

Barrier breaker

Anshuman Das is leading the way for LGBT rights, reports **Annemarie Evans**

GAME-CHANGERS

Being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) in Hong Kong is certainly a little easier than it was a decade ago. Many LGBT organisations now exist, while public events such as Mr Gay Hong Kong and the Pink Season help raise awareness. Within the workplace, the situation has also improved – certainly within international firms, at least.

Anshuman Das, a 36-year-old business analyst at IT company Fidessa and longtime LGBT activist, has worked particularly hard to break down barriers and increase awareness.

"The understanding has definitely increased in Hong Kong and has been particularly embraced by the younger generation," Das says. "The trouble we face is mostly with the older generation. But LGBT has become quite fashionable in Hong Kong."

Born in Cuttack in eastern India, Das studied engineering at Bhopal University before joining Merrill Lynch in New York City in 2001 as an IT developer. He moved to Hong Kong later that year.

In 2007, he nervously attended his first meeting of the bank's LGBT Pride employee network. He was astounded to find, however, that the meeting included the president of Merrill Lynch, as well as department heads, project managers and other senior employees, all giving their top-down support.

The same year, members of an inter-bank LGBT forum marched in the Hong Kong Gay Pride Parade, which Das sees as a turning point in awareness. That's not to say there isn't a long way to go.

"It has always been a challenge

to involve local and Asian companies. There are issues of awareness. There are also issues of equal rights. You can be fired for just being perceived to be LGBT – it doesn't even have to be really said," Das says. "While the Equal Opportunities Commission supports legislation against discrimination, the government says society here is not ready yet."

But Das disagrees with this official view, saying that surveys show many people in Hong Kong support LGBT rights.

Part of Das's success as an LGBT proponent is that he is always full of ideas. In 2011, he founded Pink Season, Hong Kong's first LGBT festival involving more than 30 different events. He is also a director of Mr Gay Hong Kong (MGHK), while his first book, *The Memory of a Face*, raised proceeds for an anti-bullying project run by MGHK. In 2012, he published *Always Forever*, a book that explores the depression he went through after the death of his young partner.

This year, he has produced anti-discrimination videos in support of LGBT, including *The Pantry*, already with 10,000 hits on the internet.

Das is very keen on LGBT employees being able to be themselves at work. While he concedes it is difficult to quantify productivity, he says it is common sense that if a person can be 100 per cent honest about themselves in the workplace, they will be happier and likely more productive.

"Otherwise, you're acting all the time. It's like playing the piano while doing a presentation," he says. "People normally fear what they cannot see. Once you lift this fear, then they see that people who are LGBT are just like them."



For the full interview, go to www.classifiedpost.com/gamechangers

DAS AGENDA: TOP FIVE THINGS TO DO



- LGBT ISSUES** Continue to focus on producing films to highlight outstanding LGBT discrimination issues
- DEPRESSION** Use his experiences to help others break the cycle
- POLLUTION** Clean up the city's environment to protect Hong Kong's younger generations
- AUTHORSHIP** Publish more Asian books via his Typhoon Media publishing outfit
- ADOPTION** When his to-do list is ticked off, it's time for parenthood

Photos: Sky Lip



CAREER GUIDE

Triumph over trial

Most permanent jobs will involve an official probationary period. The length of the probationary period will differ depending on position and industry. In some places, it can be as short as a few weeks; in others, it can be several months.

A typical probation period lasts between three and six months. During your probation, you may perhaps feel that you and your performance are being monitored very closely, but this is not usually the case. Do not feel that you constantly have to watch what you are doing.

However, there are important aspects of your performance that your new employer will be monitoring. When you start, you should be given the details of a direct supervisor or mentor who will be responsible for getting you settled and ensuring you understand what is expected. Take advantage of their knowledge and ensure you take on board the advice and guidance they give you.

Professionally, ensure you do the basic things right. Be punctual, attend all meetings required of you and get involved in team activities, both work-related and social. Don't be afraid to contribute new ideas, but also make sure you adapt to the different style of working at your new employer.

As the end of your probation nears, your manager should set a date for a review meeting. Again, don't be afraid to



Get involved in team activities, both social and work-related

follow up on this yourself to get it arranged. This review will assess how you have done in your first few months – and hopefully give you the good news that you have passed your probation.

