which can be received at ideas@jetaany.org.

Why are so many JETAANY events held on weekday evenings?

This is tricky, and something that we are trying to be flexible with since we understand that some members cannot make it to these events. Unfortunately, the challenge with this situation is that JETAA does not have its

own space for meetings and workshops. Instead, we are graciously provided with the JLGC meeting rooms upon request. These rooms, however can only be used when a JLGC member is present (Monday-Friday evenings), and also when the heat or ac is running (not on weekends). So, we are very much limited in our capacity to host events at any other times. We welcome suggestions on alternate, inexpensive venues for our many activities!

Where does our budget come from and how much is it?

Our annual budget is provided to JETAANY by a grant-in-aid program sponsored by CLAIR. This money comes from the Japanese government, which is essentially collected as taxes from the Japanese citizens. The amount we get is loosely based on the number of members that we have and varies slightly from year to year depending on exchange rates. It amounts to somewhere between \$4,500-5,000 per year.

AND NOW FOR THE BIGGEST SECRET.....

Which really isn't a secret at all – JETAANY is an all-volunteer organization *created* by the members, *run* by the members, *perpetuated* by the members *for* the members. It is a great way to remain connected to the enlightening, inspiring, amazing encounters you experienced in Japan. It exists only because of you, and all because of you.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to send them to me at president@jetaany.org... I'll be waiting!!

A Matter of Timing

Victor Cabilla (ALT Chiba-ken, 1998—2001 a professional recruiter for Bremar Associates, offers his perspectives and advice on the current job market.

Fellow JET alums and recent returnees:

I hope that you fully enjoyed your time in Japan. Unless you've kept yourself locked up in a bento box for the last couple of years, you've noticed that things aren't doing very well as far as your job market is concerned.

Unfortunately, you've left your heavenly, pampered, highly-paid, luxurious position with the JET Program (and if you don't think 3.6 M Yen, tax-free, isn't a good salary for a college grad with no experience at all, you're in for a few surprises) to return to the worst job market in ages.

The economy is in a slump, corporations everywhere are in the midst of restructuring, downsizing, lay-offs, hiring freezes, and in some cases, bankruptcies and various states of early-extinction. Things are so bad out there right now that undergrad students had a hell of a time getting positions over their summer breaks. Positions which were being scooped up by professionals with industry experience as a result of the massive industry-wide downsizing.

Even though you may not have felt it in your insulated positions on JET, the Japanese economy has been doing horribly for years now. Obviously it's going to be a bit of an uphill battle finding any position in any industry, let alone one within a Japanese company or American affiliate where you can utilize your newly acquired language and cultural skills.

Finding a job will take some work. I know because I've been there myself.

When I returned from Japan in August, 2001, I landed an excellent entry level position just outside of Philadelphia which paid me rather well, considering my lack of "real" experience. Actually, I didn't even appreciate how much I was getting paid at that time, because I was still on my JET high, and was very naïve about the economy, the job market, and my actual corporate "value".

Six months later I was laid off. It was a rough time, and I thought I wouldn't be able to find any job after that. But I reassessed my options and began setting up meetings whenever possible, including one with a Japanese related employment agency which ended up hiring me. I had become a professional recruiting specialist for a very well-respected staffing agency which assists hundreds of corporate clients in finding qualified candidates for their open positions.

In a very short time, I had learned a lot about what employers want, what they look for as far as resumes and during interviews, and more importantly, where the jobs were. Below is some of the knowledge and experience I have acquired along with some insights from a few of my veteran colleagues.

The Job Market

Which Industries are hot?

Two emerging industries with significant potential right now are the manufacturing and pharmaceutical industries. Recently, there has been an increased number of open positions in the pharmaceuticals industry, particularly in

New Jersey. Import/Export companies are also still hiring sporadically

Which Industries are not?

The information technology (IT) industry is still in a slump. I've seen many applicants with more than 10 years of IT industry experience that are having harder times finding positions than college grads with little to no experience. Another area suffering at the moment is the finance and banking industry. A number of Japanese banks have gone out of business, packed up and left the United States, or merged with other banks (which leads to a surplus in employees and to further restructuring and layoffs).

Which professions are hot?

The only profession in which I consistently see regular job openings are sales positions. Companies always need professionals that will bring in new revenue. If you aren't having any luck finding a position, you may want to consider going into sales. You'd be surprised to find out how many people completely refuse to even look in this area.

Which professions are not?

Because of downsizing, corporate restructuring and the down-turn in the economy there is a surplus of Finance and IT industry professionals. If you are in this group, you may find it very difficult to get employed. Anyone looking for a middle to upper level management position should brace themselves for disappointment.

Resumes and Interviews

What are employers looking for?

The #1 thing employers across the country look for, more than which school you graduated from, more than what type of degree you have, is **experience**. Don't think that having an MBA alone will do anything for you (other than letting employers know that you automatically desire a higher salary in this budget-stressed economy). More and more, employers are turning to rock solid experience as their main gauge for good talent.

What do recruiters look at when screening resumes?

Recruiters, whether they be working for their clients through employment agencies, or part of the regular HR staff in charge of filling vacant positions within their organization must quickly filter through hundreds of resumes per day in order to stay efficient themselves. The first thing that all employers/recruiters look at is **job experience**. Not only actual (after graduation) experience, but also very specific experience.

When applying for any position, always pay attention to what the duties and/or requirements for the position

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different depending on the clients needs, you get to meet tons of different people, and get to travel for free a lot - I've been to Japan almost 5 times in 18 months, Jamaica, Toronto, Chicago, DC, Denver, Las Vegas etc..... Of course the down side, is that you don't have a guarantee of when your next program is going to come.

Also, especially after September 11th, the travel industry took a major hit.

Thank god things are starting to improve, but for a while several of the companies that I worked with had frozen all corporate travel and meetings. If you don't mind that kind of uncertainty, and are very organized, can handle multiple programs at once and can deal with some 'high-maintenance' and demanding clients, then this might be the arena for you.

Well, good luck to you. If I can be of help, fell free to e-mail me at work: mbrophy@tokyutavel.com."

Sue Castroman-Aylesworth

Present Position: Law Librarian, Willkie Farr & Gallagher

"In order to be a librarian in any capacity you would need to get a Masters of Library Science (MLS). Yes, believe it or not you need a graduate degree! My job pretty much consists of legal research. At my firm, there is quite a bit of litigation and corporate work, with also a little of Intellectual Property, Real Estate & Tax. We have offices in France, Italy, Germany and

DC. As a reference law librarian, I mainly get inquiries from associates on anything and everything! The topic could be what is the best treatise on New York Real Estate Taxes to searching the chat room for any mention of insider trading. There are days where it is super busy-can't even get lunch-and others where I get to read the NYT cover to cover-professional reading of course!

