

Help! Save My Career!

by Donald Asher, America's Job Search Guru

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Dear Guru Don:

I had a great time for my study abroad when I was in college. I studied in Milan, which was just awesome. Once I got used to them, I loved Italian men. I loved the way art and aesthetics were more important than money. I liked the pace of life, which was in some ways more consuming but in other ways much slower than here in New York. I liked how you could drink a glass of wine at lunch without someone calling you an alcoholic. Basically, I think this was the favorite part of my life.

Now I'm clawing my way up the junior levels of the corporate scramble here in New York, working crazy hours, staying out all night every weekend with people who do not in the end fascinate me. I guess I'm going through my own quarter-life crisis. I need a change, before I become one of those frenetic American tourists I used to see in Italy, trying to stuff a year's worth of pleasure into a four-day getaway.

I think I'd like to look at working abroad. Italy would be great. I'm looking at all of Europe, but I'm open to anything more exotic than Long Island. I speak a little Italian, a little French, and even some Spanish, but I'm not really fluent in anything but American. I'm looking at something fun to do for five or ten years, and after that, who knows? Any advice for me? How can I make this dream into a reality?

Sign me,

Life Is Too Short

Dear Lifer:

You are not alone. Study abroad is more popular than ever among American students, and many of those students, like you, discover there is attractive quality of life in other parts of the world. However, shocking as this might seem, foreign employers are not always as enamored of hiring Americans for offshore appointments. Why? Because of language and cultural problems.

The junior year abroad has been replaced by the semester abroad, or even by shorter tours and "experiences." Total language immersion has been replaced by studying in English in an exotic locale, often taught by professors who are themselves from Indiana or Michigan. So the abroad experience may not be so broadening as it used to be.

The truth is that the world is full of people who are *fluent* in French, Spanish, and Italian, and who know the difference between going to dinner in Switzerland and going to dinner in Greece, and who have routinely heard this question all their lives: "And what shall be our language for the evening?"

The really good news is that the tide is turning in your favor, and English is becoming the lingua franca of the world. A friend of mine works for a German multinational and the company language is English *even in Germany*. They speak English in her office, even though practically everyone except her is German. Another friend works for a Chinese company in Vietnam, and they conduct most daily business in English. Yet another works for a multinational where all offshore assignments require fluency in English, no matter the country of origin for the employees involved.

Your best shot is to find a company with offices in another country *and* offices or key customers in the United States, where your English skills would be an asset that might overcome your deficiencies in the local language. Here are *great* resources to learn about companies like this:

- **Directory of Foreign Firms Operating in the United States**
- **Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries (3 vol. set)**
- **Going Global Country Career Guide (2 vol. set)**
- **www.goinglobal.com**
- **The International Directory of Executive Recruiters**

The Going Global books and web site are expensive, but should be available through a library near you. In them you can learn about resume and CV formats and hiring practices for countries all over the world. You should also look for the nearest embassies for the countries of interest to you, and see if they publish lists of exporters to the United States. And check for chambers of commerce that specialize in transnational commerce, such as the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce located near you in New York.

Finally, be sure to look for the foreign locations of your current employer. Large companies have satellite offices virtually everywhere, so look long and hard before you decide you have to switch companies to launch your dream of working overseas.

It's probably a good idea to pick a country and a language to specialize in, rather than just looking all over the globe. So in your case it sounds like Italy and Italian would be great places to start. You need to plan all your vacations so you go to Italy, and you need to take Italian language classes and improve your language skills past the tourist-ordering-dinner-and-finding-the-toilet level of communication. If you can't take classes, buy any of the high-quality language acquisition programs now available on CD and DVD.

Spend your vacations on language intensives rather than tours of castles. In my travels I constantly run into Europeans and Asians in language schools, but not so many Americans. Demonstrate your intentions in action, rather than words.

Finally, start talking to everybody you know about who they might know in Italy. Find some people who are working in Italy or using Italian language in their work in the U.S. Get invited to dinner in New York with friends hosting Italian visitors. Most foreign

companies hire only people they've met before, or people who are referred from a trusted source. They tend not to hire someone they know only from a resume.

So I suggest you meet some more Italians, my friend. If you stopped going out all night every Friday and Saturday with people you don't even like, you'd have plenty of time and energy to devote to this.

Next month we're going to cover a related topic--how to succeed on offshore assignments--so watch for that column. Until then, my best wishes for your continued success,

Donald Asher

Send your career emergency to don@donaldasher.com, and watch this space for Asher's response.

BIO: Donald Asher is a nationally known writer and speaker on careers and higher education. He is the author of eleven books, including *Cracking the Hidden Job Market*; *How to Get Any Job: Life Launch and Re-Launch for Everyone Under 30*; *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process; *Asher's Bible of Executive Resumes*; *Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming*, and *Just Plain Different*; and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* (named Business Book of the Year 2008 by national career columnist Joyce Lain Kennedy). Asher speaks over 100 days a year from coast to coast, to college and corporate audiences. He is eager to hear your career emergency.