



BY SHERRI MILES

Business Leaders ABROAD

World travel. Global education. International careers. For some, these are only exotic ideas and adventurous thoughts; for others, they are achievable goals that set in motion a challenging journey of academic training, job opportunities, and a lifetime of new experiences.

Meeet five Suffolk alumni working in positions of leadership and innovation around the world. As graduates of the Sawyer Business School, they acquired a global business mindset and learned to be culturally sensitive, respectful of customs and differences, and confident in their abilities to adapt and achieve. These are some of the many students who came to Suffolk with far-reaching ideas and left with the skills to be influential entrepreneurs, researchers, and executives on the world stage.

When **BILL DOBSON, BSBA '86** arrived at Suffolk, he wanted to be a Boston sports writer. One year and a life-changing cooperative education position later, he had a new goal in mind. His co-op experience as an import-export consultant with a small international freight forwarding and customs brokerage firm led him to prepare for a career in corporate international finance, and he's never looked back.

Dobson now runs Thailand's largest operator of fitness, yoga, and wellness centers—California WOW Xperience in Bangkok. Serving as the executive vice president and chief financial officer and company secretary, Dobson was recruited in 2005 to corporatize the company and prepare for its listing on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET).

Prior to California WOW, Dobson worked for almost 20 years in the information technology industry. He held finance positions at multinational companies, including Digital Equipment, Compaq, and Hewlett Packard.

He has lived in Asia since 1990, when his career with Digital Equipment took him from the US to Japan, and then to the company's Asia headquarters in Hong Kong. Since then, he has worked in seven countries, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Australia, and his current home of Thailand.

"Each country and its culture are different. What works in the west may not work in the east and vice versa. People are very proud of their culture and heritage, which you must be respectful of at all times. I've learned to adapt my leadership style to gain trust and acceptance from my working colleagues, customers, and partners," Dobson said.

For instance, in Thailand, there is a strong emphasis on *sanuk*, which is the idea that life should be fun. Conflict, displays of anger, and blaming others are discouraged. During disagreements, people generally smile or use the phrase phrase "*mai pen rai*" [pronounced "my pin rye," meaning "it's nothing," or "no worries"], Dobson said.



Cecilia Danielsson



Chip Salyards

Successful global business leaders are able to be persuasive while also being sensitive and respectful of cultural differences. It's important to "learn to compromise and create a "win-win" situation so that neither party loses face, and mutual respect and trust is gained in the process" Dobson said.

On the island nation of Singapore, **CHIP SALYARDS, EMBA '00**, knows how to create a "win-win" situation. He is a skilled sales professional who enjoys detecting his customers' needs and investigating solutions. This passion has served his 20-year sales career well. His work has led him to Boston, New York City, and finally to Singapore, where he is vice president of sales in the Asia Pacific region for BMC Software, a seller of business automation and compliance software.

"We're a US-based company doing business internationally," said Salyards. "We have to take into consideration the customs of other cultures, learn how they want to do business, and find out their expectations."

For example, in Singapore, a culture more focused on relationships than the US, Salyards learned that sales happen gradually over time and might not be in line with quarterly results. They don't do anything short term, he noted, and trying to sell too much and too hard hasn't been effective. Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region have unique characteristics. In China, customers may engage in drinking games, while in India, alcohol and meat are not usually consumed. In contrast, "Australia is so much like America from a business perspective; it's very easy to do business there," Salyards said.

Salyards' Executive MBA education prepared him for his international role. "It opened my eyes to the importance of all the functional departments and has reimbursed me 10 times over. I chose Suffolk because I liked the blue-collar type working atmosphere of the very real people there from public policy to finance. The school was strong technically, and the professors remain important to me today," he said. Professor Richard Torrisi who led a Global Travel Seminar to Aix-en-Provence France, and Professor Thomas O'Hara were both influential in Salyard's career. "Having [O'Hara] talk about central banks and the euro helped me with currency concerns in my job today when we actually peg the currency rates for a full year," Salyards said.

For others starting out in a new country, Salyards offers a tip that helped him when he arrived in Singapore: "Write down

everything you think you know and think you're going to observe. Then put it in an envelope, seal the envelope, and open it six months later. For six months, just listen and ask a lot of questions. After that, open the envelope and see how different your perceptions were from reality. Seventy percent of my assumptions were wrong."

During her year in Spain, **NICOLE GOKSEL, BSBA '02**, didn't have that advice. But after spending a year at Suffolk's Madrid campus in 2000, she returned to America a "global citizen"—her perspective forever changed and her biggest dream to work abroad. She declared a major in international business and her closest friends lived all around the world.