I really like my job. It has a lot of variety. The library department also has an Intranet which we are constantly maintaining and improving. There are also numerous projects that we are always working on. My job is different every day. SO much to talk about if you are interested in this field. Let me know if you want to find out anything about this kind of position.....Good luck in your job search!"

Sue can be contacted at: svca211@yahoo.com.

Thomas Healy

Present Position: Asia Editor for the EFL List, McGraw-Hill
Thomas can be contacted at: thomas_healy@mcgraw-hill.com.

Clara Kuhlman (Tottori-ken, '99-'01)

Present Position: Assistant Researcher, Trade Insurance Dept, JETRO NY

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"JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) is the "next-stop" in the Japan related job field for many JETs. They have branches around the world and across the US, so there are plenty of job opportunities here for JETs who aren't sure where to go next. Most of the NY job placement agencies work with JETRO, so if you go to one of them, this place is bound to turn up. The types of jobs here are really varied. JETRO is a research organization, so most everyone who works here is doing research of some kind. The types of research vary; I study macroeconomic conditions in South America, while some people study politics and policy in the US, others study furniture sales and trends in the US and abroad, and the list goes on and on. For the most part, we are all expected to write a number of reports about our assigned topic, which are then sent to the proper authorities in Tokyo. Overall, it is a good place to work. There is a strong sense of JETRO community (ski trips, softball games, bowling) and you have the opportunity to meet a lot of really interesting Japanese people (and ex-JETs). Japanese is not required to work here, but it does help to know a few words here and there."

Clara can be contacted at: 646-319-6375 (cell) or clarakuhlman@yahoo.com.

Jackie Newcomb

Present Position: Resident Coordinator, SUNY Purchase

"I found and applied for various jobs in higher education administration via websites (jobs.chronicle.com, www.studentaffairs.com), e-mail and snail mail. I interviewed by phone for several and was hired for my current position in late May. I returned to the US on July 26th and began working on August 1st. I recommend if you can, to take a little more time to adjust. I was experiencing lots of culture shock! I am a Residence Coordinator/Coordinator for Student Leadership & Campus Centers at Purchase College, SUNY. I live in an apartment with my family in a residence hall for 275 freshmen and sophomores. I oversee all of the programs, RAs, discipline and maintenance for the building. In my spare time, I coordinate student leadership development and operations for the two campus centers."

Jackie can be contacted at: Jacqueline_newcomb@purchase.edu.

Shannan Spisak (Kawasaki-shi, '96-'98)

Present Position: Administrative Assistant, President's Office of Barnard College, Columbia University

"I handle general administrative tasks and coordinate events for the President with outside organizations, as well as students and other university departments. It is a rather straightforward 9-5 position, but with an enjoyable atmosphere and great vacation time. :)"

Shannan can be contacted at: sspisak@barnard.edu.

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are. These requirements were pretty flexible when the economy was doing better. Now they've become strict guidelines. If the positions states: "Word, Excel, and PowerPoint a must." It means that unless you know how to use all three software applications very well, you need not even bother applying.

Corporate recruiters also look at the total years of experience you have. If you've worked as a Network Administrator for six different companies over 10 years, the important thing is that you have 10 years of hands-on experience. You need to gather experience and put in your time with every employer you work for. Any person who has under 2 years experience is considered Entry Level. The JETs who are currently seeking employment should consider themselves Entry Level, unless they are attempting to find ESL type jobs. When you do find a job, it is very important that you work there for at least 2-3 years to avoid any impression of being a "job hopper."

This seems present a Catch-22: How do you get experience when you have none, and every open position (even entry level ones) require prior experience?

There is no easy answer to this question. A couple of years ago, companies were hiring candidates who didn't really match the positions with the assumptions that the candidates would just learn as they go, and eventually add their other skills to the position. Right now, companies are looking for very specific experience and very specific skills.

One type of opportunity worth considering (especially if you possess the financial means at the present) is a corporate post-graduation internship. These are not normally advertised, but you may find out about these opportunities and others if you contact a company's human resources department and are able to set up an "informational" interview. Many large companies store previous applicants' resumes in their own corporate resume databases, so that even though a position is not currently open, when one does open up, they will have your contact information already. JET alums who are currently looking for positions in finance or accounting, however, may find even these types of opportunities difficult to come by.

Another avenue into an industry that doesn't have a place for you is to get a foot in the door by applying for an entirely different position. Instead of going for a financial analyst position, it may be easier to apply for the administrative assistant position within the same department or company. You'll be in a very good position to get promoted to the job you were originally looking for when the markets open up again.

More than anything you should get out and meet

people. Go out to job fairs, attend open-job forums at specific companies, get in touch with the people that actually do the hiring and let them know that you're out there.

What things should a job-seeker remember when interviewing for a position?

Impressions are very important. In addition to dressing professionally and being very courteous, you should always give positive answers to any questions asked. There are many books out there about job interviews. Don't assume that you know it all. Of course, always do some research on the company before you go to the interview. Knowledge about the company's history, different products, and any recent news about it or its competitors could be the difference between getting your foot in the door and remaining a part of the unemployment statistic. It is also important to be confident, but never be arrogant...you're the one who's looking for a job, never forget that.

Final Words:

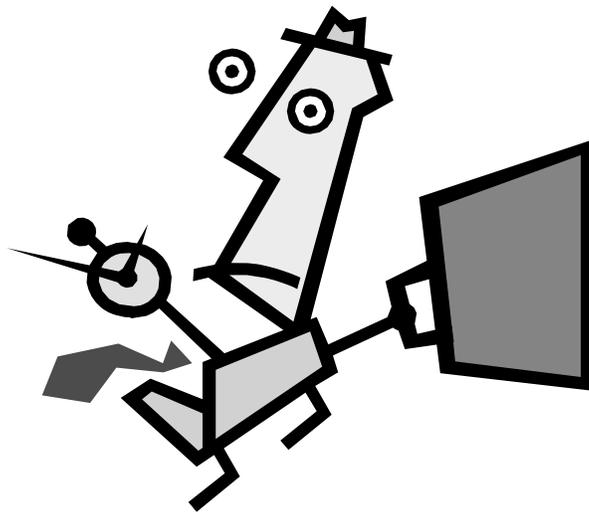
Things are very serious in the job market right now, so you have to be very serious about finding a job. That means staying informed about all of the economic and corporate

changes that are currently taking place. Always keep yourself up on which industries are doing well, and which are suffering. If you feel that you can't find any good positions right now, or you've found a position but aren't satisfied with it, this may be the best time to go back to school, go for an advanced degree, take some certification courses, or do anything to improve your chances of getting a good position and improving your marketability in any economy.

