

Working smart, not hard

Raili Cardamone is an idealistic realist.

BY TOBY ALLEYNE-GEE (TEXT), PETER LAUTH (PHOTO)

There's a lot more to Raili Cardamone than meets the eye. A diminutive, redoubtable figure, at first she is brisk and direct. Now a partner on the International Assignments team in Zurich that has doubled to 32 members since she took charge of its human resources in 1999, she has to be. After all, her responsibilities are considerable: she is in charge of finances, mediates between her clients (mostly multi-national companies placing their staff abroad) and local authorities, and keeps an eye on quality control. Tax and Legal Services ensures that contracts, tax, residence permits, social security and all the other complex issues involved with international transfers comply with local regulations. A formidable undertaking that Raili and her team seem to master with consummate ease. "I'm proud that we can call ourselves expatriate professionals," she says.

After graduating from law school with a thesis on human rights, Raili started her professional life with the Finnish tax authorities – having discovered a fascination for tax issues while on a holiday job as a student. In 1988 she joined what was then Price Waterhouse as a tax specialist. In 1996 she decided she wanted a



Raili Cardamone, Partner, Tax and Legal Services, Zurich

change of scene, and leapt at the chance to transfer to Price Waterhouse Lisbon. Three years later she moved to Zurich. "After all, it makes no difference where I live," she says, the true cosmopolitan.

But doesn't she feel rather rootless? And how does she balance her professional activities with her private life? "I am so completely absorbed by work and home" – "home" being her 11-year-old son – "that I don't always have enough time for myself," she admits. "And I don't have a wife to do the housework. But it's not forever," she laughs. "The secret is not only to see the bigger picture, but also to have a 'Plan B'. I apply this principle to all aspects of my life, whether private or professional. I wouldn't be able to live without it. I may seem chaotic" (one glance at her refreshingly untidy desk confirms this), "but I never forget the nitty-gritty details!"

Yes, this self-styled "tough cookie" is down-to-earth. But she is also an idealist, a dreamer who

has developed a great team through "creative recruitment". Seventy per cent of the team are women – a considerable achievement in a male-dominated profession. Raili prefers to encourage flexible part-time employment, taking into account the personal situations of her staff, who may be students or parents of small children, rather than "waiting for the star university graduates to come knocking at the door". She emphasises the importance of people skills and communication, especially as sixteen different languages are

spoken in the team. Raili believes in "working smart, not hard", and discourages her staff from doing overtime.

And she believes, very firmly, in having fun. The corridors, plastered with drawings, photographs of outings, and dangling with a plethora of indescribable creations, are astonishingly reminiscent of a kindergarten. And, hardworking though she may be, Raili doesn't forget to indulge her passion for messing about in boats from time to time, perhaps on the canals of France with her son. Or she might just lie by the pool at her house on the Algarve, where she intends to retire with her partner, John, who is in the same profession and commutes to Zurich from Portugal twice a month.

"One day I shall certainly grow my roses, brush up my supermarket Portuguese and write my book – economics from a philosophical and historical perspective. I don't know precisely how or when, but I know it's coming." Watch this space.