"My dream became a reality a little over a year ago," said Goksel, who now lives and works in Turkey. In 2010, Goksel created Celestial Medya, providing photography, social media, and web design services for small- to medium-sized Turkish businesses. "Companies in Turkey are still trying to understand how web design, social media, and search engine optimization can affect their businesses. From my experience, the Dot Com sector in Turkey is like the Wild West; it's quickly changing, but there are lots of opportunities."

She is now in the process of setting up a Limited Liability company for a new online business to help families, specifically women. According to the World Economic Forum, equality between women and men in Turkey stands out as one of the lowest ranking countries, 128th place out of 134 countries, she stated, adding that women's participation in the labor force is extremely low.

"With my business partner, our objective is to create the first online service in Turkey that connects families searching for domestic services and the people offering them in a safe and cost-effective manner," said Goksel. "These domestic services include nannies, babysitters, mother's helpers, housekeepers, elderly caretakers, cooks, and tutors." Her objective is to support professional women and help the women offering services to grow professionally.

In her own social circle, Goksel has female doctors, lawyers, and managers, and she often has to remind herself there is another "Turkey." "I think it is common to see multiple societies exist within one country," she said. "Over time, the woman's role will change and improve due to globalization.



Bill Dobson

Nicole Goksel

I have no doubt about this. I just hope that our business can be part of the change and make an impact.”

CECILIA DANIELSSON, MBA '02, had a dream of her own: return home to Sweden after completing her MBA and work for one of the big Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies—companies that produce regular consumables such as food and drink, paper, cosmetics, and other popular products.

In 2005, she joined Nestlé Purina in Sweden as a Supply Planner. Four years later, after moving into finance, she received an offer to transfer to the Nestlé Nordic head office in Copenhagen, Denmark, part of the world’s largest FMCG company, Nestlé, and maker of such brands as Nescafé, Nesquik, Purina, KitKat, and After Eight.

“My current role is Head of Nestlé Nordic Finance Supply Chain Controlling. I have a team of three supply chain controllers responsible for all categories in all Nordic countries. We are part of finance, but our mission is to support supply chain and procurement in becoming more cost efficient,” said Danielsson. “It is this link to supply chain that makes my role so exciting! I truly enjoy my work, and it really feels like a dream come true.”

“Get your point across and be persuasive without making mistakes and/or being culturally insensitive. Learn to compromise and create a “win-win” situation so that neither party loses face and mutual respect and trust is gained in the process.”

Danielsson credits the Suffolk MBA for providing a real-world multicultural experience. “I was exposed to many different cultures in my classes, and I made friends from all over the world—many of which I still have contact with. To get this international experience was an eye opener since Sweden was quite homogeneous at that time. At Nestlé Nordic, we are more than 15 different nationalities within Finance and four different nationalities in my team. Since we are multicultural in the office, it is reflected in the business culture as well. Most of the managers are non-Danes and it is clear that all departments have their own culture, depending on their acting manager—Italian, German or French, or other nationality.”

In her career, Danielsson uses skills acquired from her MBA courses. For example, in Professor Suzyn Ornstein’s course, “Leadership and Team Building,” Danielsson learned that self-awareness is a precursor to leadership success. She added, “To practice and discuss different leadership styles and learn success stories, as well as failures, is something I still think about in my current role today.”

US Merchant Marine Officer **CHRISTINE ISAKSON, GLOBAL MBA '08**, knows a few things about leadership. Navigating ships and carting cargo around the world are not everyday activities for most people. But for Isakson, it was her job. “That hands-on experience of being a crucial cog in the great economic machine has been priceless,” she said. “It continues to give me unique insights in my research.”

Isakson is currently completing a PhD in Economics and Management at Copenhagen Business School, where she was offered a PhD Fellowship in the Department of Innovation and Organizational Economics during an internship at a consulting firm in Copenhagen, Denmark. “Broadly, I am interested in labor mobility as it relates to innovation and entrepreneurship.”

One thing Isakson has learned about entrepreneurship, and conducting business internationally: a person’s character really matters. “How you come across as an individual often carries more weight than who you work for, or the deal you are trying to make. Whether it comes to sharing ideas in an innovative process or putting together a partnership, it often boils down to you, how much they trust you, and how genuine they sense you are,” she said.

Coming from industry, Isakson is finding her way in academia with help from her Suffolk professors. “I am extremely grateful for the continued support and mentorship I receive from Robert DeFillippi, chair and professor of Strategy and International Business, and Michael Behnam, associate professor of Strategy and International Business,” said Isakson. “They continue to assist me in navigating the world of academia and provide a deeper understanding of the nuances between the US and European research environments. I feel so fortunate to have strong ties in both the US and European academic communities, and while the scholars at the Sawyer Business School have already taught me the language of business, they continue to be there as supportive mentors as I learn the language of academia.” **SB**