If you do have a position at the moment, but are unhappy about your current salary, I'd suggest waiting a little while. You should consider yourself very fortunate

that you do have a job right now, and also understand that now more than ever it is unwise to leave your current position without already securing another. I would also suggest that you apply with recruiting agencies as well as continue to look for positions on your own. Recruiting agencies are there to assist you and they have perspectives, knowledge and access to resources beyond those of most individuals.

Good luck and good hunting!



Victor Cabilla
Recruiting Counselor
Bremar Associates, Inc.
Tel: (212) 661-0909
Fax: (212) 856-0989
victor@bremar.com

SO, WHAT DO OTHER JET ALUM DO, EXACTLY? blurbs from various JET alum about their present jobs

Glen Anderson (Miyazaki-ken, '92-'95)

Present Position: Translation Consultant

"I work part-time at a law firm in Manhattan as a Translation Consultant. Presently, my primary responsibilities are to make English translations of Japanese documents relevant to patent infringement litigation. I hope to expand my role into establishing a firm-wide standard for the translations that it requires and interpreting in meetings with Japanese clients, which I hope will eventually lead to new opportunities in client development targeting Japanese companies.

The firm also allows me to take outside work, so I take interpretation assignments 2-3 times per month. I often interpret at the depositions of Japanese witnesses or on Investor Relations road shows for Japanese companies looking to promote themselves to institutional investors in the US. I enjoy the IR work a great deal, and I find it most promising as an area of potential growth. In the future, I hope to branch out from interpretation into translation or public relations services for these Japanese companies.

To give you an idea of my background, I entered the JET Program as a Miyazaki ALT in 1992 after getting my BA in Japanese. From 1993-1995, I did two years as a CIR in the same prefecture, after which I returned to the US and entered the Graduate School of Translation & Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Since then, I've worked as a translator and interpreter in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Washington DC and the New York metro area."

Sam Beltran

Present Position: English Teacher, and Chairperson of the English Department, NY Japanese School

"I teach 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grade English in a school for Japanese kids. Our methodology is Whole Language; our curriculum is flexible enough to the extent that my classes focus on literature and creative writing, instead of pure ESL. Basically, this job is Turbo-JET, in that I am teaching English in a Japanese based school where most of the students are high achievers and highly motivated. My previous job was at an advertising agency, so the collaborative, team-oriented values here are refreshing. Finally, I know that I can hone the craft and practice of teaching here, as well as take some risks with innovation because of the small size and the administrative support. My goal on JET as an educator was to begin the process of developing my classroom practice, so this job and environment (or something similar) is a dream for those who consider themselves educators."

Mark Brophy (Aomori-ken, '91-'93)

Present Position: Sales Manager and Event Planner, Tokyu Travel America Inc.

"Will work for food or trying to find work in NYC..."

Almost two years ago, I returned back to my home town after a 3 year stint in Boston. I looked on the Internet, monster.com, hotjobs.com, flipdog.com, the jetaany.org market place listings and the Sunday NY Times. You name it, I tried it. And while I am a fan of the Sunday NY Times, having found two jobs that way, I have found headhunters or job recruiters to be the best avenue in terms of consistently setting up interviews and getting offers. Although, my job search, as I mentioned, was almost two years ago, I thought that those of you trying to make a go of it in NYC might have some luck with the very same agencies that I used.

One word of advice - be very specific about what you are looking for, otherwise the broker will interpret this as a lack of commitment and send your resume to everyone under the sun including the ice cream stand down the block, to make a commission. Also hold fast with your salary requirements. I told each broker what my minimum was and told them if the job was below that not to waste time - mine or theirs - faxing my resume because I had bills to pay and my minimum salary was in fact, just that, my minimum acceptable wage.

The most helpful during this search to be honest was Bremar Associates during my most recent job search, as well as several other searches in the past in NYC. Minako and her husband started this agency a while back and they helped me, my cousin and some friends to find placements with Japanese firms. Don't worry if you feel your Japanese is not perfect, they have a well of listings to correspond to everyone's language level and industry of choice. So, here are the three agencies that I felt were the most helpful:

1. BREMAR ASSOCIATES (Mr. Kenji Hara, Tel: 212-661-0909, Fax: 212-856-0989, 420 Lexington Avenue)
2. MAX CONSULTING (Ms. Eiko (Amy) Matsumura, Tel: 212-949-6660, Fax: 212-949-6882, 317 Madison Avenue)
3. LLOYD STAFFING (Ms. Akemi Imai, Tel: 212-354-8787, Fax: 212-354-8920, 58 West 40th St.)

So, that was how I got the job, now onto what I do.

I am the Sales Manager and Event Planner for Tokyu Travel America Inc., or Tokyu Kanko to you and me. Basically, I arrange corporate meetings, trade shows and incentive trips (free trips for their high end sales reps.) for major Japanese companies located in the USA. I have worked on events both international and domestic, ranging from everything from small board meetings at a local hotel all the way up the ladder to a corporate PGA sponsored tournament.

I find that it suits my personality, because you don't sit in a cubicle and do the same repetitive thing day after day, you get to do something different all the time - each program is

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 1)

made some sort of tremendous mistake. At this point, though, you realize that you will have to grin and bear it for a least another 11 months, or until something better comes along.

Case #2: Compromise, but not Where it Matters!!

The big day arrives; you take your place in the very quiet, somewhat messy office in the cubicle next to your boss (who is the one of the people that interviewed you). Since you've already seen a copy of the job description for your position and you've read the employee handbook prior to your first day, you are not particularly surprised with your surroundings. You see a few familiar faces in your group; there's Jane, whom you spoke with as part of your interview. She really gave you the low-down the company's good points (lots of responsibilities, decent pay, no pressure) and its not-so-good points (unorganized, no clear policies).

Your boss and the other members of your section take you to lunch as a way of welcoming you to the company. This isn't the first time you've eaten with them though, as you volunteered to do so as part of the interview process. That lunch gave you some valuable insight into the company, your future coworkers, and how they truly saw the company. Bill complained in private to you of the "rice paper ceiling" that exists at the company and explained how all of the top management jobs were reserved for Japanese expatriates. Patricia cornered you in the bathroom, telling you there was a double standard for men and women at the company. "They're at least 10 years behind the times!" she complained bitterly.

