

Great British People in Business

Capital Letter interviews British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi (BCC AD) members to help the membership get to know them.

This time we speak to Simone Jucker, incoming General Manager of BCC AD, as she takes over the reins from Sinéad to lead the Executive Management Team in October.

Tell us about your previous roles and what has led you to joining the British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi team?

When I first came to the UAE, I brought my job with me from Canada where I was the Manager of International Programs at Acadia University. This role was responsible for the international outreach and marketing for student recruitment which included business recruitment travel across Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East.

In 2004, an opening became available at the Embassy of Canada in Abu Dhabi and I was successful in taking on the position of Trade Commissioner (Education & Training). This was a very exciting career move into a Federal Government role and with a mandate for promoting Canadian education at all levels across 8 countries in the Middle East region. During my time at the Canadian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, I assisted individuals, as well as teams of school counsellors, educational agents, government departments such as UAE Scholarship Funds, Saudi Arabia Ministry of Higher Education, to learn more about the Canadian education system and why Canada should be a destination of choice for students from the Middle East region. I also assisted with inbound trade missions from the Provinces of Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta who came to the UAE to explore the market.

In 2007, I was approached with the opportunity to become the Executive Director of EduNova Gulf LLC which was effectively a trade office for the Province of Nova Scotia based in Abu Dhabi. During the 5 years that EduNova Gulf LLC was in operation, we hosted 5 trade missions from Nova Scotia and assisted over 100 Nova Scotia based companies from across multiple sectors including education, energy, environment

and agriculture to do business in the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf region.

Following the closure of the EduNova Gulf office in April 2012, I took some personal time to focus on family life. I continued in my volunteer role as Chair of the Canadian Business Council of Abu Dhabi, of which I am still a member. I set myself up as an independent trade consultant to assist companies in doing business in the Gulf region.

Most recently I worked as Commercial Manager for a UK based Media and Communications company located in TwoFour54, Abu Dhabi. In this role I focused primarily on business development, proposal writing, and being the face in front of clients, (private and government).

Throughout my time in Abu Dhabi I have been an active member across a number of business groups including the former British Business Group, Canadian Business Council of Abu Dhabi and Dubai & Northern Emirates, the International Business Women's Group and Women Entrepreneurs of Abu Dhabi.

I was excited to learn how the BBG has evolved over the past year into the British Chamber of Commerce and I look forward to helping the organization progress as we build on this momentum while pursuing the mission and vision of the BCC to support its partners under the key activities of Inform, Connect, Support.

What brought you to Abu Dhabi and how long have you been here?

January 2023 will mark my 20th year in Abu Dhabi. I was first introduced to Abu Dhabi when I met my now husband back in 2002. He had come to live in Abu Dhabi as a young boy with his family who moved over here from the UK in 1978. My father-in-law still owns

and runs the family business Acas Grovex, a long standing British owned business which has been operating in Abu Dhabi for over 40 years.

What challenges have you faced in your career to date?

In my role as Trade Commissioner for Education & Training at the Embassy of Canada in Abu Dhabi, I had a regional mandate to promote Canadian education across 8 countries including: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen and Iran. Unfortunately I was not given any marketing budget to do so, which obviously was a challenge! Luckily I had come into the role with a background in international recruitment for a Canadian university and I knew that there was an opportunity to charge a participation fee to individual universities and colleges from Canada who wished to come on an organized recruitment trip to the Middle East. Over the duration of my time at the Embassy, I organized and facilitated the annual Middle East Educational Recruitment Fairs for Canada that travelled across the GCC.

What successes and key learns have you experienced working in Abu Dhabi?

Abu Dhabi maintains a true sense of community and 'neighbourhood' feeling. It is comprised of a mixture of expatriates who have been here for a number of years as well as those who have recently arrived. The local Emirati community in Abu Dhabi is respectful and welcoming to companies and individuals who share similar values and who take the effort and time to learn about the country and culture through the exchange of stories and conversations across the different generations.

It is still possible that on a typical day you



could recognize people or at least faces while shopping at the grocery store, dining out at dinner, or at a recreational facility.

What has been your best client solution?

Establishing the office for EduNova Gulf LLC in Abu Dhabi back in 2008 and personally identifying the local Emirati partner who played an active and supportive role that enabled us to grow to become the largest employer of Canadians in Abu Dhabi with over 50 staff primarily delivering high level educational services across the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The onboarding of staff into a new 'unknown' country, culture and work environment involved a lot of expertise in terms of sharing personal experiences and insights into what it was like to live and work in the UAE. I have always enjoyed the ability to matchmake between companies from

abroad who are looking to do business in the UAE and using my network of contacts to facilitate business between Emiratis and international organisations and private companies.

What makes you a leader?

I consider myself to be a team player. I feel that I lead by example and it is my intent to inspire co-workers and colleagues to copy my work ethics and behaviour. I love a challenge.

What would be your advice for a company thinking about entering this market?

My answer to this question has remained the same throughout the almost 20 years I have been living and working here in Abu Dhabi, 'Patience, Perseverance and Presence' also referred to as the 3 P's.

Companies who are considering entering

into the UAE need to demonstrate their commitment and gain the trust of the local business community. This can be achieved by frequent visits that involve fruitful meetings set-up in advance preferably through a personal or local contact that enables face to face discussions. Companies and individuals need to understand that the skills and strategies for conducting business in the UAE are sometimes different to those used in other countries. It is always beneficial to demonstrate an understanding of the business culture and background of the client or how the company is established.

What do very few people know about you?

In addition to being a wife, mother of three young children, I am also known to some in the community as the "Christmas tree lady"! For the past 13 years, I have been importing fresh Christmas trees from Canada to customers across the UAE. Christmas is one of my favourite times of year and when I first arrived in Abu Dhabi I was devastated that I would have to consider putting up an artificial Christmas tree in our home. Fortunately through some market exploration I was able to identify our local based partner Oleander who I convinced that Canadian grown Christmas trees were far superior to the variety they had been previously importing from Holland. Working with the cooperative of Christmas tree farmers from the province of Nova Scotia, our first year comprised of one 40ft refrigerated container of approximately 400 trees. We have learned a lot over the 13 years and have had to also change our exporting location to the Province of Quebec primarily due to global warming issues, but we now import a total of 5 containers, approximately 2000 trees to customers across the UAE and more recently into Oman.