Walter Ellicott, managing director, Ellicott Long Limited, recruiting professionals for the property and construction industries in Asia

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Desmond Leung
American Express

In his new role as vice-president and general manager of global merchant services for Greater China, Leung will spearhead the growth of the American Express network and strengthen relationships with merchants and trade partners in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Prior to this appointment, Leung was the vice-president and head of acquisition and partnerships for American Express Hong Kong consumer card services.



Chris Meyrick
American Express

Meyrick has been appointed vice-president of human resources in Asia-Pacific and is charged with the responsibility of tailoring human resources strategies and solutions for American Express across 10 markets in the Asia-Pacific region. As a seasoned HR practitioner in banking and telecommunications, Meyrick has tremendous experience in change management and designing effective HR initiatives.



Lawrence Nutting
Manulife (International)

As chief distribution officer, Nutting now heads up all of Manulife's distribution channels in Hong Kong, covering the agency force and independent distribution. "[Nutting's] previous experience in agency management will prove invaluable as we continue to grow and develop our large and professional agency," says Michael Huddart, Manulife's executive vice-president and chief executive officer, Hong Kong.

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CAREER DOCTORS

Work experience boon to master's

I am a 21-year-old non-local studying a Russian-British double degree in economics and finance. Now I'm considering my next step. I would like to do a master's programme in management or finance at the University of Hong Kong, but many faculties require

work experience. Should I find a job in one of those two areas and work for a year first before applying for a master's programme? Or even work for a year in Russia before coming back to Hong Kong to study? *Renata*

Your question details the typical predicament of a graduate in 2013: should they approach the employment market for a graduate role or continue study with a master's programme?

The first path tends to be the preferred option as it is important for an individual to get practical work experience where they can demonstrate what they have been taught in university. The value of a master's programme is generally realised when it is used to complement an individual's professional career direction.

I believe that some of the value of a master's programme is lost if you are

doing it without relevant work experience – around two to four years – particularly in group discussions and assignments that require practical case studies from real working life.

To find a graduate job in finance or management, I would suggest you review the graduate programmes offered by major banks and corporate organisations in Hong Kong. The other option you suggested, of working in Russia and then returning to Hong Kong, may pose problems when you transition from the Russian employment market to the Asian job market.

Sharmini Thomas is regional director of Michael Page's Financial Services, Sales and Marketing, and Procurement and Supply Chain teams in Hong Kong. Michael Page is part of PageGroup, one of the world's leading recruitment companies operating in 156 offices in 34 countries worldwide.



For the full story, go to www.classifiedpost.com/careerdoctor

Don't dawdle over slow boss

My boss is always indecisive and easily swayed. One day he wants one thing, the next it's something else. This makes it very difficult for our team to work efficiently and it's hard to prioritise tasks. We've all tried talking to him but nothing has improved. We're overworked, demotivated and feel it's a really ineffective workplace. Should I quit and look for a new job? Or do you have any other ideas? *Otto*



It must be very frustrating for you to work for someone who is so indecisive. The reality of the workplace, however, is that these types of people are everywhere. Instead of quitting, I would suggest that you treat this as a challenge and see if you can improve the situation.

First of all, let's understand why people are indecisive and easily swayed. In general, this type of person lacks self-confidence. They tend to look for others' approval and are risk-averse. They are conservative in their outlook and don't usually trust their instincts.

You can ask for a meeting to express your concerns, focusing on the impact on your productivity and outcome. One effective tool you can use is called SBAR – situation, background, assessment and recommendation. Google it for a detailed explanation.

You can also "just do it" – instead of seeking approval for a decision over which you know your boss is going to dawdle, go ahead with action that you strongly feel is right. Afterwards, tell him that since the outcome was (hopefully)

positive, he will also look good in front of his boss.

If you've tried and tried, but your boss is not going to change, then it is time to explore alternatives. Look for "better" bosses in the same company or sharpen your saws for greener pastures. You need to be very careful in picking your next boss though, as you don't want to make the same mistake twice.

Sidney Yuen, chairman and CEO, HBC, is an expert in the human resources outsourcing, technology and consulting fields



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