Fast forward to one month later; you took the job and have finally begun to get down to work. By now you have demonstrated to your

boss that you are flexible and open-minded when it comes to your job. You have made a secret pledge to yourself to NEVER say, "that's not my job" when he asks you to do something (as long as its not illegal or immoral). As a (result of your attitude, you've noticed that you spend more time in client meetings than some of your colleagues. This is a benefit because it allows you to use your Japanese.

Sure, you may not like the fact that Japanese hold most of the key jobs. You also don't appreciate the fact that the women in the office perform most of the routine administrative work. Still, you've made a pact with yourself to lead by example. You understand that in this job market, you are much luckier than many of your friends who couldn't find any work. You've promised yourself that you will forge a role for yourself at an interesting, if imperfect company.



5 "To Do's" When Working in a Japanese Company

- 1) **Clarify your role-** Ask to see a job description for the position during your interview if one is not shown to you. If one doesn't exist, or if your potential employer can't clearly explain what the job entails, that should raise a red flag.
- 2) **Do your research-** Use the web to gather information about your prospective employer. What is its main business? How did it perform financially during the last fiscal year? Who are its main clients? Nothing is more disheartening than to begin a new position only to find out that your new employer has been having trouble meeting its financial targets and may need to make cost-cutting measures at some point in the near future. Doing your research also allows you to demonstrate this knowledge to your prospective employer during the interview.

(Continued on page 16)

JETTING ON: Co-Editor Jody Mousseau Interviews Maggie Glover (Kagawa-Ken, '99-'01) About Her Career in Non-Profit Organizations

Jody (J): Why did you decide to join JET?

Maggie (M): I joined JET in 1999, at a time when I had a pretty good job in Minneapolis as Managing Director for a dance company. I had been considering JET for a few years as a way to help me decide what career path I might want to take. I had been out of school for about 6 years, and I was considering going to grad school in Art History with an Asian Art focus. I had also spent 3 years volunteering as an ESL teacher for refugees, something I hadn't considered in college but "fell" into in my first job after college. I liked teaching refugees. I wasn't sure if my desire to do grad work in Asian Art was just a desire to travel in Asia. So I thought if I traveled first I could gain a clearer sense of my motives. My decision to go into JET was part for the adventure, and part to gain clarity for my future career choice.

J: After coming back from Japan, what was your job hunt like?

M: I returned last year on July 18th and it was really tough. I was pounding the pavement everyday from 8 AM to 5 PM. I tried every possibility, connections through friends, headhunting agencies, responding to ads in the paper. I got a job in about 3 weeks. But I should clarify; I was looking for "a" job... not a career job. Since prior to JET I had worked in several fields, including corporate, job hunting was not as difficult for me as it might have been for others. However, there is a catch. I took the first job I could get, which was a very questionable sales job. Then September 11th happened. It was at that point that one of my old job-hunting techniques went into action, my faith in God. (I'm not joking about this. . . one of the best jobs I had in Minneapolis I often said I got because "God told me to apply." I was standing on a street corner in front of the Minnesota Orchestra, meaning to cross the street, when I just felt a really strong urge to apply for a job there. I ended up working for the Orchestra for three years and meeting some of my best friends there.) On September 11th I felt a similar urge. It's a REALLY long story, but I ended up quitting my sales job with no real serious plan, and landed a job as a manager for call center for 9/11 victims and then manager for the distribution of one of that agency's funds for 9/11 victims. I got very swept up in the recovery effort, and in the process learned a lot about disaster recovery planning and process. The first 9/11 job was decent pay, but not permanent. Later I landed another 9/11 related position in a different agency. The pay was slightly less, but it was permanent with full benefits. As all of this progressed I got a chance to help lead in the creation of a community-wide, inter-agency initiative to help victims who were being excluded from aid. Basically, one thing led to another and the past year has been filled with professional learning experiences for me. I am still working for this agency, but I am no longer doing only 9/11 related stuff.

J: Why did you decide to work for a non-profit organization?

M: As you can tell from what I have alluded to already, I have been drawn to the non-profit sector over and over again. I like the non-profit world because sometimes the-sky-is-the-limit in terms of the choices you can have. "Non-profit" refers to so many different types of jobs. The non-profit sector includes everything from the Lincoln Center, The American Cancer Society, the Rockefeller Foundation, to your basic community initiative program in the Bronx. Working in the non-profit arena you could work for an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), an AIDS awareness program, or... the Japan Society. All of these are types of non-profits. Non-profit can mean OPPORTUNITY. Sometimes the pay is less, sometimes it's NOT, depending on what agency you work for and what you do. I tend to be interested in management and community organizing. I'll be attending New School for Social Research in the spring semester to start working on a Master's in Non-Profit Management. My entire "career-searching" journey, including going into JET, makes me feel confident that this is the right choice for me.

J: What is your current position, and what do you do in a typical day?

M: My current title is Resource Development and Communications Manager. Hmm? Well, I do something different almost every day. For the past few weeks I have supervised the design work for my agency's annual report and the event planning for our annual meeting. I also attended a weeklong seminar on grant proposal writing, and I will have opportunities to do development work, such as proposal writing and helping with the design of new programs. I think my role in my agency will be shifting again soon, and I'll be organizing international adoptions and helping to grow the refugee resettlement services that my agency provides. Attending conferences, going out into the community to coordinate and create programs, doing paperwork in the office, grant proposal writing, supervising communications (reminding people what logos to use, etc.) are all parts of my job. This is not true for all non-profit agencies. In my case, I have had a lot of initiative and drive. That has allowed me to have more opportunities. Also, my agency is small to medium size, which means I have more opportunities to do a variety of different types of jobs.

J: What is the most rewarding part of your job? Of working for a non-profit organization?

M: The most rewarding part of my job is the interacting with people who are helped by my agency's programs. Sometimes the politics or the paperwork of the job really wears you down, just like any job. Then you have the opportunity to meet someone who is affected by that work, like a foster child, or a teenage mom at my agency, which provides social services. In the arts, it would be the art form that motivates. Basically something has to motivate you to make it through the politics and the paperwork without giving up. Having really changed a person's life, in a small way, for the better, is what motivates me. It's the end product that we are all striving for. I am really interested in quality programs and philanthropy. There are so many sides to the distribution of money for the hoped for goals of an agency program. The whole process, from beginning to end, fascinates me.

J: What skills do you think you built in Japan that help you in your current job?

