

Changing Places in a Small World

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Thus far, this column has included the observations of academics who have taken international sabbaticals, practitioners who made temporary international moves that turned (semi-) permanent, and those whose studies and work experiences have taken them from their native country to an adopted one. If there is a common theme that emerges from the columns thus far, it is that the people we have heard from seemed to adjust rather admirably to the changes they have encountered, have very much enjoyed the process, and learned a great deal.

Since the column began, several academic I-O psychologists with an interest in taking an international sabbatical have asked me about two general issues: how to get the process started and, once established as a sabbatical visitor, how to make the most of the experience. So, no guest columnist this month. Instead I thought I'd reflect on those questions. Part personal opinion, part very unscientific small-sample "survey" conducted with international sabbatical experts (i.e., colleagues and friends). Please note that several of these comments apply equally well to sabbaticals in which one relocates but stays in one's one country.

Getting the Process Started: The 4 Ps

Where in the world do you want to go? Based on my experiences, and those of others who have arranged lengthy sabbaticals (several months to a year), there are three "P" factors that can drive the choice of potential sabbatical locations: people, projects, and place. Some folks first decide where they would like to go based specifically on who they want to work with (people) and/or specific activities in which they wish to be involved (projects). Others think first about places (usually more than one) where they might like to live and go from there, developing or strengthening contacts with relevant people and tweaking their sabbatical project plans to suit.

The fourth—and critically important—"P" is possibility. Have you laid the necessary groundwork to make it possible to be an academic guest in another university department, school, or research institute? Most people who I spoke to arranged their visits through preexisting individual contacts they had at the place in question. Either they were working with someone already or, more often, had simply developed professional and/or friendship ties that made working with someone (even very loosely) a mutually desirable possibility. Clearly, this makes it much easier to make that initial inquiry (and, of course, they may ask you first—even easier!). It also makes it easier to find

out answers to basic questions. (Are sabbatical visitors generally welcome? And would you be welcome? Would a visit work for the particular time period that you have in mind? What would be expected of you? What resources could the “host” provide?) If you don’t have contacts who fit the bill (and too little time to develop them), however, don’t give up. People do contact folks they do not already know to ask about sabbatical possibilities. They simply think about people, projects, or places, and based on whichever of those was the lead-off factor, do some more detailed investigations to come up with a “maybe here” list, and send out some initial queries about possibilities. (Might be best to do this sequentially.) In both cases, you have to be clear about what your expectations are. Realizing that you are the guest here, of course it makes sense to have as few “must haves” as possible. All most of us really need is office space of some sort, computer access, access to the library, and to feel welcome. Most academic units that are willing to have a sabbatical visitor are willing and able to provide that. (Some folks negotiate funding from the host, although my sense is that this is rare [read: don’t count on it!] and typically is in exchange for doing some teaching. For some folks, the latter activity may defeat the purpose of taking a sabbatical, other find it a positive.)

Looking at “possibility” from another perspective, of course one has to determine whether the location in the world that you are considering is a reasonable possibility for you, personally, and for the others in your household who will accompany you. Can you afford to live in Location X? Is furnished housing (relatively) easily arranged? What about schooling and/or childcare? Transportation needs? Some of you may have heard discussion of some of these issues in a symposium organized by **Steve Rogelberg** at the 2004 SIOP conference in LA. See also the first **Changing Places** column (*TIP*, October 2004), in which I discussed logistics and took the view that most of this practical stuff can be sorted out, but it often takes time, planning, patience, and (occasionally) luck.

Making the Most of the Visit

You have arrived. Your hosts have given you some space to work, helped establish computer and library privileges, and introduced you to a few folks. How to make the most of the opportunity to work in this new place?

Sabbatical visitors are, in many ways, odd guests. Although in the politest way possible (I hope!), some will have invited themselves. They may, or may not, be connected to a particular member of the host department and so may be either “someone’s guest” or “everyone’s” (and therefore, really, no one’s) guest. Either way, it is important to remember that the visitor is not there to be looked after or entertained by others in the department. Those others have the same old teaching, research, and administrative tasks that they had before the visitor arrived, and they may not be eager, or able, to add a new responsibility to the list. Most people, however, are exceptionally

friendly and willing to help with specific things. So, how does one avoid becoming a responsibility while at the same time making the most of the opportunity? My experts made the following blend of generic and I-O-related suggestions, all common sense, really, but worth mentioning.

- Introduce yourself to whomever you can run into regularly
- Find out where the coffee room is and what its norms are
- Find out who the go-to people are regarding logistics (computers, office stuff, lost keys, faxes, etc.); try to do this before you have a “crisis”
- Work with your door open if possible
- Make yourself available to graduate students
- Show interest in you new colleagues’ work
- Offer to give a talk (or more than one) about your research
- Attend department/university colloquia, seminars, and “brownbags”
- Attend local/regional I-O-related conferences if possible
- Don’t make assumptions; ask questions about the way work in organized in the culture/country/region you are in
- Attend worksite visits and consulting sites with colleagues if possible
- Get to know relevant colleagues in neighboring universities; who knows when you will be back?
- Read the local papers; it’ll helps you know what folks are discussing at lunch or coffee
- Insure that you have sufficient independent work to do (this is usually not difficult!)

Most of all, it is important to appreciate the amazing opportunity you have been given: to get some new (and possibly “old”) work done, with fewer interruptions and responsibilities, in a new cultural environment (of your choosing) with new and welcoming colleagues. How cool is that?