M: Learning how to sit tight on a bad day and do nothing, and be ok with it are skills I use. I'm not referring to my experience in the schools, but rather in my small town. It wasn't so easy for me to be distracted by going to shows and going out with friends while I lived in Japan, because I lived pretty far from most other JETs. So I learned how to just have nothing in particular to do. And that taught me a little patience. I tend to want to be active all of the time, so the isolation was good. It was hard to adjust to being back in the US, especially New York at first. You'll love this! In my first job, the questionable sales job, my boss made the following comment: "you speak too slowly and you are too polite." I kept on saying "I'm sorry" and "excuse me" to the clients and the staff. I could hardly control myself from bowing. It was really funny. I tried to explain why, but they didn't get it.

J: What advice would you give to JET Alum looking for a job in the non-profit sector?

M: Grad school and career stuff should be a type of journey. Some people do what falls into their lap and seems easy, some do what they "plan," some find that their career is something quite different than what they "plan." I am in the third category. But you have to experiment to find what fits. Look at www.idealists.com to see some of the types of jobs in the non-sector. Even if social work is not your thing. . . it's a growing field in New York because of 9/11. There are job opportunities in the non-profit sector if you are open to them. Even if it was not what you studied in college, even if it doesn't relate to what you have done already, if you discover you love something you never thought you'd want to do. . . just do it. It is so great to love your job! And you can only find what you love if you are open to it.



Reviews of Japan-Related Films

Brought To You By Your Friendly Co-Editors



AMAZING! WONDERFUL! FABULOUS!

Great content, amazing cinematography, and mind-blowing story. The film leaves you with a feeling of "awe" about it afterwards, and you think that the writers and director are complete geniuses. You think EVERYONE should see this film, and it is worth your time to watch it not only once, but two or three times!



GOOD.

The film makes you laugh, think, or cry- whatever the writers and director intended for it to do for you. You leave feeling satisfied with what you just saw, and don't feel like it was a waste of time in any way, shape or form. The sotry doesn't present any holes or discombobulation, and the rest of the content is respectable. You would recommend the film no problem to anyone who asked about it.



MA MA...

Okay, so the film wasn't a *complete* waste of time, but if you had a lot of laundry to do, you would probably be a bit urked that you didn't take time out to do it instead of watching the film. The film has merit, but you need to scrape under layers of fair to bad script, holes in the pot, director choices that you just don't understand, and shots that you don't agree with to find it. You may have dozed off once or twice, or gotten up to go to the bathroom at least three times. And the friend that you went with that you recommended the film to by saying, "I don't know anything about this film, but I heard it's *supposed* to be really good," probably won't be trusting your judgement in films for a while.



JUST A PLAIN WASTE OF TIME. PERIOD.

You feel cheated. You walk out of the film thinking, "Wow. That was two hours of my life that I can never get back." Somebody definitely owes you that \$9 that you paid to see the film, and an hourly rate for the time you spent watching it.

Spirited Away

Reviewed at Lowes 19th Street East (Broadway & 19th St.) by Co-Editor Jody Mousseau, ALT, Kagawa-ken, '97-'00

Let me first admit that I had a bit of a bias going into this movie. I am not a big fan of anime. In fact, movie-length cartoons of any nature annoy me, and I could never really understand why more than a couple of my friends are avid collectors of the Disney animated films.

On that note, I went to see this movie after a JET alum friend asked if I would be interested. "Why not?" I thought. Worst case scenario, I write a not-so-favorable review.

Spirited Away, which is Japanese Director Hayao Miyazaki's 2001 masterpiece, was claimed by Time Out to be "the most commercially movie (animated or otherwise) in Japanese history." The movie begins by pulling the audience into the disheartening sorrow of a spoiled-brat, Chihiro, who is moving to a new town. The mother tries to comfort her, but in a rather cold, stand-offish way, while the father refuses to follow directions and gets them lost.

As the movie develops, Chihiro finds herself in a strange, challenging, frightening world on a quest to set her life back on its right path. The audience gains a sense of her complete struggle and her effort to strengthen so many characteristics within herself

within a small amount of time.

Okay, so we are talking about a cartoon. However, the character development, especially depicted in Chihiro's mysterious friend, Haku, is astonishing. The whole fact that Miyazaki can breathe such life into the characters and their individual stories, struggles, and conquests, all within a two-hour animated film, is in itself worth seeing.

Although the film does not completely alienate it's younger "cartoon-going" crowd, the storyline and undertones are definitely geared for an older audience. And though the dialog has been adapted to English, the reflection of Japanese culture and thought within the movie remains untouched, and is one characteristic of *Spirited Away* that the JET crowd will truly appreciate.

This film is undoubtedly a masterpiece, and will go down as one of the all-time great animated films.

Jody's Rating:



Wasabi

Reviewed at Village East Cinema (2nd Ave. & 12th St.) by Co-Editor Steven Horowitz, ALT, Aichi-ken, '92-'94

What do you get when you mix French cool and Japanese kitsch in an American action-humor-cop flick? A fun movie with a few holes that's nonetheless enjoyable on several levels, especially if you've lived in Japan.

Directed by Luc Besson (*La Femme Nikita*, *The Fifth Element*, *Transporter*) this French-language film introduces Hubert Fiorentini (Jean Reno) as a cynical American-style cop with a penchant for punching folks in the nose who gets results despite his unorthodox (i.e., illegal) methods. This approach, as expected, doesn't fly well in France. But just as you're getting ready to write off Hubert as Bruce Willis/Arnold Schwarzenegger with subtitles, Besson begins to drop subtle hints letting you know that Hubert is in fact a satire of such clichés and setting the tone for an entertaining, well-shot film with unique and intriguing characters and settings within a story-line that is almost, but not quite, secondary.

The story moves from France to Japan after Hubert's past work and romantic connection with Japan is abruptly reawakened causing Hubert to jump on a plane and proceed to do things his own special way in Japan (ways you may well wish you could have employed at certain times in your JET career.) Through Hubert we are treated to every day scenes in Japan that nicely avoid over-exoticization and evoke subtle nostalgic pangs, such as the tinny, crisp background voice at the *shinkansen* station announcing, "Kyoto eki desu." For the most part, Besson eschews "Mr. Baseball"-type east-meets-west humor scenes, and when he does, e.g., in a scene involving the popular dance-video game, it doesn't necessarily work that well. Besson is more successful with his subtle jabs at English-centric Hollywood films. Note the sudden plethora of fluent French speakers in Japan (an occurrence we JET alums know to be as unlikely as a bar mitzvah in the Imperial Palace).

It is in Japan that we also meet Yumi (Ryoko Hirosue), the impudent, bubbly plot-thickener who changes moods every three seconds (which according to sources was Hirosue's real-life emotional state by the end of filming). Although Hirosue is a bit over-the-top and at times annoying in her portrayal of Yumi, her character is intriguing and likeable enough to keep the film moving.

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Dogs and Demons: Tales From the Dark Side of Japan
 Review by Jo Sonido, (Kobe-shi, '92-'95) and Glen Anderson (Miyazaki-ken, '92-'95)

Kerr, Alex. Hill and Wang, USA. 2001 432 pages

"How Japan went bonk is one of the strange and terrible tales of the late twentieth century."

In the past 150 years, Japan has experienced two cultural revolutions, the first being the Meiji era reforms after the "opening" of Japan with Commodore Perry's black ships, and the second being the 40 years of explosive economic development after World War II. 35-year veteran ex-pat and scholar, Alex Kerr, asserts that Japan is now due for its next cultural revolution.

This coming revolution, Kerr argues, will erupt due to the deterioration of Japan's traditional culture and environment. Moreover, the revolution will necessarily have to come from the within Japanese populace and not from foreign economists, consultants, or even the home-grown bureaucracy. Kerr takes the risk of exposing Japan's many convoluted problems, from its spiraling debt to the decimation of its once beautiful countryside, and the bureaucratic and educational systems that move the country farther away from the development that it so earnestly seeks. "Dogs and Demons" is truly a lamentation of Japan's cultural "malaise" from this famed Japanophile, not only for himself but for his Japanese friends who cannot.

Throughout "Dogs and Demons" Kerr casts his net to reign in the psychological factors that contribute to Japan's seemingly indifferent response to her problems. The main culprit is the vaunted and insurmountable Japanese bureaucracy and its will to control economic growth, education, and even the environment. Kerr draws a very vivid parallel between the various ministries' public works mania and the neurotic fear of danger that characterizes Japan's natural environment and permeates the everyday announcements in the subways. From cement lined riverbanks to seashores to constant reminders that danger is all around on the subways and stairwells, the Japanese government has mounted an all out war to protect its people. The end result is the "infantilization" of the populace, with the bureaucratic leaders acting as the parents.

Inculcated from birth, Japanese are taught in schools and reminded in society that they are surrounded by danger. If they make the wrong decisions or do not follow the rules, unspeakable and unknown terrible things will happen to them. No wonder the Japanese are so risk-averse and do not want to change the status quo. Quoting, Dr. Masao Miyamoto, a former psychiatrist for the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Kerr writes that "the real purpose of education in Japan is not education but the habit of obedience to a group." By training its citizens to be docile, indifferent and yet resistant to change, the powers that be need not worry repercussions for lining their pockets as they siphon government subsidies for projects that are contracted to their old-boy networks in the private sector.

The list of travesties is long and deep and Kerr liberally fishes them out and serves them to the reader like an artful plate of sashimi. At times, he can be repetitive if not over-zealous in his servings. His message though is clear—Japan needs to reflect on its own plight and work to correct itself.

Mr. Kerr is self-admittedly, NOT an expert on all aspects of Japan. He acknowledges the assistance of many of his Japanese and non-Japanese friends who do possess the credentials and work in those areas (finance, cinema, the sentiments of Japanese people themselves, et al) that Mr. Kerr wants to expose but lacks the

knowledge to do so. It is important to note that Mr. Kerr's network is as wide as a Japanese fisher's net as he counts among his personal friends the likes of flower masters, Kabuki actors, financiers, the crème de la crème of ex-pat Japanologists, and even regular folk, perhaps more than a few JETs and former JETs among them.

Regrettably, however, there are glaring errors in his statements. He claims that Yasuo Hamanaka lost \$2.6 billion of his company's money in risky copper trades without ever breaking a law, when in fact Mr. Hamanaka is in jail now for charges of fraud and forgery. Even easily researched details are missed, such as the official English names of Japanese companies he cites. For example, he refers to Sumitomo Trading, but the company calls itself Sumitomo Corporation. There are other examples that reveal a weak background in Economics and Accounting. Finally, the timing of the book makes many of his comparisons of financial markets in Japan and the US irrelevant; he compares Japan after 10-plus years of decline to an America that is, as subsequent events would reveal, approaching the peak of a high-tech bubble.

Regardless, kudos to Kerr for sharing the dark side of the Japanese miracle. JETAANY's book club members enthusiastically recommend "Dogs and Demons" as a book that will surely stimulate passionate conversation about Japan.

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The movie suffers in various instances from flaws that impair the audience's suspension of disbelief, such as the costuming of the yakuza henchman (who all look more like they're ready to go clubbing in LA than kick some ass) and Hubert's "discovery" of *wasabi* despite the fact he had previously lived in Japan. But the fusion of French *chic* with Japanese kitsch and corniness along with Jean Reno's intense performance gives the film a dimension rarely found in other productions and enables the audience to look past the flaws.

In some instances, however, scenes that push the boundaries of believability seem to fit in with Besson's action movie satire, particularly in fight scenes employing creative uses of golf balls and department stores as well as Hubert's habit of walking into the lion's den facing impossible odds without a doubt that the outcome could be anything but favorable. Such movie optimism, along with gratuitous violent slapstick, appears to be yet another jab at Hollywood-style film making.

Adding comic relief throughout the movie is Momo (Michel Muller), Hubert's old buddy from his French intelligence days. In addition to adding flavor to *Wasabi*, Muller puts on some of wonderful facial expressions in a scene involving *wasabi*, a scene which otherwise seems a bit forced and is apparently the source of inspiration for the film's title.

The award for best about-to-cry face, however, goes to Hiroe in her final scene. Whether a result of bad acting or an intentional allusion to the cheesiness of Japanese dramas, the struggle of her facial muscles fits perfectly into Besson's satirical theme and allows the viewer a smug, internal laugh amidst a sensitive scene.

While not a must-see, *Wasabi* is a highly entertaining movie carried by the characters, the cultural interplay and the director's hand, a movie that will appeal to those looking for something of the beaten path yet still accessible.

Steven's Rating: ☺ ☺ ☺

WHAT ABOUT FREELANCING?!

by Tamara Boorstein (Yamanashi-Ken, '90-'92) and
President (or one of) of Tamarack Communications, Inc., a Public Relations and Marketing firm

If you're reading this article, you know what an awful job market we're in at the moment. Nobody is hiring. Even top business school grads are looking for jobs. If you're having trouble finding openings, let alone the job of your dreams, then freelancing is a path worth considering.

First off, it's the American way. You're an entrepreneur creating your own job. Secondly, even if you are working for a company or other organization, it's valuable to approach your job as a freelancer in the sense of always justifying your value to the organization.

By freelancing, you're saying you're not going to wait for a job to come and bite you on the behind. You're going to take matters into your own hands. And I can guarantee you that, even if you try to freelance with little success, you will gain some valuable experience in the process that will help you in some fashion down the line.

When I began freelancing in the last century, I heard and read a number of stated "truths" about succeeding in this new world. I heard, "if you are self-disciplined, you'll make a good freelancer." And, "If you are well-organized, you'll make a good freelancer." Now granted, while I am not taking my clients' money and sipping pina coladas on a Caribbean beach, I do not consider myself either terribly well-organized or self-disciplined. However, I have freelanced, consulted, and worked part-time over the last number of years to varying degrees of success. And I am here as a former JET to tell you that you can do it too.

Here is a list of my "truths," as I see them:

Truth #1: Be intrepid. You can cross that one off your list of concerns. You went to a strange country on the other side of the world and stood in front of many groups of strangers for long periods of time. Many of you explored far beyond the isles of Japan. You were excited and enthusiastic to set off into the unknown. That same vigor can be applied in your home country to find ways the combination of your skills, personality and interest can benefit a client, or firm.

Truth #2: Be Creative. Here you can use that same adept mind you applied to creating fill-in-the-blank sheets for your students who listened to your favorite rap song. You solved a problem (dull lesson plan) with a far better solution for many different audiences from boisterous teenage boys at a technical high school to solemn salary men attending English night school. Trust me, whether the US is in a recession or in a recovery, companies and organizations will always have problems with which they need an objective outsider's help.

Truth #3: Consider yourself an asset. The Japanese government considered you to be an asset to their teaching program. (And if you question this premise, remember the many enkais thrown in your honor.) You were noted for being an individual in your last job, and you'll be noted for being an individual with your clients. Because of your experiences, you offer a unique perspective and many times a solution to a client.* For in-

stance, the media contacts I have developed while representing a state senator, come in handy for clients as diverse as an Australian lamb and beef organization.

*author's note: recently, I've re-learned that many times people hire me to say no to them and actually appreciate it.

Truth #4: Focus. Just as you were pigeon-holed in Japan, as The Gaijin, or the Japanese English Teacher, you will be labeled here. While I don't recommend limiting yourself from potential opportunities, I do recommend taking time to prioritize your skills and interests. The time you take to do that at the beginning, will save you time looking for work and will set you apart from the freelance crowd. Depending on my audience, I am known as the investor and international media relations consultant, the travel, advertising and graphic design PR expert, and lately, the press secretary. While the fields are varied, the essential skills remain the same.

Truth #5: Hang in there. When winter came, and you huddled for warmth under your kotatsu; when you felt like a dying plant both in and out of the classroom; and, when you wanted to scream and shout instead of smile and bow—hang in there. Last year, the hardest work year I've ever experienced, typically, I would substitute teach for three days at an inner city public high school in Brooklyn and head off for the remainder of the week to run media relations for an investment bank conference at an upscale hotel in midtown. If you can live through the turmoil of obtaining a new client and worry about paying your next month's rent, there are better times ahead.

Truth #6: Your desk is not your bed (or anywhere near it). While I can't draw any immediate parallels to JET, I will tell you the importance of this last piece of advice. Create a separate working space for yourself. For those of you in small Manhattan apartments, it might mean buying a paper screen and separating off a corner of your space. For others, it might mean getting up in the morning and taking your laptop with you to a library or coffee shop. Trust me: while Edith Wharton might have written in bed every morning, she was independently wealthy.

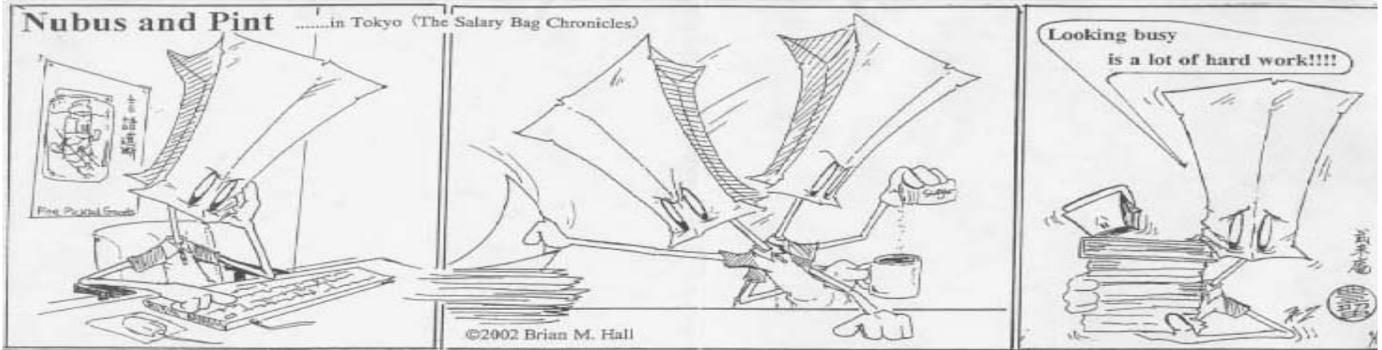
Many books exist on this topic. My favorites include: [Making Money Freelance Writer](#) (Writer's Digest), [Job Search Secrets](#) (Kate Wendleton), and [Solo Success—100 Tips for Becoming a \\$100,000-a Year Freelancer](#) (David Perlestein).

Finally, if you are interested in becoming a freelancer, even if it is for a set time period, make a list, and head out the door. Freelancing, not thinking about it too much, is key. Yes, you will make many mistakes. You will make the same mistake twice. But you are your own boss determining your own destiny. That's worth a lot.

Tamara Boorstein can be contacted at: tamarackinc@aol.com.

(The author welcomes questions and comments, preferably after election day, November 5th, when her campaign running responsibilities end. In the meantime, she urges everyone to get out and

Nabus and Pint by JET Alan, Brian M. Hall



Top 10 JET Resume Descriptions: What They Say..... And What They Really Mean

- #10- **Says:** Functioned as liaison for city relations and internationalization efforts. **Means:** Got hammered with city employees and guests while singing numerous renditions of "Love Me Tender."
- #9- **Says:** Developed and designed lesson semester lesson plans for 6 junior high schools. **Means:** Played bingo and/or hangman 6 periods per day for six straight months.
- #8- **Says:** Responsible for all municipal international correspondence and communications. **Means:** Wrote the letter to the replacement JET before going home.
- #7- **Says:** Translated and edited board of education documents. **Means:** Changed all the r's to l's and l's to r's.
- #6- **Says:** Served as international representative for official and civic activities. **Means:** Stumbled around the o-bon dance circle after consuming significant amounts of alcohol.
- #5- **Says:** Created and designed promotional guide materials for international visitors. **Means:** Came up with fictional names for the hodge-podge of nameless streets in my inaka town that no tourist will ever set foot in.
- #4- **Says:** Initiated city-wide language study and cultural exchange program for 12 public pre-schools. **Means:** Had to dress up and play Santa at all of the local *yochiens*.
- #3- **Says:** Developed and taught seminar on cross-cultural teaching and communication at national JET conference for over 500 JET teachers. **Means:** Taught foreign English teachers how to play bingo and/or hangman. Then got ripped, down and over for three days at taxpayers' expense.
- #2- **Says:** Organized and led 13 events for junior high school sports' festival involving over 400 students. **Means:** Did the NHK radio exercises and then outsprinted twenty 12-year olds.
- #1- **Says:** Conducted presentations addressing International Relations. **Means-** Showed a group of adults in your town pictures of your family.

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- 1. **Adaptability-** You went to Japan and spent at least a year there. Chances are, you had either never been to Japan before, or had at least never been there for an extended amount of time. For all JETs, whether they have been to Japan previously or not, the ability to adapt to new surroundings is a key part in how involved they will get with the culture and their surroundings during their time in Japan. You may have even started to assimilate to Japanese culture, depending on the length of time that you were there. In addition, you had to re-adapt to American culture, which can sometimes be a challenging task.
- 2. **Flexibility-** If you were an ALT, sure, you had to teach classes. But perhaps you also had to perform any of a variety of functions as the "local gaijin": coordinating presentations for the school *bunkasai*, participating in other town or school festivals, organizing and teaching special English classes for the town employees, acted as a tour guide for visitors from an American sister city, or anything else that was not communicated to you as one of your duties. Most probably, you weren't only a town or city JET, but the "local gaijin" that assisted with almost any cross-cultural or English-related function.
- 3. **Communication-** When you went to Japan, you may or may not have been able to speak Japanese. If you were an ALT, your role was to teach English to students who knew little or no English. Unless you had been an ESL teacher prior to JET, this was probably an entirely new experience. It required learning a new way to communicate to make sure that you could understand, which meant adjusting your vocabulary and speed of talking to the group, and knowing when to use gestures, pictures, drawings, or other communication tools to get your message across to them without having to use Japanese. In addition, you may have made the effort to study Japanese, or at least pick a general knowledge of the language up from your surroundings.

- 4. **Confidence-** You picked up and went to Japan. Granted that you were part of the infamous JET Program, but you did it all by yourself. Not only that, but you developed an entirely new support and social network there, both of foreigners and Japanese people.
- 5. **Patience-** Teaching a foreign language, or any other subject for that matter, takes a certain amount of patience. In addition, we all how the Japanese bureaucratic process works. Perhaps you requested a week of vacation off, and submitted the request to your supervisor at your base school. He or she then asked the *kocho-sensei* if it was okay, who later called the town Board of Education to ask the *kacho-san* if you could take time off. The *kacho-san* may or may not have had to ask the *kyoikucho-san* if you could use your vacation days, and after the person at the top finally said yes, the answer was handed back down in the same exact, but reverse, order. The phrase "patience is a virtue" probably gained the entirely new meaning of "patience is a necessary survival mechanism" during your time in Japan.
- 6. **Empathy-** On a daily basis in Japan, JETs have to put themselves in their students' shoes in order to figure out what they can and cannot understand. Also, as the "local gaijin," you probably were always aware of how it felt to be an outsider, even if you were surrounded by Japanese co-workers and friends who made an effort to always include you as part of the group.
- 7. **Creativity-** Think on your toes. That's what we did there, on a daily basis. Whether it was completely conceptualizing a presentation or entire workshop and carrying it out, or having a teacher say to you five minutes before class, "Please bring a game for the students to play during the last ten minutes," you probably had to let your right brain shine through on more than a few occasions.

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- 3) **Seek constructive feedback-** Once on the job, look for advice and pointers on what you're doing well and what you need to do to improve. If your supervisor doesn't provide this to you, take the initiative. Remember, many Japanese managers in the U.S. for the first time have never given the sort of direct, sometimes conflict-ridden, performance reviews that we have come to expect as Americans. Therefore, be "politely persistent" in seeking this feedback.
- 4) **Be realistic-** Understand from the beginning that this is a buyer's market. In other words, you are in a weaker position now than you would have been five or even three years ago. The fact is that the economic situations in Japan and the U.S. have senior managers very nervous. When companies do hire, they are being selective. Still, this does not mean that you won't be able to find work. It simply means that you may have to compromise on immediately finding your dream job. The key is to start somewhere and demonstrate your value to the organization. By doing this, you will find yourself getting more and more responsibility and becoming more important to your company.
- 5) **Trust your instincts-** Still, does the current job market mean that you accept any offer? Certainly not! If, during the course of an interview, you feel that the position, company, or your future coworkers may not fit your own personal work style, opt not to take the position. It would be much better to decline an offer up-front than to quit three months into a new job.

Many JET alumni decide to work for Japanese companies in order to use or further develop their Japanese cultural and language skills. This situation is both beneficial to the JET alumni, who is looking to

incorporate Japan into their American life, and to a Japanese company in the U.S., that is looking to locally-hire Staff with some understanding of their business culture and/or the Japanese language. However, Japan-related skills are not the only skills that JET alumni have to offer. Many of the soft skills that you developed in Japan, such as adaptability and flexibility, are important characteristics that many companies, Japanese or not, are looking for.

Finding a job that "fits" you is not an overly-easy task, in any economy. However, by focusing on what you the characteristics that you are looking for in a company to help you grow personally and professionally, your job search will be a much less trying and arduous task.

Working for a Japanese company can have many benefits, especially for the JET alumni who wants to stay connected to Japan. By staying adaptable, but not completely sacrificing what you are looking for in a company in terms of a conducive work environment, your term of employment at the company will be much more productive and enjoyable.

John G. Crum is the President of ima consulting, llc., which is a Human Resources consulting company that specializes in providing services to Japanese companies operating in the U.S. ima's services include assisting Japanese companies to set up all aspects of their performance management systems and advising them on a wide range of HR topics, as well as conducting training programs regarding cross-cultural issues and other topics to assist Japanese companies with their functions in the U.S. For more information about ima consulting, llc., please check out the web site at www.imaconsulting.com.